

University of Missouri, St. Louis

IRL @ UMSL

---

Undergraduate Research Symposium

UMSL Undergraduate Works

---

September 2024

## Gender and Genocide: Rape as a Weapon of War in Darfur

Ella Woods

eswgvd@umsystem.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://irl.umsl.edu/urs>



Part of the [Holocaust and Genocide Studies Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Woods, Ella, "Gender and Genocide: Rape as a Weapon of War in Darfur" (2024). *Undergraduate Research Symposium*. 215.

Available at: <https://irl.umsl.edu/urs/215>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the UMSL Undergraduate Works at IRL @ UMSL. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Research Symposium by an authorized administrator of IRL @ UMSL. For more information, please contact [marvinh@umsl.edu](mailto:marvinh@umsl.edu).



# Gender and Genocide: Rape as a Weapon of War in Darfur

Ella Woods | Faculty Advisor Christoph Schiessl, Ph.D. | HON 2030 | **UMSL**  
University of Missouri-St. Louis

## Introduction

In instances of genocide, the women of a persecuted group face unique victimization. This has been the case in Darfur, where gendered violence has been a tool for the Janjaweed and the Sudanese military. The history of this conflict gives insight into how the international community can better protect women throughout the world.

## Background

- Fertile land in West Sudan inhabited by non-Arab African farmers, periodically shared with nomadic Arab groups
- Disputes over land in the 1980s led to Arab groups attacking farm villages
- Omar Hassan al-Bashir became president through a military coup in 1989
  - Authoritarian
  - Arabic supremacist
  - Disenfranchised Black Africans
  - Coordinated with village attackers
- Janjaweed
  - Armed militia backed by the Sudanese government
  - Goal was to destroy the Black African population (primarily Fur, Massaliet, and Zaghawa tribal groups)
  - Carried out bombings, shootings, abductions, burned and looted property, tortured villagers
- Rebel groups took arms against the government in 2003



Darfur Region of Sudan  
<https://issafrica.org/iss-today/darfurs-conflict-could-return-to-square-one>

## Impact on Darfuri Women

- Victims were stigmatized and shunned by a culture that valued chastity
- Experienced humiliation, dehumanization, intimidation
- Abandoned by family members
- Left with no means of income
- Jailed and beaten for extramarital/premarital sex
- Disease, infection, permanent injury, infertility, psychological trauma
- Infanticide

## Gendered Violence

- Rape (in public, in victims' homes, in groups, in front of family)
- Genital mutilation
- Forced pregnancy
- Halted women from repopulating within their own ethnic group
- Abducted for sexual slavery
- Assaulted with foreign objects and weapons
- Victims ranged from 8 to 80 in age
- Single, married, and pregnant women
- Problems with underreporting but it's believed that tens of thousands of females were raped
- In almost every testimony provided, women who were sexually assaulted were also berated with racial slurs

## International Response

- The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia set a legal precedent in the early 1990s
- International Criminal Court (ICC) was established in the late 1990s
- The Women's Caucus for Gender Justice in the ICC established to incorporate gender-based crimes in the Rome Statute
- In 2005, ICC announced it was opening an investigation in Darfur
- Court indicted two high ranking officials for crimes against humanity and war crimes in Darfur, including counts of rape
- In 2007, UN announced plan to send 26,000 peacekeepers to Darfur
- The ICC issued arrest warrants for al-Bashir in 2009 and 2010 for crimes against humanity, war crimes (including rape), and genocide
  - He remained president of Sudan until 2019
- In 2012, the ICC issued an arrest warrant for Sudanese Defense Minister Abdelrahim Mohamed Hussein
  - Hussein went on to be governor of Khartoum from 2015-2019
- Obstacles for the ICC regarding Darfur:
  - USA was not a state party
  - Sudanese National Commission
  - Struggled to keep peacekeepers safe

## Darfur Today

- 2019- Coup ending with peace agreement to transition to democracy
- 2020- UN closed Darfur peacekeeping mission
  - Led to resurgence in violence between rebel groups, armed militias, and government
- 2021- Military coup
- 2023- Multiple massacres in Darfur by Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a paramilitary force composed of Janjaweed militias

## Conclusions

- The international community sets international standards for recognizing mass rape as a tactic of genocide and is responsible for condemning it
- We must be direct and outspoken about rape as a weapon of war if we want to prevent it in the future
- International law and humanitarian aid must reflect more than the male experience of genocide

## Bibliography

- Corcoran, Rebecca A. "Justice for the Forgotten: Saving the Women of Darfur." *Boston College Third World Law Journal* 28, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 203-238.
- Dahir, Abdi Latif. "Darfur's New Generation, Once Full of Promise, Now Suffers 'Fire of War.'" *The New York Times*. September 21, 2023.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/21/world/africa/sudan-war-darfur.html>.
- Dessu, Meressa K. "Darfur's Conflict Could Return to Square One." *Institute for Security Studies*. July 22, 2020.  
<https://issafrica.org/iss-today/darfurs-conflict-could-return-to-square-one>.
- Hourel, Katharine, and Hafiz Haroun. "Sudanese Paramilitaries Seize Darfur Cities in Major Advance, Amid Massacres." *Washington Post*. November 8, 2023. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/11/08/sudan-rsf-army-darfur-massacre/>.
- Totten, Samuel. "The Plight and Fate of Females During and Following the Darfur Genocide." In *Women and Genocide: Survivors, Victims, Perpetrators*, edited by Elissa Bemporad and Joyce W. Warren, 268-285. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018.
- Schneider, Mary Deusch. "About Women, War and Darfur: The Continuing Quest for Gender Violence Justice." *North Dakota Law Review* 83, no. 3 (2007): 915-996.
- "UN Confirms Closure of Darfur Peacekeeping Mission." *United Nations*. December 30, 2020. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/12/1081122>.