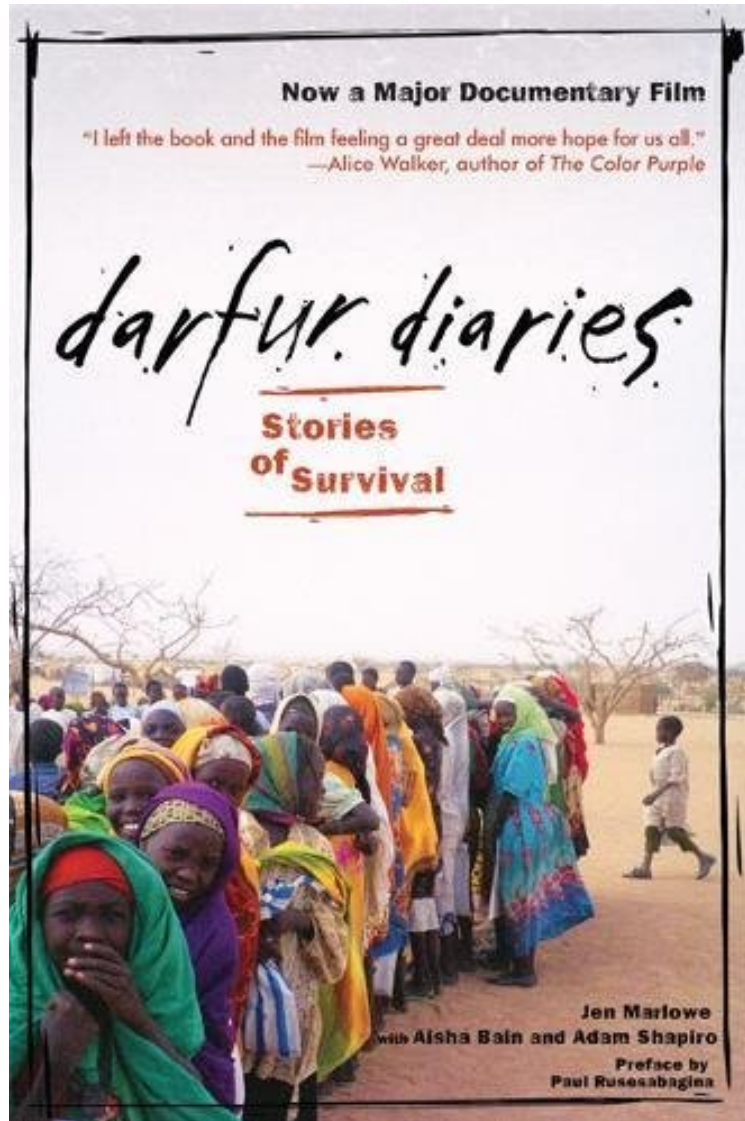


[Library ebook] Darfur Diaries: Stories of Survival

Darfur Diaries: Stories of Survival

Jen Marlowe

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#949621 in Books 2006-10-25 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.50 x .75 x 5.631, .58 #File Name: 1560259280256 pages | File size: 48.Mb

Jen Marlowe : Darfur Diaries: Stories of Survival before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Darfur Diaries: Stories of Survival:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. "flattened... against the scarce shadow of a mud-brick wall" By Ivy Kleinbart In 2003, the Sudanese government and Janjaweed dramatically escalated their campaign of violence against the people of Darfur, killing thousands, forcing millions from their villages, and turning the once-stable region into a wasteland of starvation and disease. Upon arriving in Darfur, Marlowe writes: "I had been to other scenes of large-

scale devastation. In all those places, people seemed to spring up out of the remnants the way weeds stubbornly grow in cracks of a sidewalk... But here, it was different. It was almost entirely depopulated... Even the birds had left. The only sound was the wind and the hard sand crunching beneath our feet" (75-6). I was prepared for either a detached historical report driven by dates and events, or a gutwrenching depiction of hunger, sickness, and mass graves. On the contrary, *Darfur Diaries* consists of a series of interviews and conversations with displaced people, refugees, and members of the makeshift Darfurian rebel army, interwoven with the author's impressions of the landscape, the people, their customs, and their challenges. How do they live? How do they survive dispossession, lack of food and water, familial fracture, lack of medicine, and the intense desert heat and cold? How do they cope with the brutalities of rape, injury, mass murder, and widespread material destruction? How do they sustain their sanity? Where do they find hope? I was impressed with the openness of the questions asked, which allowed the interviewees to speak from the depths of their own experiences, rather than responding to some pre-set agenda on the part of Marlowe and fellow documentarians Adam Shapiro and Aisha Bain. The result is a complex weave of human personality: dignity, humility, anger, humor, gentility, forgiveness, desperation, and hard endurance. Most amazing to me was the persistent emphasis on education. Education is a priority held as high among the Darfurian people as life itself. Volunteer teachers work with children in refugee camps in clusters under the leafless skeletons of trees, sand blowing in their faces--no books, nothing to write with, or on. Some of these children sit through a day of lessons without food or water. In fact, Marlowe's striking insights into the impact of the hardships and violence on the Darfurian children demonstrate a piercing depth of empathy. Towards the beginning of her journey, she writes: "Knowing what I did, I wanted to find some way to protect them: from their pasts, which I could scarcely imagine when looking at their quick smiles, and from their futures, which were so precarious" (33). In a Chadian refugee camp on the border of Sudan, she recalls "A small boy, around four years old, settled into the sand next to me... He rested his hand on my arm. He wanted to make sure I knew he was there" (34). Indeed, Marlowe knows they are there. She never fails to notice the tiny silent faces peering on from behind the torsos of their remaining family members. *Darfur Diaries* is an incredible effort to bridge the gap between the dire realities of genocide and America's resistance to fathom the atrocities that are steadily eroding Darfurian society and culture. One thing I did not realize until I read this book was that the government is actually bombing its own people!! The situation is utterly intolerable, especially given the luxuries we Americans take for granted on a daily basis, and yet, life goes on, and this is the story of the lives left behind.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. "If you read one book about Darfur..." By David Morse *Darfur Diaries* offers a sensitive glimpse into the lives of Darfurians struggling at the brink of survival. It tells the story of three independent filmmakers who traveled into Chad and Darfur in November 2004. At one level it is a book about the making of their film by the same name, which is available on DVD. But at another level it is a deeply human book in its own right, not only for its interviews with refugees, IDPs, and rebel fighters, but because Jen Marlowe and the other two videographers Aisha Bain and Adam Shapiro, show their own vulnerabilities in their quest to understand what is happening in Darfur. Other books portray the history of the Darfur conflict with more authority. (Visit my website for reviews of Alex de Waal and Julie Flint's *Darfur: a short history of a long war*, and Gerard Prunier's *Darfur: the Ambiguous Genocide*. [...]) But *Darfur Diaries* is no less authentic and no less ambitious. It is also timely, written after the failure of the Darfur Peace Agreement signed in May 2006, and conveying today's urgency as Sudan government planes bomb their own people, and as the violence spreads into neighboring Chad. The writers are keen observers who care passionately about their subjects, and they are also willing to raise critical questions and to laugh at themselves. This is clearly a work of great love, and despite the tragic nature of their subject, there is something healing in getting to know the survivors. If you are going to read just one book about Darfur, read this one. David Morse (independent journalist/Darfur activist)

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. *Darfurians speak for themselves* By John Uniack Davis This is a multi-layered, extremely readable and informative book. It is first and foremost a vehicle through which the authors allow Darfurians to speak for themselves regarding their travails, fears, hopes and dreams. It is also a fascinating travelogue of the authors' adventure, their experiences in eastern Chad and Darfur -- They had to overcome enormous logistical obstacles and take great risks to sneak into Darfur and document the havoc wrought by the Government of Sudan and its Janjaweed proxies. The book also includes rich reflections on technical challenges and ethical issues involved in creating a documentary film about events in Darfur. *Darfur Diaries* is tender, thoughtful, and thought-provoking. It reflects the authors' courage without being self-glorifying, and it never loses sight of its most important objective, which is to allow Darfurians to speak for themselves. The Darfurians that the reader meets are eloquent and vulnerable, courageous and surprisingly positive in light of the living hell that most have experienced. Jen Marlowe and her collaborators do an outstanding job at putting very human faces on the victims of the ongoing Darfur tragedy and thereby giving them back their dignity. In the course of the narrative, the reader also meets a fascinating supporting cast, including United Nations staff and NGO workers, among others. While it is not a central focus of the book, one gets a sense of some of the challenges in conducting humanitarian work in a conflict zone. The authors do a very good job of weaving in historical and social context and a bit of political analysis without undermining the book's readability, and the foreword by Francis Deng is helpful in this regard. As a result, this is a rare book through which one can get a rich, up-close idea of what is happening on the ground while also receiving a

useful introduction to the big picture, the context in which the story unfolds. The book also has a number of decent, provocative photos as well as a simple but useful map. In sum, I heartily recommend this well-written, engaging, and accessible book. This said, I have one major criticism and one minor criticism of *Darfur Diaries*. The major criticism is that the authors do a great job of depicting the rich humanity of the "African" Darfurians who are the primary victims of the current conflict, but "Arab" Darfurians who have historically been almost as exploited, manipulated and neglected by Sudan's central government remain two-dimensional. The authors recognize this failing, and it seems largely a consequence of limited time and lack of access, given that they had entered Sudan illicitly, with support from SLA rebels. Nonetheless, to fully understand the complexity of Darfur, it is important to understand that Arabs and Africans in the zone have tended to get along historically, and a big part of the current tragedy is the wedge that has been driven between them. My minor criticism is that the book has no index -- there is enough contextual detail that it would have been quite useful.

In February, 2003, the Sudanese Liberation Army in Darfur (the western region of Sudan) after years of oppression took up arms against the Sudanese government. The government and allied militias answered the rebellion with mass murder, rape and the wholesale destruction of villages and livelihood, resulting in one of the world's largest humanitarian and political crises. Up to 2 million people were displaced; 400,000 people killed. In October and November, 2004, after watching woefully inadequate media coverage on the crisis in Darfur, a team of three independent filmmakers trekked to Darfurian refugee camps in eastern Chad and crept across the border into Darfur. They met dozens of Darfurians, and spoke with them about their history, hopes and fears, and the tragedy they are living. Refugees and displaced peoples, civilians and fighters resisting the Sudanese government, teachers, students, parents, children and community leaders provide the heart of *Darfur Diaries*. Their stories and testimonies, woven together through the personal experience of the filmmakers, and conveyed with political and historical context, provide a much-needed account to help understand Darfur. These are people whose lives, homes, safety and rights deserve to be protected as vigilantly as those of peoples all over the world.

About the Author
Aisha Bain served as Deputy Director at the Center for the Prevention of Genocide. Jen Marlowe spent the last four years coordinating and directing the program at the Seeds of Peace Center for Coexistence in Jerusalem. Adam Shapiro is a founding member of InCounter Productions that produced the documentary film, "About Baghdad". He is also a co-founder of the International Solidarity Movement (www.palsolidarity.org) in Palestine and lived and worked in the Occupied Palestinian Territories for three years.