

Report

June 2020



DIASPORA IN DESPAIR

Darfurian Mobility at a Time of International Disengagement

Jérôme Tubiana, Clotilde Warin, and Mahamat Saleh Mangare



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Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the
Netherlands



A co-publication of the Small Arms Survey's Human Security Baseline Assessment for Sudan and South Sudan (HSBA) and Security Assessment in North Africa (SANA). Support for HSBA comes from the US Department of State. Support for SANA is provided by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Credits

Published in Switzerland by the Small Arms Survey

© Small Arms Survey, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva, 2020

First published in June 2020

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Printed by Gonnet in France

ISBN 978-2-940548-82-8

Cover photo

Darfurian and other migrants in a Libyan detention centre, 2019.

Source: Jérôme Tubiana

The HSBA project

The Human Security Baseline Assessment (HSBA) for Sudan and South Sudan is a multi-year project administered by the Small Arms Survey. It was developed in cooperation with the Canadian government, the United Nations Mission in Sudan, the United Nations Development Programme, and a wide array of international and Sudanese partners. Through the active generation and dissemination of timely, empirical research, the project supports violence reduction initiatives, including disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programmes and incentive schemes for civilian arms collection, as well as security sector reform and arms control interventions across Sudan and South Sudan. The HSBA also offers policy-relevant advice on redressing insecurity.

All publications in English and Arabic are available at: www.smallarmssurveysudan.org

The HSBA receives direct financial support from the US Department of State. It has received support in the past from the Global Peace and Security Fund at Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the UK government's Global Conflict Prevention Pool, as well as from the Danish Demining Group, the National Endowment for Democracy (United States), and the United States Institute of Peace. The Small Arms Survey also receives Swiss funding, without which the HSBA could not be undertaken effectively.

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The SANA project

The Security Assessment in North Africa is a multi-year project of the Small Arms Survey to support those engaged in building a more secure environment in North Africa and the Sahel-Sahara region. The project produces timely, evidence-based research and analysis on the availability and circulation of small arms, the dynamics of emerging armed groups, and related insecurity. The research stresses the effects of the recent uprisings and armed conflicts in the region on community safety.

The Security Assessment in North Africa receives ongoing funding from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands. It has previously received grants from Global Affairs Canada, the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the German Federal Foreign Office, the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the US State Department.

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We wish to thank Gaffar Mohammad Saeneen for the research and translation work he undertook in Europe, as well as our two peer reviewers for their generous inputs.

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List of abbreviations and acronyms

CAR	Central African Republic
CCMSR	Council of Military Command for the Salvation of the Republic (Conseil de commandement militaire pour le salut de la république)
EU	European Union
EUR	Euro
GNA	Government of National Accord
GSLF	Gathering of Sudan Liberation Forces
IDP	Internally displaced person
IOM	International Organization for Migration
JEM	Justice and Equality Movement
LJM	Liberation and Justice Movement
LNA	Libyan National Army
LYD	Libyan dinar
NISS	National Intelligence and Security Service
RSF	Rapid Support Forces
SAF	Sudan Armed Forces
SDG	Sudanese pound
SLA-AW	Sudan Liberation Army-Abdul Wahid
SLA-MM	Sudan Liberation Army-Minni Minawi
SPLM/A	Sudan's People Liberation Movement/Army
SPLM/A-N	Sudan's People Liberation Movement/Army-North
SRF	Sudan Revolutionary Front
TMC	Transitional Military Council

UAE	United Arab Emirates
UFDD	Union of Forces for Democracy and Development (Union des forces pour la démocratie et le développement)
UFR	Union of Resistance Forces (Union des forces de la résistance)
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USD	United States dollar
XAF	Central African franc

Executive summary

In recent years many members of the international community have increasingly appeared to accept the narrative espoused by Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir's regime that the Darfur conflict was over. Darfurians, including civilian victims of government-related forces and combatants opposed to the government, have reacted to the internal and international paralysis that has resulted from the adoption of this narrative with increased levels of mobility,¹ moving or attempting to move both to and between neighbouring African countries and to Europe.

This report analyses several components of this increased mobility. Darfur rebel groups have proved to be particularly mobile in their quest for foreign support, rear bases, and refuge from increasingly successful government counter-insurgency tactics. This holds true not only in Sudan itself, but also for countries neighbouring Sudan, that is Chad, the Central African Republic (CAR), South Sudan, and, more recently, Libya. In Libya these armed groups are able to operate in a familiar desert terrain where lawlessness since the fall of the Qaddafi regime has allowed them to participate in various cross-border smuggling activities. Darfur's non-Arab civilians, many of whom have been displaced since 2003, have been forced to cope with diminished international aid both in Darfur itself and in refugee camps in Chad. This, coupled with pressure to return to what remains of their homes, has prompted many to move further, joining former rebel kinsmen in gold-mining activities across the Sahara, and attempting to find sources of income and safety in Libya. These non-Arab Darfurians are increasingly going beyond Libya to Europe, where those who survive the perilous Mediterranean crossing often have a good chance of being granted asylum.

Key findings

- Recent Darfurian mobility differs from earlier Darfurian migrations and other contemporary migrations because it involves both combatants and non-combatants (civilians). These categories are porous, and role changes from civilian to combatant (and sometimes back again) often occur.
- In Libya, Darfur rebels and former rebels have been involved in many lucrative and dangerous armed activities. These activities include proxy fighting; cross-border smuggling; and sales of stolen vehicles, fuel, and sometimes weapons. Some have become road bandits, notably targeting drug convoys, while others have acted as escorts for these convoys. Both Darfur rebels and civilians alike have taken up gold mining across the Sahara.
- The Sudanese government's current main paramilitary group, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), appears to be much more involved in smuggling and trafficking migrants to Libya than Darfur rebel groups.
- The lack of prospects of the Darfur rebellion and the financial opportunities offered by the RSF have pushed an increasing number of non-Arab Darfurians to join the RSF. This is likely to increase with the recent rapprochement between the RSF leader, Mohammed Hamdan Daglo—known as 'Hemeti'—and the rebel movements, who share a common fear that they will be sidelined by the regular army—the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF)—and by civilians from central Sudan.
- Non-Arab Darfurian civilians in search of both safety and jobs continue to migrate to Libya. But the abuses they suffer there—including forced recruitment into local armed forces—pressure them to seek asylum in Europe. The actions of the international community, including the decreased provision of international aid in both Darfur itself and camps in Chad hosting Darfurian refugees, help to drive this phenomenon. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has tried to encourage refugees to return to Darfur, but this has had counter-productive effects and has itself resulted in Darfurian migration to Libya and Europe. Indeed, the funds UNHCR allocates to the returnees often finance their journeys further north.



The war that started in Darfur in 2003 is complex and deeply rooted in a country, Sudan, where historically the peripheries have been ostracized and marginalized.”

Introduction

The war that started in Darfur in 2003 is complex and deeply rooted in a country, Sudan, where historically the peripheries have been ostracized and marginalized. These processes have been driven by a racially connoted official discourse that places ‘Africans’ and ‘Arabs’ in opposition. For a time the international community considered the government’s violent counter-insurgency strategy targeting non-Arab civilians to be one of its main concerns, but this issue has gradually disappeared from the headlines and Western interests. The silence surrounding Darfur has grown to the point where the conflict has falsely appeared to be frozen, despite considerable evidence to the contrary (Gramizzi and Tubiana, 2012; HSBA, 2016; Tubiana, 2017).

In response to attacks on them since the beginning of the war, Darfurian non-Arab civilians have had to become particularly mobile. This is not unprecedented: when facing the severe droughts of the 1970s and 1980s, Darfurians largely survived by moving hundreds of kilometres south of their original homelands to areas near the border with southern Sudan. This led to the development of a Darfurian trading class in southern Sudan. Many Darfurians fleeing from droughts since the 1970s have also engaged in ‘circular’ labour migration to Libya, facilitated by, but also fuelling, long-standing movements for commercial purposes between Sudan and Libya, and leading to the establishment of the Darfurian-dominated Suq Libya (‘Libyan market’) in Khartoum (Chevrillon-Guibert, 2013; Ali, 2015, p. 14). Darfurian and broader Sudanese labour migration and trade also extended to countries in the Gulf.

The civilian victims of the 2003–04 government violence therefore drew on this earlier experience, seeking safety in camps or towns in Darfur and the rest of Sudan, and in neighbouring countries, in particular Chad (Gallar, 2019). Rebel movements also survived by moving rapidly within Darfur and to neighbouring countries. They crossed borders in search of rear bases, but also to find conflict situations in which they could play a proxy role in exchange for support—beginning with Chad, and later South Sudan, the CAR, and Libya. When political shifts obliged their hosts to reject these rebels, as Chad did in 2010, they had to move again, but sometimes found themselves trapped in new crises.

One particular example of this was in South Sudan: by 2010, in anticipation of the country’s secession from Sudan, Darfur rebels had moved there. After civil war erupted in December 2013, however, the situation became increasingly uncomfortable for both Darfurian combatants and civilians. Some rebel movements then succeeded in moving to Libya, mostly by backing Khalifa Haftar’s Libyan National Army (LNA); others had no choice but to remain where they were. Recently more familiar players have been trying to use (or use again) Darfur rebels as proxies or allies: one such player is the Chadian regime, which is trying to survive despite its increasing unpopularity among the cross-border (non-Arab) Zaghawa ethnic group (the tribe of Chad’s president, Idriss Déby); another is the Sudanese RSF leader, Hemeti, who is already recruiting among non-Arabs and engaging in a rapprochement with the rebel movements. These dynamics carry a

high potential for renewed tensions, both between Sudan's centre and peripheries, and within Chad.

The endless Darfur conflict, whose root cause appears more and more distant, has brought despair to both rebels and civilians. Many rebels have returned to civilian life, including in camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugee camps, or have turned to other mobile—and often armed—activities such as road banditry and cross-border smuggling or the trafficking of cars, fuel, arms, drugs, and migrants. Both civilians and rebels also traverse the Sahara during successive gold rushes, trading their skills as miners. The mobility of Darfurian civilians has not been any less than that of the rebels. Economic hardship and hopelessness have pushed them to look for gold-mining opportunities and safety outside Sudan, mostly in Libya, where new violence has pressured an increasingly large number of them to attempt the crossing to Europe. Refugee camps in Chad and gold mines at the Chadian–Libyan border have both become staging posts along new migratory routes. Extreme suffering in Libya has also caused unexpected movements of Darfurian refugees, notably to Niger.

The ongoing 2018–19 transition in Sudan is bringing new uncertainty. While events largely took place in Khartoum rather than in Darfur, the unexpected rise of Hemeti as the new Sudanese strongman means that Darfur is an important part of the equation and will affect future events. While Bashir's fall brought hope to the many Darfurians who had been driven out of their homeland, Hemeti's rise has a more bitter taste for many. The recruitment of non-Arabs into the RSF and Hemeti's attempts to form alliances with Darfur rebels will prove to be either an opportunity or a risky bet—political borders could be harder to cross than spatial ones.

This report is based on field research carried out by the authors between 2018 and 2020 in Chad, Europe, Libya, and Niger. ●

“The endless Darfur conflict, whose root cause appears more and more distant, has brought despair to both rebels and civilians.”



There is no doubt that the evolving situation in Khartoum since the overthrow of Omar al-Bashir in April 2019 will have consequences in and around Darfur, including impacts on the movements of Darfurian combatants.”

Darfurian armed groups in Sudan's neighbours

Moving south, looking for new proxy wars: from Chad to South Sudan

Between 2003 and 2010 Chad was crucial in allowing various Darfur rebel groups to establish rear bases on its soil, near Sudan's western border. In exchange, the Darfurian groups performed occasional proxy operations on behalf of the Chadian government, including in Chad itself, against Khartoum-backed Chadian rebels (Tubiana, 2008). When the rapprochement between Chad and Sudan ended the proxy war in 2010, however, the Darfur rebels' presence in Chad also came to an end (Tubiana, 2011). As a result, Darfur rebels looked for other countries neighbouring Sudan that were willing to host and support them. The ideal candidates were those that were currently or potentially involved in a proxy war with Sudan, thus replicating the favourable situation provided by the former Chadian–Sudanese proxy war.

The first and best option was southern Sudan. In 2010 the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) was focusing on South Sudan's planned independence in July 2011, but there were fears in Juba that the Khartoum government would use force to oppose the secession. With the secession deadline approaching, Khartoum was increasing its support to anti-SPLM/A southern Sudanese armed groups or militias, triggering tensions both in what would be the post-independence borderlands and deep into southern Sudan. Because the SPLM/A was certain it could win the referendum on independence, it prevented its own forces from retaliating—including in the disputed border areas and in the so-called Three Areas (Abyei, South Kordofan, and Blue Nile), which were partly controlled and claimed by the SPLM/A's northern branch—the future SPLM/A-North (SPLM/A-N). The SPLM/A still needed to put some indirect pressure on Khartoum, however. An opportunity therefore opened up for the Darfur rebels, who were historically at a sufficient distance from the SPLM/A to play a role in a proxy war between Sudan and southern Sudan similar to the one they had played in Chad and at the beginning of the Darfur conflict in 2003 (Gramizzi and Tubiana, 2012, pp. 55–69).

The main Darfur rebel movement at that time was the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), which managed to transfer the bulk of its forces from Darfur and Chad to southern Sudan. By late 2010 the Sudan Liberation Army faction led by Minni Minawi (SLA-MM), which was arguably the other main Darfur rebel movement and which had been at peace with Khartoum since the signing of the Darfur Peace Agreement in 2006, decided to resume fighting. It succeeded in transferring a large portion of its forces to southern Sudan, while keeping another portion in North Darfur in an attempt to maintain control over pockets of territory there. Other smaller Darfur rebel factions, some with previous ties to the SPLM, were also hosted in South Sudan after its independence in July 2011 (Gramizzi and Tubiana, 2012, pp. 61–69).

In the end, Khartoum did not oppose South Sudan's independence. Nevertheless, by mid-2011 tensions had crystallized around issues that the Comprehensive Peace Agree-

ment had failed to resolve, one of which was the fate of the Three Areas. In May 2011, two months before independence, SAF reoccupied Abyei, and the (most likely rigged) elections in South Kordofan gave the governor's post to the Bashir regime's National Congress Party candidate, Ahmed Haroun, and not to local SPLM leader Abdelaziz al Hilu. In June, with Juba's support, al Hilu resumed the war against Khartoum, and after failed African Union-mediated negotiations, convinced elected SPLM Blue Nile governor Malik Agar to resume the war in September (Gramizzi and Tubiana, 2013, pp. 15–18). Other disputed issues concerned border areas, including some that were rich in oil. As early as 2010 Darfur rebels were hosted by the then-autonomous government of southern Sudan in Western and Northern Bahr al Ghazal, playing a buffer role between the SPLA and Khartoum forces near the disputed Kafia Kingi and Mile 14 territories bordering Darfur. In April 2012 JEM also played a key part alongside SPLA and SPLM-N units in Juba's ten-day occupation of the disputed Hejlij oil field (Gramizzi and Tubiana, 2013, pp. 49–53).

Tensions in the borderlands and the resumption of the war in South Kordofan and Blue Nile allowed Darfur rebels to improve their relations with both Juba and the SPLM-N. In November 2011 this led to the creation of the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF), an umbrella group that included JEM, the SLA-MM, and the SLA-AW (the SLA faction led by Abdul Wahid al-Nur), with Juba's support (Al Jazeera, 2011).

Although it was historically less closely linked to the SPLM/A than other Darfur movements, JEM was the most involved in this rapprochement because it believed more than others did that the war should be fought closer to Khartoum, most notably in South Kordofan itself. JEM thus began to move forces into South Kordofan and to recruit fighters among local Nuba people, including some who were sharing or had shared JEM's Islamist (rather than the SPLM's secular) ideology. The SLA-MM, while ideologically closer to the SPLM-N than JEM, preferred to remain nearer Darfur in Western and Northern Bahr al Ghazal, where it had stationed troops and controlled territory, and where its troops preferred to operate. Differences in both ideology and military tactics, as well as JEM's ability to seduce some of the Nuba youth into joining its ranks, generated competition between JEM and the SPLM-N. By 2013–14 JEM was obliged to withdraw from South Kordofan, which made the SRF a mere political umbrella with little ability to coordinate military operations on the ground (Craze, Tubiana, and Gramizzi, 2016, p. 155).

JEM troops partly withdrew to South Sudan's Unity state, immediately south of South Kordofan, when South Sudan's civil war broke out in December 2013. Unity state immediately became one of the main theatres of the conflict, and JEM's presence there allowed the group—more than the SLA-MM in Western and Northern Bahr al Ghazal, and even more than the SPLM-N—to play a proxy role on behalf of Juba against the Khartoum-backed SPLM-in-Opposition. By late 2014 Darfur rebels (especially JEM) were in an increasingly precarious position. While its proxy role allowed JEM to continue to obtain support from Juba, it caused violent tensions between Nuer civilians in Unity,

who were the main victims of the SPLA and allied troops' successive operations, and Darfurian civilians also present in South Sudan (Craze, Tubiana, and Gramizzi, 2016, pp. 157–83).

Between 2011 and 2013 the growing and interrelated economic crises in both Sudans had contrasting effects on Darfurian civilians. In Darfur itself the crisis, combined with Arab militias' continuous violence against non-Arab civilians, meant that few economic opportunities were available to displaced Darfurian youth. High prices in South Sudan gave income-generating opportunities to many Darfurians with skills in petty trade, particularly in the border states, which were still dependent on supplies from Sudan. Prices and opportunities increased further after the outbreak of civil war in 2013, with the result that many Darfurians moved not only to neighbouring Western and Northern Bahr al Ghazal, but also to war zones such as the towns of Bentiu and Rubkona and the surrounding Rubkona county in Unity state. There they became the targets of violence perpetrated by the Nuer armed opposition and allied militias, which culminated in a massacre of several hundred Darfurian civilians in Bentiu in April 2014. After the SPLA retook the town JEM helped to evacuate the survivors to Darfur. Many Darfurian civilians then left South Sudan, some of whom migrated to Libya or Europe (Craze, Tubiana, and Gramizzi, 2016, pp. 170–77).

Dissatisfied with the violence and the mercenary aspect of the fighting in South Sudan, JEM combatants wanted to move to and fight on a savanna or desert terrain rather than in the Sudd swamps. For them, South Sudan increasingly became a trap, not only because of the hostility of the local population, but also because returning from South Sudan to Darfur proved to be dangerous. JEM's main attempt to do so in April 2015 led to their suffering an unprecedented defeat at the hands of the RSF. The SPLM-N's persistent refusal to allow JEM to return to South Kordofan was indirectly blamed for this defeat (Craze, Tubiana, and Gramizzi, 2016, p. 187). This prompted JEM to transfer its troops out of South Sudan in a more discreet way, and without all the military equipment (vehicles mounted with machine guns) acquired during the movement's involvement in the country. Some commanders and fighters left both South Sudan and JEM to join other rebel or former rebel factions in Libya.²

Another civil war in a country neighbouring on Sudan, the CAR, also attracted Darfurian combatants. These were mostly Arab '*janjawid*' militias integrated into or operating in the wake of the Séléka rebellion in the CAR. But they also reportedly included former Darfur rebels.³

Back to desert terrain: from South Sudan to Libya

Muammar Qaddafi's Libya, while supporting various Darfur rebel movements, was not one of their main rear bases. In 2011, under the guise of supporting Qaddafi during

the so-called Arab Spring, both JEM and the SLA-MM sent troops from Darfur to Libya, mostly to obtain weapons from the collapsing Libyan regime, which they succeeded in doing. This led to Libyan revolutionary factions becoming very hostile toward the Darfur rebels, who only returned to Libya in significant numbers in 2015, at a time when both South Sudan and Darfur—the latter enduring growing RSF attacks—became increasingly inhospitable for them.⁴

The SLA-MM was the first of the Darfur rebel movements to move the bulk of its troops to Libya. The opportunity to return to Libya was provided by a new round of civil war in that country that began in 2014, prompted by the launch of ‘Operation Dignity’ (*karama*) led by Gen. Khalifa Haftar’s self-styled LNA in the east against ‘Libyan Dawn’ (*fajr* Libya), a coalition of former revolutionary brigades in western Libya. Both sides needed manpower and were interested in recruiting skilled Darfurian fighters, regardless of their political affiliation (Tubiana and Gramizzi, 2018, pp. 57–62). Courted by both factions, some Darfurian combatants changed sides to maximize their incomes and increase their weapons stockpiles (see Table 1).

But Darfur rebel movements also understood that, given the loyal support of Khartoum (and of Khartoum’s main allies at the time, Qatar and Turkey) to revolutionary brigades and the Muslim Brotherhood in western Libya, consolidating their ties with Haftar—and thus Haftar’s regional allies, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)—could offer them more stable and wider support. The SLA-MM in particular adopted this strategy, thus becoming the main Darfur rebel movement in Libya (Tubiana and Gramizzi, 2018, pp. 57–62; UNSC, 2019a, p. 21). It was also joined by and coordinated its activities with smaller splinter factions, including the three who united to form the Gathering of Sudan Liberation Forces (GSLF), the second largest Darfurian force in Libya after the SLA-MM. In late 2018 another small SLA faction under Yusif Ahmad Yusif ‘Karjakola’ also reportedly changed its allegiance from anti-Haftar forces to the LNA, illustrating both the Darfurian’s ability to change sides and their trend to ultimately align together in the Haftar camp (UNSC, 2019a, p. 23).

The SLA-MM’s strength in Libya was also due to the fact that a large share of the movement’s troops had remained in Darfur rather than moved to South Sudan, and could travel more easily to Libya from Darfur than other rebels in South Sudan; however, both the SLA-MM and JEM managed to move men, including leaders, from South Sudan to Libya through Darfur itself, and also through the CAR, Chad, and even Niger. Individuals or small groups mostly made these journeys, travelling discreetly and as civilians. They were largely unable to transport the military equipment they had obtained in South Sudan. Military expeditions from South Sudan to Darfur and eventually Libya were attempted, but the RSF annihilated them. This was the case for both JEM’s raid in April 2015 (referred to above) and the similar May 2017 attempt of the SLA-MM and allied rebels to have their separate forces in Libya and South Sudan move simultaneously to Darfur (UNSC, 2017, p. 8).

Map 1 Darfur rebel presence and smuggling routes across Libya's southern border

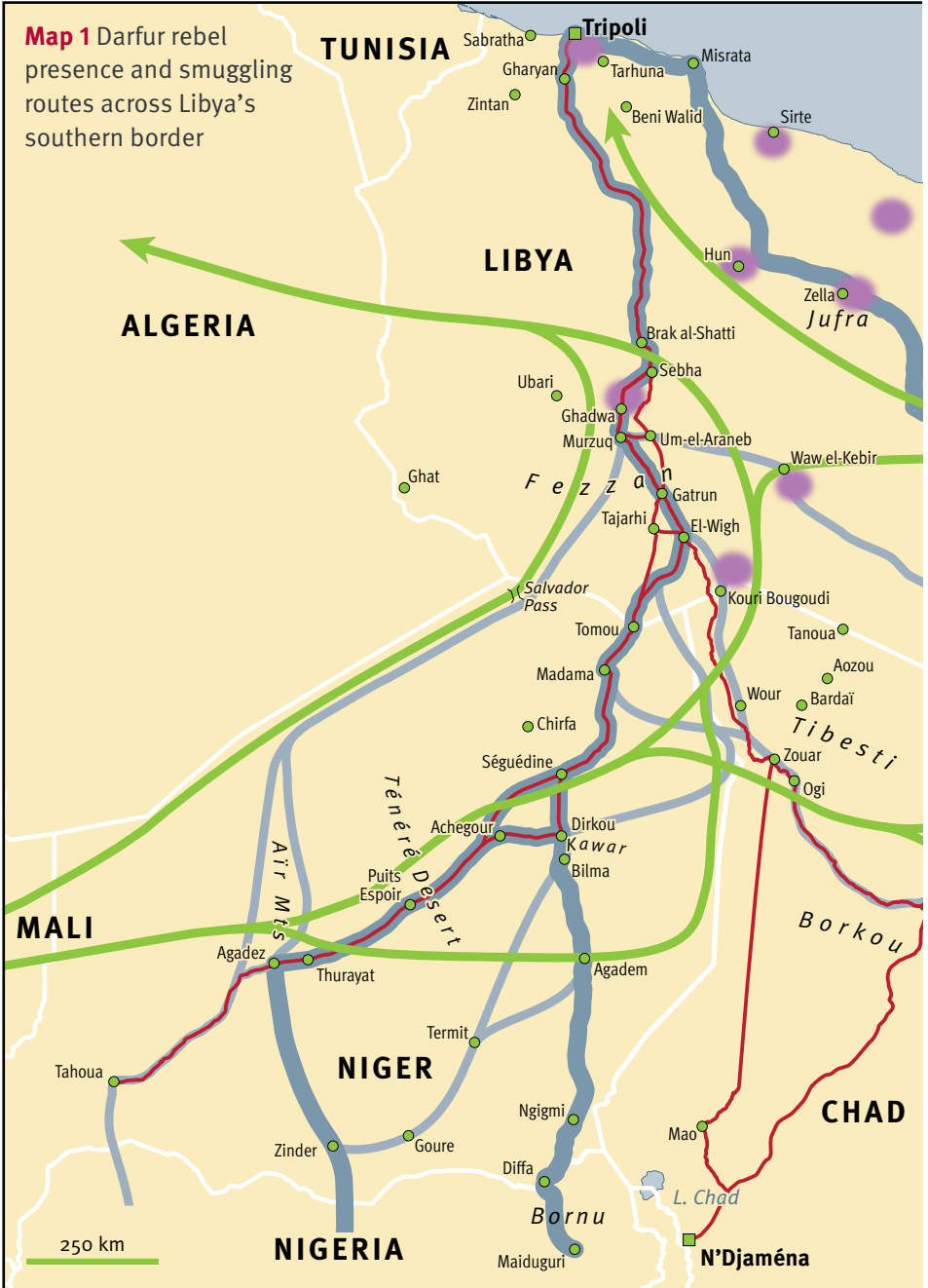




Table 1 The main Darfurian combatants in Libya, early 2020

Force leaders	Force names or description	Main ethnicity
Minni Minawi	SLA-MM	Beri (Zaghawa)
Jibril Ibrahim	JEM	Beri
Taher Hajer, Abdallah Bashar 'Janna', Abdallah Yahya	GSLF	Beri
Nimir Mohammed Abderrahman and Mohammed Adam Abdelsalam 'Tarrada', respectively replaced by Saleh 'Jebel Si' and Al-Hadi Idris Yahya	SLA-Transitional Council	Fur
Yusif Ahmad Yusif 'Karjakola'	SLA-AW, autonomous elements	Fur; reportedly joined by a few Zaghawa SLA-MM fighters led by Salah Jok 'Bob'
Abdallah Banda and Jibril Abdelkarim Bari 'Tek'	LJM/United Resistance Front	Beri

Sources: Tubiana and Gramizzi (2017, pp. 139–44; 2018, pp. 60–61); UNSC (2019a, pp. 21–26); author interviews with Darfur rebels, locations withheld, January 2017–January 2020; with a Darfur refugee, location withheld, March

Areas of presence, 2014–20	Affiliations or loyalties	Force strength and notes
Southern Libya (Rebyana, Sarir oil field, Waw el-Kebir, Fezzan), Jufra (Hun, Zella), Benghazi, oil crescent, Sirte, Tripoli area	Tubu forces, then Haftar	1,000 men and 200–300 vehicles, although 160–200 vehicles were sent on a mostly failed raid to Darfur in May 2017. This is the main Darfur rebel group in Libya.
Kufra area, Sebha, Gatrun, Waw el-Kebir, Kouri Bougoudi gold mine	Shifting loyalties between Haftar and Benghazi Defence Brigade; linked to Chadian UFR rebels and Tubu forces	100–200 fighters, 40 vehicles. The group's core remained stuck in South Sudan and largely dispersed.
Southern Libya (Chadian–Libyan border, Rebyana, Waw el-Kebir, Sebha, Um el-Araneb, Murzuq), Jufra (Hun, Zella), oil crescent, Sirte, Tripoli area	Haftar, Qaddafiists. Discussions about uniting with the SLA-MM did not succeed for the moment, but the groups have been operating jointly.	500 men and 150–200 vehicles; formed in July 2017 as a coalition of SLA-Justice (Hajer), SLA-Unity (Yahya), and Abdallah Janna's splinter group from JEM Bashar/Dabajo (the latter signed a peace accord with Khartoum in 2016).
Zella, oil crescent	Haftar, SLA-MM	50 vehicles; dissidents from SLA-AW faction. Tarrada was reportedly killed and Abderrahman captured as the group returned from South Sudan to Darfur alongside SLA-MM forces in May–June 2017. Abderrahman was released after Bashir's fall.
Oil crescent, Sarir oil field, Waw el-Kebir	Haftar, after some involvement with anti-Haftar forces until late 2018; close links to GSLF	100–150 men and 50 vehicles. The group has been moving back and forth between Darfur and Libya.
Southern Libya (Kouri Bougoudi and Kilinje gold mines, Kufra area, Waw el-Kebir), Jufra area, Sirte, Tripoli area	Haftar, SLA-MM, Chadian UFR rebels, local Tubu forces	30–40 vehicles; signed the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur with Khartoum in 2011; involved in gold mining, smuggling of cars, banditry, attacks on drug traffickers, and escorting of drug convoys.

2017; with Sudanese officials, by telephone and in undisclosed locations, April and December 2017, October 2019, and January 2020; and with Chadian rebels, locations withheld, December 2017–January 2020

Other Darfur rebel factions also moved to Libya, but more hesitantly or in lesser numbers than the SLA-MM, notably JEM, the bulk of whose forces remained stuck longer in South Sudan. According to a former Darfur rebel, the more organized groups, in particular the SLA-MM, then became the only conduit for the LNA to recruit Darfurians travelling to Libya as combatants.⁵ More recently, in early 2020 it was said that LNA forces in the Jufra area had recruited several hundred Sudanese, as well as Chadian and other sub-Saharan individual combatants.⁶

Initially, former Qaddafi regime officers who had had connections with Darfur rebels since before 2011 facilitated these rebels' transport to Libya.⁷ In southern Libya Tubu contacts also played a key role in this process, including sometimes through family connections. JEM's chief of intelligence and security, Abdelkarim Tchollo Gunti, for example, hails from the Murdy clan gathering of north-eastern Chad, including Tubu clans, and speaks Tubu.⁸ He had led the first JEM convoy to Libya in 2011, before playing a key role in the group's settlement in South Sudan, and their subsequent relocation to southern Libya. Prior to his arrival, other Darfur rebel factions had fought on the Tubu side in inter-tribal conflicts in Ubari and Kufra, Libya, in 2014–15 (Tubiana and Gramizzi, 2018, p. 58).⁹ In the following years Darfur rebels moved north and mostly fought on Haftar's side in the oil crescent, and were then sometimes used to guard the oil fields. Some Tubu leaders even believed that Haftar was aiming to replace Tubu petroleum facilities guards with more pliant troops.¹⁰ Haftar's relations with the Tubu became increasingly tense, in particular because of the support he gave to their enemies in Kufra and Sebha, the Zway and Awlad Suleiman Arabs, respectively.

The involvement of Darfur rebels as proxies in Libya triggered debates between and within the various Darfur rebel movements. They were not only concerned about the risk of gradually abandoning their political aims in Darfur, but were also reluctant to fight in northern Libya; they preferred to operate in the more familiar desert terrain of southern Libya or northern Darfur. The combatants' desire to return to Darfur was one of the motivations for an attempt by the SLA-MM and allied factions, which had been re-equipped thanks to LNA supplies, to resettle in Darfur in May 2017. But, as mentioned above, the RSF defeated their convoys coming from Libya and to a lesser extent from South Sudan—like JEM's earlier attempt to leave South Sudan. Immediately after the convoys' defeat the SLA-MM resumed its proxy role on Haftar's side in order to regain its strength, taking part in the LNA's recapture of Jufra in June 2017 and part of the Fezzan in early 2019, the latter together with GSLF troops. Darfurian combatants remained more reluctant to participate in the LNA's subsequent attempts to take Tripoli, however.¹¹

Another reason for the Darfur combatants' growing reluctance to take part in the Libyan conflict was that JEM, unlike the SLA-MM and most Darfur rebel factions, had reportedly fought alongside anti-Haftar forces (UNSC, 2019a, p. 23). This is possibly due to the past affiliation of a large number of its leaders with the Muslim Brotherhood, whose Libyan wing, with support from Qatar, is hostile to Haftar.¹²

As a result of these diverging alliances it seems that JEM and the SLA-MM fought each other, notably in the oil crescent in mid-2018, in Murzuq and Ghadwa (between Sebha and Murzuq) in early 2019, and possibly in the Tripoli area in May 2019.¹³ Both groups reportedly took prisoners from the other, and it is likely that they also killed each other's fighters.¹⁴ As a result, in May 2019 the SLA-MM, JEM, and other Darfurian factions allegedly held a meeting in Jufra that resulted in an agreement not to fight one another.¹⁵ Further, the Chadian rebel Union of Resistance Forces (UFR), which maintained close links to JEM in Libya, has also been involved in fighting against Haftar.¹⁶ Because the UFR is mainly composed of Zaghawa (like JEM and the SLA-MM), this likely also led to Sudanese and Chadian Zaghawa killing each other—as they had done during the 2005–10 Chadian–Sudanese proxy war. As a consequence, not only are Darfur rebels more reluctant to fight as proxies in the current Libyan civil war, but some JEM combatants are also asking their leaders to change sides and join the LNA camp in order to align with the majority of Darfurian combatants.¹⁷ Such a move could pave the way for further Darfurian involvement in the fight for Tripoli. In July 2019 there were rumours of both SLA-MM and JEM forces moving from Jufra toward Tarhuna, immediately south of Tripoli;¹⁸ however, in August SLA-MM forces reportedly rejected their leadership's plans to join Haftar's attempt to take Tripoli.¹⁹ But since November 2019 several Darfur rebel factions, including the SLA-MM, GSLF, Karjakola's group (see above), and elements of the Liberation and Justice Movement (LJM) under Abdallah Banda and Jibril 'Tek', together constituting a force of 200–300 vehicles, have been said to be fighting in the Tripoli area on the LNA side, allegedly at the instigation of the UAE and Egypt (UNSC, 2020, p. 19).²⁰ In January 2020 GSLF elements under Abdallah Bashar 'Janna' and LJM elements reportedly took part in the LNA's capture of Sirte, while the SLA-MM did not. Some factions were also considering taking part in a possible LNA offensive to capture Misrata.²¹ The presence of Darfurian fighters on the LNA side reportedly increased in February and again in April, with several dozens of them reportedly killed by Turkish drones operated in support of the Government of National Accord (GNA) south of Tripoli and between Sirte and Misrata.²²

Darfur rebels in Libya were involved not only in proxy fighting, but also in other potentially lucrative and not necessarily armed activities. Many rebels came to look for gold in mines straddling the border between Libya and Chad. Others became cross-border traders, notably in vehicles, including stolen vehicles from Libya, which they then sold in Darfur and Chad. In southern Libya they were also involved in road banditry, sometimes in alliance and sometimes in competition with local gangs. Some rebels made successful attacks on drug traffickers' convoys, after which some of them contacted traffickers and began to escort their convoys. Darfurian combatants who prefer these activities to proxy fighting are notably former rebels whose leaders signed peace agreements with Khartoum, because the implementation of these deals was often limited to giving a few government positions to rebel political leaders. The fighters, fed up with waiting for the dividends promised in the peace agreements, such as integration into

armed forces or financial rewards, found other opportunities to support themselves in southern Libya, which is largely devoid of any form of state control. Interestingly, in spite of past differences and strong enmities between leaders, as well as (for some) their involvement as proxies on opposing sides in Libya, all Darfur rebel factions, including splinter factions and original groups, remained connected and cooperated in Libya.²³

Apart from the more visible non-Arab Darfur rebels, another type of Darfurian combatant present in Libya is Darfurian Arabs, including former members of *janjawid* militias and paramilitary forces formed by Khartoum. Those in Libya are mostly mercenary combatants who reportedly fought on various sides of the Libyan conflict, but there are also partisans of former *janjawid* leader Musa Hilal. When Hilal increasingly opposed the Sudanese government and his rival, Hemeti, some of his men moved to Libya in order to form their own armed opposition group with Haftar's support (UNSC, 2019a, pp. 23–24). With Bashir's fall and Hemeti's rise to greater prominence in Sudan in 2019, some of them remain opposed to Hemeti, but are less likely to obtain Haftar's support, and are now reportedly supported by Haftar's adversaries; however, a force of 74 Hilal loyalists were reportedly fighting in Tripoli on the LNA side, two of whom were captured by pro-GNA forces. The governments of both Sudan and Chad reportedly successfully warned Haftar against providing Darfurian (Arab or non-Arab) combatants with substantial amounts of military equipment, which could then fuel new anti-government armed activities in either country.²⁴ As a result, by April 2020 Darfur rebels, having suffered significant casualties from Turkish drone attacks, were reportedly reluctant to fight for Haftar because the LNA had not provided them in particular with armoured vehicles. Some of them were said to be ready to withdraw from both the Tripoli area and the oil crescent, and even to join the GNA side.²⁵

A new alliance between Darfur rebels and the *janjawid*?

The rise of the RSF

There is no doubt that the evolving situation in Khartoum since the overthrow of Omar al-Bashir in April 2019 will have consequences in and around Darfur, including impacts on the movements of Darfurian combatants, and thus indirectly on their activities in Libya. At the leadership level, Hemeti played a key role in deposing Bashir, enabling the militia leader to become deputy chairman of Sudan's Transitional Military Council (TMC). He subsequently became deputy head of the mixed civilian–military Sovereign Council that would constitute Sudan's transitional government, although he is perhaps best understood as the real strongman in the country (Tubiana, 2019a).

While Bashir's final years in power provided the conditions for Hemeti and the RSF to accrue unprecedented levels of power under the guise of a praetorian, albeit autonomous, guard, Bashir's overthrow and Hemeti's betrayal of the former president paved

the way for the RSF, which he leads, to consolidate its position. This rise to power is also gaining the RSF—which is still referred to by those who oppose its increased influence over the levers of power as the *janjawid*—more enemies than ever.

Convergent foreign alliances and interests

Both Bashir's fall and Hemeti's role in it had foreign backers—particularly Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. While Bashir had negotiated a rapprochement with those nations in his last years as president, his regime was still playing a double game and maintaining ties with Qatar, Turkey, and the Muslim Brotherhood in various countries. Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE likely backed his removal because they wanted Sudan to have a military ruler with closer links to them.

As a result of Bashir's removal, Sudan's security apparatus now has the same backers as Khalifa Haftar in Libya. Sudan is therefore likely to stop supporting the LNA's adversaries, and may even be asked by its allies (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE) to support Haftar. The RSF, which largely consists of skilled desert fighters that are already operating at the Sudanese–Libyan border, has existing ties with Libyan militias (including pro-Haftar militias). Its members' unofficial cooperation with these militias has notably included the 'sale' of migrants transiting from Sudan to Libya (Tubiana, Warin, and Saeneen, 2018, pp. 49–52). Given all of these existing linkages and alliances, it is conceivable that the RSF could play the same proxy role as Darfur rebels played in Libya on the LNA side.

According to a US Department of Justice document, a lobbying company based in Canada, Dickens & Madson, signed a contract with Hemeti on behalf of the TMC to 'strive to obtain funding for your [that is, Sudan's] Council [the TMC] from the Eastern Libyan Military Command in exchange for your [Sudan's] military help to the LNA' (US DoJ, 2019, p. 2). Nothing in this document indicates whether this USD 6 million deal actually resulted in the transfer of Sudanese troops to Libya, however. In addition, in April 2019 Russian Federation government 'consultants' reportedly met Qaddafi's son and heir, Seif al-Islam Qaddafi, in Libya, proposing to send him personnel from 'our Sudanese company', according to a memo seen by Bloomberg News (Al-Atrush, 2020). There are also allegations that the UAE, which is disengaging from the Yemen conflict, proposed to move the RSF's deployment from Yemen to Libya (see Box 1).²⁶ In December 2019 Hemeti himself, as well as other Sudanese government officials, claimed that 'the RSF were withdrawing from Yemen' (Trew, 2019) and numbered no more than 600 men.²⁷

Some have taken these allegations as fact. The UN Panel of Experts on Libya, for example, estimated, that '1,000 Sudanese troops from the Rapid Support Forces . . . were deployed to Libya on 25 July 2019 by General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (also known as Hemeti)' (UNSC, 2019b, p. 10). The Panel of Experts concluded that 'the Sudan, and General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, as he has command responsibility, are both in

non-compliance' with the UN Security Council sanctions on Libya (UNSC, 2019b, p. 10). This conclusion is apparently based on limited data: a single, confidential source and an online media article that quoted a report from Radio Dabanga are the only support cited.²⁸ It is worth noting that the UN Panel of Experts on Sudan subsequently disagreed with the Panel of Experts on Libya on this issue:

The Panel has no credible evidence of the presence of Rapid Support Forces in Libya, and the Panel's sources remain unaware of any such presence. It is worth noting that many Arabs from Darfur and Chad who fight in Libya as individual mercenaries for the Libyan National Army and other groups, including in Jufrah, hail from the same tribes as the majority of Rapid Support Forces personnel (UNSC, 2020, p. 17).

Cracks in the *janjawid*

But not all Sudanese militias or paramilitary forces are under Hemeti's control. For example, between June and September 2019 there were rumours of *janjawid* either crossing the Sudanese–Libyan border or preparing to do so to fight in Libya.²⁹ In June some of those rumours referred specifically to Darfurian Arabs, including former *janjawid* members, being recruited by Misratan forces opposed to Haftar and the LNA.³⁰ Other allegations relating to Libya mentioned up to '1,000 Sudanese militiamen' from the RSF arriving in the oil crescent (where Darfur rebels are still present) in July. Another 3,000 more were 'expected to arrive in Libya in the next few months' (Dabanga, 2019; Libya Observer, 2019). Haftar supposedly recruited these fighters to protect oil installations in the oil crescent and to man LNA checkpoints on roads north and south of Jufra (Dabanga, 2019).³¹

According to a Sudanese government source, Darfurian Arabs are likely to be recruited as mercenaries by both sides in the Libyan conflict, just as they have been in the past.³² Their recruitment by external powers is limited, however, by Hemeti's need to retain the RSF in Sudan and protect him from possible challenges to his power, including from SAF.³³ He is unlikely to have ordered or backed the alleged arrival of 'RSF' in Libya from June to September of 2019; however, Hemeti does not control all elements of Darfurian Arab militias and some are even opposed to him. It is reasonable to conclude that Darfurian Arabs in Libya are fighting as mercenaries for either the LNA or GNA and are not on Hemeti's RSF payroll. Rather, as mentioned above, they are likely to be combatants loyal to Hemeti's imprisoned rival and former *janjawid* strongman Musa Hilal (UNSC, 2019a, pp. 23–24; 2020, pp. 16–17).

In September 2019 the Chadian army reportedly arrested almost 100 Hilal loyalists on their way to Libya at the Chadian–Darfur border and handed them over to the RSF.³⁴ By December 2019 a Sudanese government source mentioned that pro-Hilal forces

were recruiting primarily from within his own Mahamid tribe—including defectors from the RSF. The source estimated that these forces had nearly 100 vehicles in Libya. The pro-Hilal forces were fighting on both sides of the Libyan conflict and had suffered losses. Some of them are reportedly trying to acquire military equipment in Libya (from various sides) to use against Hemeti.³⁵

Convergent Sudanese alliances too?

There are signs that Hemeti would not oppose an RSF intervention to support Haftar. Hemeti has reportedly told his Gulf backers that he is now in need of support to ensure security in Sudan itself before being able to contribute RSF forces to other foreign wars.³⁶ With regard to the rumours about the *janjawid* presence in Libya, it is worth noting that Libyan sources often call not only Darfurian Arab militias *janjawid*, but, paradoxically, Darfur rebels as well.³⁷ This confusion may be aggravated by two recent factors. Firstly, since Bashir's removal the RSF and Darfur rebels have formed a tactical alliance, with Hemeti reportedly encouraging the SLA-MM to fight alongside Haftar in Libya. Secondly, non-Arabs, including former rebels, have been increasingly integrated into the RSF.³⁸

The Darfur rebels saw the 2018–19 unrest in Khartoum as a long-awaited opportunity for them and their cause. Since the uprising began in December 2018 they hoped that the situation would evolve in a way that could allow them to resettle in Darfur and influence Sudan's future. Their failed attempt to resettle in 2017, however, and Hemeti's rise to power made the rebels wary that the RSF would prevent their return. For this reason they believed that some kind of non-aggression pact with Hemeti was needed before they could safely leave Libya.³⁹

After Bashir's removal in April 2019, another cause for concern among Darfur rebels was that the TMC, which was becoming more closely linked to Haftar, could ask him to sever ties with the Darfur rebels. After the RSF's role in the deadly repression of the protestors on 3 June, however, Hemeti lost his brief popularity in Khartoum and attempted instead to establish a popular base in Sudan's peripheries. Engaging in a rapprochement with Darfur and other rebels, notably thanks to talks in Chad and South Sudan, served Hemeti's purposes (Tubiana, 2019d, p. 20). It now appears that this new alliance is unpopular with both Darfurian non-Arab civilians and Darfur rebel combatants in Libya.⁴⁰ The alliance may evolve, however, depending on the rebel leaders' capacity to justify their tactics.

New alliances and a new RSF

An alliance of the RSF and Darfur rebels may also depend on the RSF's own evolution. While it was initially conceived as a paramilitary force in which to integrate Arab *janjawid*

combatants from Darfur and Chad, it gradually started to incorporate non-Arab recruits. As early as 2015 former Darfur rebels, including some who still had ties with the rebel movements, joined the RSF.⁴¹ Both rebels and former rebels state that well-known combatants were given high ranks, vehicles, and good salaries. For example, notable former SLA-MM commander Mohammedin Ismail Bashar (known as ‘Orgajor’) was made an RSF colonel and now reportedly commands the paramilitary force’s contingent in Port Sudan. Orgajor’s associate Abdallah Tijani Shaghab was reportedly given 400 vehicles to patrol the Sudanese–Libyan border in 2016–17, before being deployed in Khartoum shortly after the beginning of the protests in late 2018.⁴² Orgajor was also reportedly involved in enlisting non-Arabs into the RSF.

Among non-Arabs, the Zaghawa are said to be the best represented group in the RSF, with some 2,500–3,000 men. This total includes both former rebels and disillusioned non-Arab youths, who have reportedly rushed to join the force in recent years.⁴³ The RSF purportedly recruited within IDP camps in Darfur and among Darfurian refugees in Chad who were suffering from the decline in international aid supplied to them. According to one Darfurian refugee in Chad, who was recruited into the RSF in February 2019 in the border town of Tina:

The RSF does everything they can to change their image among the non-Arabs, which is why they recruit among all communities. But we non-Arabs only join them for money. I integrated into them not because I like them but because I wanted to earn a salary.⁴⁴

The same source explained that since Bashir’s removal, non-Arabs were even keener to join the RSF: ‘Everyone thought that if Bashir were to fall it would be the end of the RSF. But the opposite happened’. Another refugee recruited into the RSF with the same financial motivation explained that there are so many candidates for recruitment that they are asked to wait until more troops are needed.⁴⁵

Yet another non-Arab RSF member and former rebel gave a different, more political, justification for joining the paramilitary force as early as 2015:

As paradoxical as it may seem, non-Arab presence within the RSF is a chance for us. When we are many in their ranks, they refrain from abuses against the blacks. I even found out that since we joined them, their racist speech slightly changed. I began to think I was in a kind of mission to save Darfur people. Anyway, as the saying goes, ‘with no horse, one rides a donkey’.⁴⁶

Non-Arab rebels who had joined the RSF also reportedly took part in the attacks on and killing of protestors in the Khartoum sit-in on 3 June 2019. This had the effect of strengthening their ties with Hemeti on the basis of a common hostility towards civilians in the centre.⁴⁷

Box 1 Darfurian fighters in Yemen

Since early 2017 Sudan, as a member of the Saudi-led coalition fighting the so-called ‘Houthi’ rebels, has sent several thousand troops to Yemen. Various unofficial estimates put their numbers at around 10,000, including 4,000–5,000 members of the RSF (in a 2019 speech Hemeti himself mentioned the figure of 30,000 men, which, if it is not an exaggeration, could be the number of troops deployed in Yemen successively since 2017, rather than simultaneously).⁴⁸ The Yemen war was reportedly particularly attractive to RSF troops thanks to the relatively high salaries they received and to the compensation sent to soldiers’ families if they were killed—which was not an unlikely possibility, since the Sudanese troops in Yemen have reportedly suffered heavy losses.⁴⁹ An RSF member in Yemen claimed to have received the equivalent of USD 20,000 for a six-month deployment, while a confidential report mentioned pay of USD 12,000 for a rank-and-file soldier and USD 25,000 for an officer for the same period.⁵⁰

In Yemen, as in Sudan, the RSF was officered by and largely composed of Darfurian Arabs, but not exclusively: it also included Chadian Arabs, including former Chadian rebels, and Darfurian non-Arab former rebels, including from factions who had joined the government.⁵¹ Because of the high salaries, and in spite of the risks, it is likely that many Chadian Arabs and Darfur rebels joined the RSF with the aim of being deployed to Yemen. A large number of the RSF troops deployed in Yemen are said to be non-Arabs.⁵² Among non-Arabs who joined the RSF, including in Yemen, are migrants who suffered from violence in Libya or failed to reach Europe. For instance, a Sudanese Zaghawa deployed in Yemen described on social media how he left Darfur for Libya and then, after boarding a boat to Europe that was returned to Libya, decided to go back to Sudan to join the RSF.⁵³

The RSF’s deployment in Yemen has been a key factor in Saudi and Emirati support to Hemeti, which led to Bashir’s removal and Hemeti’s rise to being deputy chair of Sudan’s TMC (Tubiana, 2019a).

The Chadian perspective

For Darfur rebels, Chad always remained the best option for establishing rear bases and obtaining support, because they could rely on support from both Darfurian refugees in Chad and the Chadian Zaghawa community. There was one notable exception to this, Chadian president Idriss Déby himself, who, albeit a Zaghawa, did everything in his power to sever these ties with Darfur rebels in order to maintain good relations with Khartoum. This policy continued in spite of the fact that it alienated Déby from the once-crucial support of large numbers of Darfurian and Chadian Zaghawa communities. Currently a key question in Chad is whether the regime will be able to regain the trust of the Zaghawa or if it will be able to keep its grip on power without them—or even against them.

Chadian attempts at co-option

Déby's policy regarding the (mostly Zaghawa) Darfur rebel movements has been either (a) to pressure them to make peace with Khartoum (this has recently even turned into open encouragement to join the RSF); or (b) to coopt the rebel movements as proxies that will provide a buffer against both Chadian rebels and *janjawid* incursions into Chad. Déby's attempts at co-option extend to rebels who are still in rebellion, those who have made peace with Khartoum, and even those who have joined the RSF. The SLA-MM's splinter faction led by Orgajor—who signed a peace agreement with Khartoum with Chadian support and whose troops were integrated into the RSF in 2016–17—is reported to be as loyal to Hemeti as it is to Déby (Tubiana, Warin, and Saeneen, 2018, pp. 45–49).

Since mid-2019 Déby and Hemeti, while apparently on good terms and aligned with Haftar in Libya, have been competing to get Darfur rebels on their side. Hemeti currently appears to have been more successful, which may lead Déby to fear the threat of an unprecedented Zaghawa–Arab alliance with possible support from Haftar and his Middle East allies.⁵⁴ After Bashir's fall the RSF reportedly continued to incorporate Chadian Arab recruits—notably through Arab political and traditional leaders in West Darfur—who were originally from Chad and were once connected to Chadian Arab rebel movements (Green, 2019, pp. 14, 27).

Chad's most recent pressure and co-option efforts appear to have been less successful than Hemeti's. SLA-MM fighters in southern Libya are supported by Haftar and are thus de facto aligned with Déby, and reportedly have good relations with Chadian forces guarding the border. They also fought against some of the Chadian rebels operating in the same area, but this does not appear to have been at Chad's request. Déby's attempts to coopt SLA-MM fighters for this purpose, which Minawi has reportedly not rejected, have been met with reluctance among his forces.⁵⁵ In March 2020, however, Chad allowed Minawi to successfully tour refugee camps in eastern Chad to drum up popular support among Darfurian refugees.

Déby has also unsuccessfully tried to coopt rebels of the GSLF coalition and former rebels of the LJM who have been at peace with Khartoum since 2011. After talks with both groups failed, the GSLF's chief of staff, Abdallah Bashar 'Janna', was arrested in N'Djaména in October 2018, and in March 2019 the Chadian army attacked gold miners linked to LJM chief of staff Abdallah Banda in Chad.⁵⁶

Conflicts between Darfur rebels and the Chadian state

A primary reason why Déby's relations with Darfur rebels remained uneasy in spite of their common alignment with Haftar is the ethnic ties, mentioned above, of the Darfurians and the Chadian Zaghawa rebel movement, namely the UFR. In spite of forming part of opposing alliances on Libyan soil, Darfur and UFR rebels share a renewed sense

of belonging to one community, which may lead Chad to fear that some equipment supplied to Darfur rebels in Libya may end up in the hands of Chadian rebels.⁵⁷ But while the Darfurians and the UFR were able to avoid fighting each other in Libya, they could not agree on a common military agenda with respect to either Chad or Darfur. The Darfurians have met with scepticism the UFR's proposals that the two groups should attack Chad together and then allow the Darfurians to shelter again in Chad, while plans to resettle jointly in Darfur did not materialize either.⁵⁸

Darfur rebels have, however, entered into violent conflicts with other, non-Zaghawa, Chadian rebels based in Libya, mostly of the Council of Military Command for the Salvation of the Republic (CCMSR), largely composed of Goran from the Kreda subgroup. In August 2018 the CCMSR successfully attacked Chadian troops stationed in the Kouri Bougoudi gold mines near the Libyan border, but managed to refrain from targeting gold miners, many of whom are Zaghawa, in spite of strong anti-Zaghawa feelings among Kreda rebels (Tubiana and Gramizzi, 2018, pp. 44–45).

More recently, in November 2018 gunmen confiscated vehicles in Kouri Bougoudi belonging to Zaghawa, including former LJM rebels under Abdallah Banda. The gold miners accused the CCMSR of carrying out the attack, but the CCMSR denied responsibility, blaming a gang of Chadian and Libyan bandits;⁵⁹ however, the attackers' tracks led to a CCMSR base. The gold miners, armed with machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades, followed the tracks to the base, where fighting between them and CCMSR forces caused casualties on both sides, including two of Banda's sons.⁶⁰ Jaber Ishaq, the SLA-MM's deputy chief of staff, also reportedly lost a brother in a subsequent CCMSR attack on Zaghawa gold miners in December 2018.⁶¹

In January 2019 a large convoy of 70–75 vehicles from five Darfur rebel movements (SLA-MM, GSLF, LJM, SLA-Transitional Council, and SLA-AW) moved from Waw el-Kebir in southern Libya towards Kouri Bougoudi.⁶² After a CCMSR ambush in which both sides lost vehicles and men, the Darfurian force expelled the CCMSR from Kouri Bougoudi. This move seems to have been mostly inspired by a desire for revenge for earlier attacks. While giving some protection to Zaghawa gold miners, the Darfur rebels also admittedly hoped to convince them to join their ranks.⁶³ The operation was also likely a response to an LNA demand for Darfur rebels to extend their proxy control in southern Libya. Later, in February 2019, SLA-MM fighters fought together with the LNA when it took control of the Murzuq area. This involved fighting anti-Haftar Tubu forces who were allied with the CCMSR and other Chadian rebels.⁶⁴

By January 2020 the conflict between Goran rebels (specifically from the CCMSR) and the Zaghawa (in particular from Banda's group) was still under way, with Banda, through voice recordings circulated on social media, threatening the CCMSR with retaliation and stating: 'CCMSR has no objective for the country [Chad]; it is only against the Beri [Zaghawa]'.⁶⁵ In February, as another CCMSR incursion to Kouri Bougoudi again allegedly

resulted in the confiscation of gold miners' vehicles, Banda was said to be preparing for further fighting against the CCMSR.⁶⁶

Both CCMSR and Darfur rebels have accused each other of secretly working for the Chadian government.⁶⁷ In fact, these accusations and the tensions between the Zaghawa and Kreda have directly benefitted Chad. They led a handful of Zaghawa members to leave the CCMSR (with some reportedly joining Banda's faction), and prevented the long-awaited unity of Goran rebels and the UFR, and the development of a larger alliance of Chadian and Darfur rebels against Déby—but not to the point where Darfur rebels would once again side with Déby.

In February 2019 Goran rebels again attacked Darfurian gold miners and former rebels under Abdallah Banda in Kouri Bougoudi. This time the attackers were from one of the main factions of the Union of Forces for Democracy and Development (UFDD) led by Ali Goukouni and Ali Mardakore, who were on their way to Chad to join the government side.⁶⁸ Because these former rebels were already connected with the Chadian regime, Darfurians strongly believed that they had attacked them on behalf of N'Djaména.⁶⁹

Giving credit to this theory, shortly afterwards, in March, the Chadian army itself targeted Abdallah Banda's gold-mining camp in Kouri Bougoudi.⁷⁰ The gold miners, including former rebels, reportedly numbered 400–500 men in some 50 vehicles, some of which had heavy weaponry mounted on them.⁷¹ Most of the miners fled toward Libya, and the army only managed to arrest four men in charge of guarding the mining bulldozers left behind, which were confiscated.⁷² Chadian government media claimed that the army had 'discovered a secret camp' and unearthed vehicles hidden under the sand. They also accused Banda's group of burying weapons, and of being a 'terrorist column' and drug traffickers. They further recalled that the International Criminal Court had indicted Banda for crimes allegedly committed in Darfur.⁷³ Some Darfurians believe that Banda was targeted because he was reluctant to fight as a proxy for Chad, and because Chad was worried that he could support Chadian rebels.⁷⁴ One Darfurian politician stated that the Chadian army's attack on Banda's gold miners could actually be counter-productive, because they could now return to rebellion not only against Sudan, but also against Chad: 'Déby created a new rebellion', he said.⁷⁵

Proxy conflicts: gold miners in the middle

This series of violent incidents in Kouri Bougoudi resulted in the further deterioration of relations between the Chadian regime and Darfur rebels and miners alike, but also with the wider Zaghawa community in both Chad and Sudan. This was preceded by repeated confiscations of or threats to confiscate pickup trucks, because the Chadian government feared that their owners in the northern part of the country (notably the Zaghawa gold miners) could easily hand them over to rebel kinsmen in Libya. In early 2018 N'Djaména proclaimed a complete ban on civilian ownership of pickup trucks in

northern and eastern Chad, and reportedly confiscated several hundred acquired by Zaghawa youths who had bought them with the gold they had found.⁷⁶ The Zaghawa community strongly resented the ban and confiscations. Some Zaghawa army officers were said to refuse to enforce the ban, and Zaghawa civilians protested on social media.

In the end the government reportedly withdrew this policy, but Zaghawa mobilization on social media continued, with a WhatsApp group reportedly gathering more than 4,000 members.⁷⁷ These WhatsApp messages then took a more political turn, notably criticizing Déby for fuelling hatred toward the Zaghawa, among other Chadian communities, and for undermining the Darfur rebellion.⁷⁸ Zaghawa mobilization also reportedly thwarted Déby's desire to deploy troops to the Saudi-led coalition fighting in Yemen.⁷⁹ New links were also forged between Zaghawa youth inside Chad and the UFR in Libya.⁸⁰ A Sudanese Zaghawa gold miner explained, for instance, that after the confiscation of his car in 2018 he decided to join the UFR and managed to contact the rebels through a WhatsApp community group. While he was in Kouri Bougoudi in January 2019 he then joined a UFR raid on Chad.⁸¹

This is what reportedly led the UFR to believe that, if they were able to send forces from Libya to north-eastern Chad, both Zaghawa soldiers and civilians would join them.⁸² The scenario looked credible—indeed, when the UFR sent 40 vehicles to Chad's Ennedi region in March 2019 army units reportedly refused to fight the rebels, and some soldiers even appeared to be ready to join them.⁸³ This is likely what prompted Déby to call on France for help. The unprecedented French intervention that followed—aerial bombings targeting a rebel column at a great distance from the capital—surprised the rebels and their supporters, stopping their progression and discouraging Zaghawa soldiers and civilians from joining them, at least for the moment.⁸⁴ ●



In recent years Darfurians from all backgrounds, including rebels and former rebels, have been involved in a range of trafficking activities, in particular across the Sudanese–Libyan border.”

Smugglers, bandits, and gold miners

Smugglers and traffickers

In recent years Darfurians from all backgrounds, including rebels and former rebels, have been involved in a range of trafficking activities, in particular across the Sudanese–Libyan border (see Map 1). They have been using both direct routes and indirect routes through Chad’s north-eastern corner, and have reportedly been involved in trafficking arms, vehicles, fuel, and migrants.

Darfurians appear to be most involved in trafficking vehicles acquired in Libya to both Sudan and Chad. These include vehicles bought for relatively cheap prices in Libya, but also apparently a large number of vehicles stolen in that country. Prices vary depending on the risk involved for the buyer/car thief. Stolen cars, in particular stolen from an owner with cross-border connections, are much less expensive than purchased vehicles.⁸⁵

The Kouri Bougoudi gold mine straddling the Chadian–Libyan border has become a hub for smuggling cars.⁸⁶ One Darfurian vehicle smuggler explained that most of the people involved in the car trade are former Darfur rebels, since they have guns and know how to defend themselves against frequent carjacking attempts in southern Libya.⁸⁷ According to another Darfurian vehicle smuggler the car trade has boomed further since 2018, because the Chadian government’s ban on pickup trucks allowed traders to buy cheap vehicles in Chad rather than in Libya and resell them in Darfur.⁸⁸

Car smugglers explain that their activity is often connected to other trafficking activities: vehicles do not travel empty from Libya, but may carry fuel, weapons, or ammunition.⁸⁹ In recent years a large share of the fuel smuggled south from Libya was reportedly sold at the border itself, in Kouri Bougoudi, for the gold miners’ cars and machinery. Weapons are reportedly transported in all directions, but mostly from Libya to Darfur and the CAR. Car smugglers are also said to sometimes transport passengers, including both gold miners and migrants, although the latter mostly travel from south to north.⁹⁰

Darfurians have also been involved in smuggling migrants from Sudan to Libya. They either move directly from Sudan to Libya or go through Chad, transporting migrants from Sudan and other parts of the Horn of Africa. Historically, this was mostly done on lorries that transported livestock to Libya—migrants would sometimes take care of the animals to pay for their journey. More recently, migrants have been smuggled on both pickup trucks and large trucks devoted exclusively to this activity.

Since 2016 the RSF has been deployed at the Sudanese–Libyan border, supposedly to stop migrants. Thanks to this strategic positioning elements of the RSF seem to have taken over much of the migrant-smuggling business: many Darfurian and other Horn of Africa migrants in both Europe and Libya stated that they were transported to Libya either on military RSF pickups or on lorries escorted by the RSF.⁹¹

It is interesting to note that many young non-Arab Darfurians migrated to Libya and Europe after Sudanese government forces accused them of being rebels and often

imprisoned them. Those who were arrested on their way to Libya were also often accused of intending to join rebel movements in Libya. This may be one of the reasons why the RSF intercepted some migrant convoys moving toward Libya; however, Darfurian non-Arabs sometimes interpreted the fact that the RSF seemed much more involved in smuggling rather than stopping migrants to Libya as an indication that the (Bashir) government preferred these suspected pro-rebel youths to leave Sudan rather than support armed or unarmed political unrest in the country (Jaspars and Buchanan-Smith, 2018, p. 78). There is, however, no evidence that the RSF's double game with regard to migration reflects a political agenda. It may simply reflect the economic interests of a militia known for its autonomous activities of various kinds.

Because of the RSF presence Darfurian civilian smugglers not associated with the RSF abandoned the Sudanese–Libyan routes and moved to Chad. Civilian smugglers reportedly include former rebels, but current rebels are said to be much less involved in migrant smuggling than the RSF.⁹² Some rebel factions, however, have been allegedly escorting migrant convoys and guarding migrants on behalf of both Darfurian and Libyan migrant smugglers or traffickers in Libya. Darfur rebels were also apparently hosted by migrant smugglers or traffickers in Beni Walid, one of the main trafficking hubs in north-western Libya: the town is also considered to be a stronghold of Qaddafi loyalists, including some who may have long-standing links to Darfur rebels.⁹³

In 2019 the UN reported that

According to a rebel source, some Darfur rebels operating in southern Libya occasionally cooperated with a Sudanese Zaghawa migrant smuggler named Abdelaziz Tayara and a Libyan migrant smuggler based in Beni Walid known as Mohamed al-Muzri, providing escort to convoys of migrants from the Sudan-Libya border up to Sebha (UNSC, 2019a, p. 50).

This report refers to Abdelaziz Ibrahim Khater, nicknamed ‘Tayara’ (flyer), a well-known Sudanese migrant smuggler who was already based in Libya during the Qaddafi era, when he had connections with the Libyan security apparatus. Tayara and his associates Adam Hassan (based in Zuwara, which was one of the main smuggling ports at the time) and Jaber Adam Mursal ‘Daybok’ (operating in Sabratha port) were said to be the first Darfurians to become involved in migrant smuggling in Libya.⁹⁴ They reportedly arranged the Mediterranean crossing for many of the Darfurian asylum seekers who made it to Europe before 2011.

Tayara allegedly returned to Sudan during the 2011 Libyan crisis and then came back to Libya in 2012 or 2013, when he was first active in the booming car-smuggling business before resuming his migrant-smuggling activities. He is supposedly connected to both rebels in Libya, who seem to have provided escorts for his migrant convoys between Kufra and Sebha, and former rebels based in Darfur, such as Nureddin ‘Shaytan Gayle’, who was also involved in car smuggling.⁹⁵

In recent years Daybok was said to be actively smuggling Horn of Africa migrants to and from Sabratha in cooperation with local kingpin Ahmed al-Dabbashi, known as ‘al-Ammo’ (the uncle).⁹⁶ Tayara was also said to be working with al-Ammo, but to be based or regularly present further south in Brak al-Shatti, one of the main migrant-smuggling and trafficking hubs on the road between the south and the similar hub of Beni Walid.⁹⁷ It seems that he was initially a classic migrant smuggler (transporting migrants across the border in exchange for payment), but after returning to Libya he adopted more violent practices, including buying migrants and detaining them until they had paid him a ransom.

Both this practice and the transition from smuggling to trafficking have been described as common in post-2011 Libya, although mostly Libyan actors are involved.⁹⁸ Eritrean asylum seekers have described how after being detained by Beni Walid traffickers, they were resold to Tayara in Brak el-Shatti, and were thus returned to the south rather than brought to the coast.⁹⁹ They also described how rival armed Chadian traffickers, likely rebels or former rebels, attacked Tayara’s migrants prison on several occasions. On one occasion they apparently managed to abduct more than 100 Somalis and resell them to traffickers in Beni Walid. Similarly, in mid-2017 Darfur rebels guarding Eritrean migrants in the Jufra area for a Libyan smuggler were also reportedly attacked by Chadian former rebels who abducted several hundred Eritreans and resold them further south, in Um el-Araneb.¹⁰⁰ An Eritrean asylum seeker also recounted how in 2017, after he had entered Libya from Sudan, a gang of Chadian bandits (and possibly rebels or former rebels) attacked his migrant convoy and sold him to Tayara.¹⁰¹ Competition for migrants between armed Chadians and Darfurians in Libya is likely to have increased tensions between their respective rebellions, as described above. Former Darfur rebels were also allegedly involved in attacking migrant convoys and reselling migrants.

Migrants have also mentioned that former Darfur rebels and migrants, as well as other Sudanese migrants, have acted as guards in Libyan prisons where migrants are tortured to force them to pay ransoms. It appears that Libyan traffickers often picked Sudanese migrants for these types of jobs because they speak Arabic. They are either forced to do these jobs or given promises of being released and possibly driven to the Mediterranean coast if they agree to do them.¹⁰²

Road banditry and drug trafficking

Darfurian gangs have been accused of acting as road bandits in Darfur itself, and also in southern Libya and even north-eastern Niger as far as the Agadez area, deep in Nigerien territory (Tubiana and Gramizzi, 2018, pp. 78–79). In Darfur Arab *janjawid* or former *janjawid* militias have largely monopolized road banditry. In contrast, southern Libya and, to a lesser extent, Niger offer more favourable opportunities for road banditry to

non-Arab rebels and former rebels from Darfur, as well as to Darfurian civilians, including youths from the refugee camps in Chad and gold miners who joined them.

Among the bandits' targets are vehicles and migrants—in particular Eritreans whose families are believed to pay large ransoms—but also drug convoys. While attacks on drug traffickers are particularly risky and can be fatal for the attackers, a few successful precedents have encouraged Darfur and Chadian rebels, former rebels, and bandits operating in Libya to organize large-scale expeditions and mobilize dozens of skilled combatants, sometimes from several groups, to search for drug convoys moving across southern Libya (Tubiana and Gramizzi, 2018, pp. 93–94).¹⁰³ They may hire rebel vehicles for these expeditions.

A young Darfurian refugee in Chad gave this description of being enlisted by a friend in a five-car gang operating in southern Libya:

I thought my friend was working in the gold mines, but to my surprise he was a member of a bandit gang. He asked me why we should dig holes like aardvarks when we can easily earn millions [of CFA francs] if we succeed in intercepting drug loads crossing the region. We used to follow car tracks going west to east—drug traffickers come from Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, and across Libya towards Egypt, while south–north tracks are generally considered to be normal trade or migrant vehicles. I stayed with my friend, thinking, ‘as soon I get my share of the first booty, I’ll keep going and cross the Mediterranean to Europe’. But one day we were ambushed by a rival group and suffered heavy losses, including most of our vehicles and weapons. My friend suggested we should join Libyan militias as mercenaries, since, according to him, they pay well. But I preferred to join the gold miners and after a few months I returned to the refugee camp. My friend went on to Libya, but since then I have had no news from him.¹⁰⁴

The same former bandit and other sources have described how successful raiders would then resell the drugs to their original owners or to rival traffickers, before sometimes being asked to change sides and escort drug convoys in exchange for a share of the profits.¹⁰⁵ Former rebels from Darfur are said to have been employed as escorts for long-distance convoys travelling between the Malian–Nigerien border and the Libyan–Egyptian border (Tubiana and Gramizzi, 2018, pp. 93–94).

RSF members were reportedly involved in facilitating hashish trafficking on another route, from the South Darfur borderlands with South Sudan and the CAR—the area where the cannabis is grown—to Libya, or to central Sudan for the Sudanese internal market. As with migrant smuggling, the RSF members either tax the convoys or transport the drugs themselves.¹⁰⁶



Tracks at the Chad–Libya border, 2015.
Source: Jérôme Tubiana



Darfurians as skilled gold miners in a regional market

In recent years Darfurian gold miners have come to be seen as the most seasoned and skilled prospectors across the Sahara and Sahel. Groups of locals looking for gold have thus sought to hire them as labourers in various gold fields, including in southern Libya, northern Chad, northern Niger, southern Algeria, and northern Mali (see Map 2).¹⁰⁷ The Darfurians' skills as gold miners are derived from their long experience of mining in various parts of Sudan.¹⁰⁸ Darfurian miners, including former rebels, have also occasionally succeeded in forming their own mining groups in countries such as Chad, Libya, and Niger. They were sometimes said to fully control some gold fields and to be more successful than other prospectors, which led to tensions between them and both rival gold miners and local communities that occasionally turned violent (Tubiana and Gramizzi, 2018, pp. 68–74).

Darfurians were also successful traders (for instance, of food or mining equipment) or providers of services in markets in mining areas. A miner who was an internet service provider in Kouri Bougoudi, northern Chad, explained that this type of service activity was often more profitable than mining itself.¹⁰⁹

Darfurian miners have reportedly included many refugee youths from the camps in Chad whom decreasing levels of humanitarian aid have forced to look for gold.¹¹⁰ Gold rushes diverted Darfurian youth from other activities or projects, including fighting as rebels or mercenaries, banditry, and migration to Europe.¹¹¹ Equally, their expulsion from gold fields and the closure of mines by the governments of Algeria, Chad, and Niger often encouraged disgruntled miners to turn or return to armed activities or attempt to migrate to Europe.

Governments have often viewed the presence of foreign miners, including armed Darfur rebels and former rebels, as a security threat. In Chad, for example, the army has repeatedly expelled gold miners, including Darfurians, from mines and confiscated their vehicles, mining equipment, personal property, and gold. Miners' vehicles were often destroyed, including by Chadian air force bombings; some miners have also been killed or wounded.¹¹² Darfurian gold miners have also suffered attacks from both Chadian rebels from the Goran community and local Tubu self-defence forces. In north-western Chad and north-eastern Niger fighting has pitted armed Tubu and Darfurian gold miners against each other (Tubiana and Gramizzi, 2018, pp. 68–74).

Miners who have been targeted have responded in various ways. Some Darfur rebels whose vehicles had been confiscated by Chadian government forces joined the Chadian rebellion, for example.¹¹³ At the same time the Chadian army deployed to the gold mines reportedly recruited Darfurian miners or migrants as *bogobogo*—a common nickname for unofficial or unauthorized agents backed by official forces, in this case to provide security in mining areas.¹¹⁴

Miners were also expelled from other countries in the region. For example, in Niger foreign gold miners—often Darfurian—were expelled from the Djado gold mines in 2014

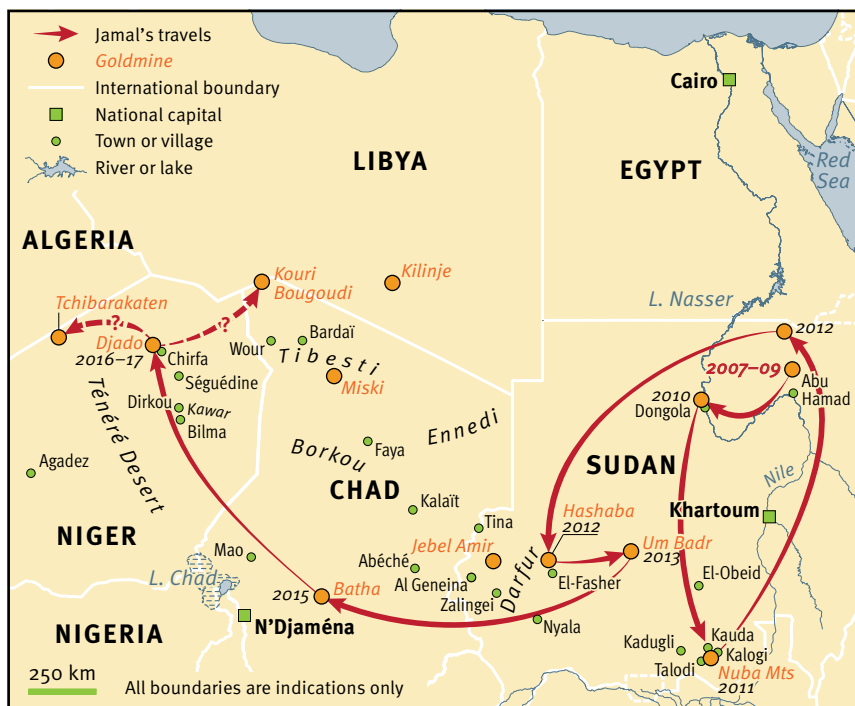
(see Box 2). Their return after a few months prompted the government to close the mines in 2017.¹¹⁵ In 2019 Niger reportedly deported Darfurian miners to Libya.¹¹⁶ Similarly, government repression of miners (including Darfurians) has been particularly violent in Algeria. There have been aerial bombings, vehicles and mining equipment have been destroyed, miners have been killed, and several hundred people have been arrested.¹¹⁷ In northern Mali armed groups who negotiated peace with the government have also been accused of confiscating gold found by Darfurian miners.¹¹⁸

Violence against and abuse of gold miners in one country has had a knock-on effect, pushing many miners to look for gold in another country, moving from Chad to Libya, Niger, Algeria, and Mali; from Niger back to Libya and Chad; from Mali to Algeria, and so on.¹¹⁹

Darfurian combatants-turned-gold-miners

Among the miners and purveyors of related services are a number of people who self-identify as rebels or former rebels who work for their own benefit and not to fund rebel

Map 2 Main Saharan gold mines and the travels of a Darfurian gold miner





A gold mine in eastern Chad, 2016.
Source: Jérôme Tubiana



movements.¹²⁰ While some still consider themselves to be members of rebel movements on leave from their military duties, others are former rebels who have wholly abandoned the rebellions. Some are also members or former members of rebel movements who signed a peace agreement with the Sudanese government. In Djado (until 2017) and Kouri Bougoudi (until 2018) a smaller number of prospectors were Darfurian Arabs, including former members of *janjawid* militias, notably Musa Hilal loyalists who were still hostile to Hemeti (Tubiana and Gramizzi, 2017, p. 99; UNSC, 2019a, p. 24).

Darfur rebel movements facing a manpower shortage, such as the SLA-MM, have been continually trying to recruit fighters from among the gold miners, or to re-recruit members

Box 2 The travels of a Darfurian gold miner

Jamal is a seasoned Zaghawa miner from Darfur. His journey is illustrative of many Darfurian gold miners:

- He first heard of gold mining in 2007, and became a gold miner in Abu Hamad in River Nile state, north of Khartoum. Until 2010 he worked in various mines between Abu Hamad and Dongola in Northern state, further west.
- In 2011 he mined for the first time in a conflict-affected area, in South Kordofan's Nuba Mountains.
- Jamal returned to River Nile state in 2012 and worked on a gold field straddling the Sudanese–Egyptian border.
- Later in 2012 he joined a gold rush in the Hashaba area in North Darfur. According to him the mine was on the front line between Darfur rebels and the *janjawid*. Competition over control of the area led to violent *janjawid* attacks in September and October 2012 in which many miners were killed and many more displaced.
- As a result, in 2013 Jamal worked on a mine in a more peaceful part of North Kordofan.
- In 2015 for the first time he joined a gold rush outside Sudan, in the Batha region of Chad.
- In February 2016, as a result of intense government pressure against 'illegal' miners in Chad, Jamal went on to Djado in north-eastern Niger, to which Darfurian miners were returning after an earlier expulsion. According to him, in 2016–17 he was one of more than 10,000 miners in Djado, the majority of whom were from foreign countries. The Nigerien authorities tolerated the mining, not least because of the revenue they gained from the tax Nigerien army units levied on the miners (foreigners were taxed more heavily until March 2017). After renewed plans to expel foreign miners, the government eventually ordered the closure of the site and evacuated all the miners working there, including Jamal.¹²¹

Jamal was unsure where he would go next, but said that some of his colleagues had moved back to the Kouri Bougoudi area in Chad. Other had continued further west in Niger toward Tchibarakaten, a mine that the government had left open. Jamal also claimed that some 50 Darfurian miners in Djado had given up looking for gold and used their earning to pay for their journeys to Europe.¹²²

who had left to go to the mines, notably those at the Chadian–Libyan border. Since late 2018 the SLA-MM and other rebel movements have reportedly succeeded in establishing a presence in Kouri Bougoudi with the aim of recruiting fighters.¹²³ This appears to have been increasingly successful because of the violent targeting of Darfurian gold miners by the Chadian rebels, leading some Darfurian gold miners to join the SLA-MM in order to protect themselves or to seek revenge.¹²⁴ The 2018–19 transition in Sudan also reportedly led some to join or rejoin rebel movements in the hope that they would be able to resettle in Darfur. Some refugees allegedly travelled from the camps in Chad to Kouri Bougoudi as gold miners in order to join the rebels.¹²⁵ According to one former rebel, however, there are more rebels becoming gold miners than vice versa.¹²⁶

Armed Darfur rebels or former rebels have sometimes apparently been able to set up well-equipped, militarized mining camps. This was reportedly the case in north-eastern Niger near the borders with Libya and Algeria and, even more openly, in Kouri Bougoudi, where Abdallah Banda’s group was said to number 400–500 miners. According to one of Banda’s employees, their ‘company’ was legally registered in Chad, with a valid mining permit issued by the government, and equipped with bulldozers and various mining machines.¹²⁷ Following their expulsion by the Chadian army in March 2019, it was said that the disgruntled miners joined both the SLA-MM and Chadian rebels.¹²⁸ ●



Together with Chad and Niger, Sudan has long been one of the main countries of origin of migrants in Libya.”

Migrants

Darfurian migrants in Libya

Migrant communities in Libya

Together with Chad and Niger, Sudan has long been one of the main countries of origin of migrants in Libya. Many people from these three countries have travelled to Libya since the great droughts of the 1970s and 1980s. They constitute a large share of the ‘seasonal’ or ‘circular’ migrants who make trips back and forth, yearly or over several years, to work in Libya (de Waal, 2005; Jaspars and Buchanan-Smith, 2018, pp. 9–11).

Representatives of these migrants’ embassies and communities estimate their respective community to number between 250,000 and 500,000 people, which would put the total population of these three nationalities in Libya at between 750,000 and 1.5 million people.¹²⁹ Lower International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates put the number of Sudanese migrants in Libya at 41,000 in 2017, or 9 per cent of the migrant population in Libya, which is also likely to be a conservative estimate that does not take into account migrants who have lived in Libya for many years (Jaspars and Buchanan-Smith, 2018, p. 61). According to a more recent, slightly less conservative estimate, Sudanese constitute 12 per cent of the migrant population in Libya, behind Nigeriens (20 per cent), Egyptians (15 per cent), and Chadians (14 per cent) (CoEU, 2019, p. 3).

European migrant policies, in particular with regard to the Libyan–Nigerien transit route, appear to have reduced the number of West Africans (although not necessarily the number of Nigeriens) travelling to Libya. In contrast, the same policies failed to decrease the flows from Sudan: various interlocutors from Kufra and Sudan even mentioned *increased* flows in 2018 (although this route remains less important than the West African routes).¹³⁰ Migrant flows may even have increased further during the first months of 2019 due to the unrest in Khartoum and elsewhere in Sudan.

The role of existing Sudanese and Darfurian migrant communities in Libya

As mentioned above, Sudanese, much like Chadians and Nigeriens, have been residing in Libya for many years, even prior to Qaddafi’s fall in 2011, and are well established in the country. They play an important role in helping newcomers from their nationality or community to settle in—thus newcomers from Sudan will often find support in specific neighbourhoods and restaurants.¹³¹

Community associations do not necessarily treat the members they are supposed to represent equally, and discrimination occurs. This frequently depends on the nature of relations between the community and the embassy. In the case of Sudan, there are reports of discrimination between, on the one hand, migrants coming from northern

and central Sudan (the Nile Valley), who are usually government supporters, and, on the other hand, refugees from Darfur and other war zones, who are often considered to be rebels and treated as non-Sudanese by the embassy. Indeed the Sudanese embassy in Tripoli appears to deny Sudanese nationality to refugees from Sudan's peripheries, especially those from Darfur, and among Darfurians in particular to ethnic Zaghawas, who are often accused of being Chadians.¹³² Nevertheless, since Bashir's fall in April 2019 it appears that the Sudanese embassy and the Sudanese association have become more helpful to Darfurians, including Zaghawas.¹³³

When—as frequently happens—a migrant is kidnapped for ransom, the ability of community members to help is limited. The Sudanese community in Libya is regularly asked to pay ransoms to release kidnapped countrymen. Representatives of the small Sudanese community in Beni Walid, one of the main migrant-kidnapping hubs in Libya, mentioned that, through contacts with traffickers involving in particular a Sudanese intermediary, they were able to release their nationals from torture centres in exchange for ransoms. The amounts of the ransoms vary enormously, from LYD 1,000 (USD 200) up to, more exceptionally, LYD 35,000 (USD 7,000) for one migrant (Jaspars and Buchanan-Smith, 2018, p. 47).¹³⁴ Those who were released then had to either work or ask relatives to pay back their debt; sometimes community members accepted that the ransom amount would not be paid back to them.

The extent of arrangements of this kind is unclear, since the same community representatives also emphasized that they could only offer limited help to newcomers: 'Now it has become more difficult than it was two to three years ago; we have to care for our own families. Because we're not Libyans we can barely protect ourselves'.¹³⁵ The Sudanese Zaghawa community in Tripoli also mentioned that they had been able to release some 20 kinsmen from one particular Beni Walid prison with the assistance of a Nigerian broker, paying LYD 5,000 (USD 1,000) ransom for each—but subsequently ransoms were increased to LYD 8,000–25,000 (USD 1,600–5,000) per person, and more exceptionally USD 20,000 (such high rates are not uncommon for other Horn of Africa nationals, in particular Eritreans).¹³⁶

From Libya to elsewhere

Many Darfurians (including refugees in Chad) who attempt to reach Europe are stopped in Libya, and some of them, fed up with the situation there, choose to return to Chad or even to Darfur, or to make their way to Niger. Others, sometimes facing violence, attacks, or accidents in Chad or Darfur, decide to turn back even before reaching the Libyan border. Those that remain in Libya face many dangers, as do other migrants there, leading to an increasing number of them trying to leave Libya for a safe host country.

For those looking for legal and safe ways to leave, Darfur is one of nine places of origin whose residents are considered to be eligible for asylum. Migrants originating from



Darfurian and other migrants in Libya, 2019.
Source: Jérôme Tubiana



these places can therefore be registered as asylum seekers or refugees by the UNHCR in Libya, in the hope of being resettled in a safe country (in Europe or the United States).¹³⁷ By November 2019 the UNHCR had registered nearly 46,000 migrants in Libya as asylum seekers or refugees. The majority of those registered were Syrians (41 per cent),¹³⁸ followed by Sudanese/Darfurians (28.8 per cent) and Eritreans (13 per cent). But many more could be registered, because in mid-2019 it was estimated that no more than 14 per cent of the Sudanese living in Libya had been registered (in contrast to the 91 per cent of Eritreans who are believed to have been registered) (UNHCR, 2019).¹³⁹

Being registered by the UNHCR is not synonymous with a quick departure: some asylum seekers have been registered since 2017, and some have even been registered several times—sometimes re-registering after having been arrested or kidnapped and held for months. Because slots for resettlement in Europe and the United States are extremely limited, the UNHCR is planning to evacuate asylum seekers from Libya to sub-Saharan countries that are considered to be sufficiently safe. A first group of 70 asylum seekers, including Darfurians, were evacuated to Rwanda in September 2019, and there have been discussions about transferring others to Chad.

The experience of Ahmed,¹⁴⁰ a Darfurian, is instructive. Ahmed was registered by the UNHCR but, while waiting for resettlement, he worked for a year washing cars in Tripoli. His UNHCR document did not prevent him from being arrested by a Tripoli militia in 2017; sent to a prison where hundreds of Sudanese, Ethiopian, and Eritrean migrants were detained; and asked for a LYD 1,000 (USD 200) ransom, the amount asked for from all Sudanese. Ahmed explained:

They beat me for a month and half, but because I had no money and no one to call, they stopped beating me and forced me to work. . . . I washed their cars and clothes, cleaned rooms and toilets, collected garbage, loaded and unloaded military equipment, and sometimes they sent me to farms or to their houses to clean. I was never paid, not even one dinar. If you don't work, they'll beat you up. The UNHCR never visited. It's a militia place; no one can go there.¹⁴¹

Ahmed was released after ten months and had then to renew his UNHCR registration (which is valid for one year). But later, in January 2020, he was again arrested by a militia and taken to a military base in Tripoli's Abu Slim neighbourhood, where he was again forced to wash cars, clean toilets, and collect garbage. This time he was released after three days. Again, because his UNHCR document had been torn up, he had to renew it.¹⁴²

Ahmed then wondered whether he should try to bring his wife and children from Darfur to Libya.¹⁴³ Indeed, as well as specific nationalities and communities, the UNHCR prioritizes those who are viewed as the most vulnerable, notably women and children. This has inadvertently created a negative pull factor towards Libya. Darfurian migrants

are aware of this priority, and have recently begun to travel with their wives and children or have had them join them in Libya, despite the dangers of the journey. As a consequence Sudanese unaccompanied minors registered in the European Union (EU) increased by 18 per cent in 2018, amounting to one-tenth of Sudanese applicants (EASO, 2019, p. 168). In the past, and particularly since 2003, mostly young men from displaced non-Arab communities were travelling to Libya and on to Europe; women, children, or old men would stay behind in IDP and refugee camps (which explains why the displaced population predominantly comprises women). Men and boys considered to be of fighting age were often killed during fighting, while others had joined rebel movements, or were going to Libya or, more recently, the gold mines to earn money to send to their relatives in the camps. Women were encouraging men to leave the camps—including through sometimes-aggressive songs—to fight or migrate, and were shaming those who preferred to ‘remain lying in the camps’, as a refugee song goes.¹⁴⁴

For migrants who are not considered to be asylum seekers, the main exit from Libya is through the IOM, which organizes the so-called and highly publicized ‘voluntary humanitarian returns’. All those involved, including the IOM, agree that returns are not always ‘voluntary’, and that after some time in a detention centre many refugees understand that they have no other choice and agree to be ‘voluntarily’ returned (Jaspars and Buchanan-Smith, 2018, p. 62). This programme also sometimes includes people from countries or communities eligible for UNHCR registration, including Darfurians who were returned to Khartoum, in spite of the well-established risks (cases of Darfurians being arrested on arrival have been documented (Kingsley, 2018)). According to the Sudanese community, the IOM chartered at least two flights to Sudan in 2017 and three in 2018, and returnees included 150–200 migrants detained in Misrata.¹⁴⁵ At least one case has been reported of a Darfurian Zaghawa whom the IOM returned in August 2017 being arrested and tortured upon arrival at Khartoum airport.¹⁴⁶ The Sudanese embassy in Tripoli has reportedly been actively lobbying the Libyan GNA in Tripoli, the UNHCR, and the IOM for Darfurians not to be registered as asylum seekers, but rather for the IOM to return them to Sudan.¹⁴⁷ By 2020, after Omar al-Bashir’s fall, lobbying of this kind was no longer reported, and the IOM was reportedly being more cautious about returning Sudanese to Sudan. Only a small number of Darfurians were said to have registered for voluntary return since Bashir’s fall, believing that the situation in Sudan was now better than in Libya. In the meantime, ‘voluntary returns’ from Libya decreased due to the IOM’s lack of access to migrant communities, detention centres, and airports because of the ongoing civil war around Tripoli and security concerns regarding IOM personnel.¹⁴⁸

Egypt has been a similarly long-standing destination for Sudanese migrants, including Darfurians. Some of these Darfurians are part of a circular pattern of labour migration, others are refugees who settled in Egypt as a result of the conflict in Darfur, and still more are transiting asylum seekers on their way to either Israel or Libya, from where

some try to continue on to Europe. The Egyptian coast itself has been a departure point for migrant boats sailing to Europe, but in recent years the Egyptian government has reportedly cracked down on the smugglers, which forced more migrants to move on to Libya. Migrants who were promised a place on a boat on the Egyptian coast also found themselves smuggled by land to Libya and sometimes sold to traffickers based as far as in western Libya.¹⁴⁹ As in Libya, many Darfurians in Egypt hope to benefit from resettlement programmes under UNHCR aegis. At odds with the Bashir regime (except briefly during the presidential tenure of Muslim Brotherhood leader Mohamed Morsi), Egypt also increasingly hosted Darfur rebels. The involvement of Darfur rebels in the Libyan conflict also increased their links with Cairo, as Egypt facilitated connections between them and Haftar in Libya and accepted injured combatants in need of treatment. With the emergence in 2019 of military leaders in Khartoum who are more friendly to Cairo, Egypt reportedly hopes to play a mediating role between them and Darfur rebels in future.¹⁵⁰

Box 3 The forced recruitment of Darfurian migrants in Libya

In addition to the commonly reported practices of migrants being tortured for ransom and forced into labour, for several years various armed forces have reportedly recruited migrants in Libya, particularly Darfurians. In 2017 Italy contacted Libyan migrant smugglers to try to convince them to give up their trade. Among them, Ahmed al-Dabbashi ('al-Ammo') was the main migrant smuggler and militia leader in Sabratha. He reportedly agreed with Italy and the GNA to move from migrant smuggling to fighting against it, in exchange for funding and equipment, including boats, supplied by Italy through the GNA. Al-Ammo was widely rumoured to have received EUR 5 million (USD 5.5 million in 2017) from the Italian intelligence services.¹⁵¹ Whether those rumours were correct or not, beginning in mid-2017 the GNA recognized al-Ammo's forces, which ostensibly had changed sides (Micallef and Reitano, 2017, p. 15).

Other smugglers who until then had been al-Ammo's partners, as well as rival militias in Sabratha, reacted violently to these developments and the two sides fought each other in September and October 2017 in what is known as the 19-day 'Sabratha war' (Micallef and Reitano, 2017, p. 15). Al-Ammo reportedly did not have sufficient manpower to defeat his enemies. It is arguable that Italy's plan to turn Sabratha's militias into anti-migrant forces was one of the main causes of the 'war', in which more than 40 people were killed, 350 injured, and 15,000 displaced (Micallef and Reitano, 2017, p. 15).

Suleiman, a Darfurian migrant who was about to board a boat that al-Ammo had chartered when the fighting started, remembers the conflict:

They picked us, Sudanese, Somalis, Ethiopians, and Eritreans to carry ammunition from their store to a bullet-proof car. Then after heavy fighting took place,

they asked us if we had experience with firearms. Skilled fighters were given a gun, and others were responsible for loading. As I was no good at either, a soldier hit me on the head, then I was given a hammer and told to knock holes in the walls for the snipers to use. We were exposed to crossfire and five of us were injured, and replaced by others (Tubiana and Warin, 2019).

More recently, migrants, particularly Darfurians, were again forced to take part in fighting or to work for both pro-GNA and pro-LNA forces during several rounds of fighting between rival forces in Tripoli from August to September 2018, December 2018 to January 2019, and since April 2019. Sudanese, in particular Darfurians, are especially in demand because they are believed to have had fighting experience in rebel movements and speak Arabic (Thorne, 2019). Some Darfurians volunteered to fight and were reportedly offered LYD 2,000 (USD 400) in monthly wages, while others were forcibly recruited,¹⁵² which, according to Human Rights Watch, may constitute a war crime (HRW, 2019). Those who do not fight must work by loading and unloading weapons, repairing and cleaning military vehicles, cleaning and transporting weapons, removing dead bodies from the battlefield, cooking, delivering food, and cleaning for the soldiers.

The migrants who were forced to fight were notably 'recruited' in Tripoli detention centres, including Tajura, Abu Slim, Tareq al-Matar, Tareq al-Sikka, and Qasr Ben Gashir.¹⁵³ In Gharyan detention centre, situated in a disputed area that changed hands twice between April and June 2019, both the factions involved forcibly recruited migrants or attempted to do so. In April the LNA or its affiliated forces reportedly took 23 Sudanese and Chadian strong-looking detainees and used them for cleaning work for a day before bringing them back to the centre. The next day they reportedly took 15 Sudanese and Chadians, who were not seen again. In April LNA or affiliated forces also brought two groups of Sudanese migrants to Gharyan, including some people they had taken from the streets of Tripoli. The Sudanese managed to escape, reportedly telling the others:

If we stay here, they'll take us to fight beside them. And if they take you, you don't come back.¹⁵⁴

The numbers of forced recruits from one centre can range from a few individuals to a 100 at a time. Forced recruitment has also taken place outside detention centres, and migrants who showed reluctance were reportedly imprisoned in these centres as a punishment.

In addition to migrants who were reportedly killed and wounded while forced to participate in the fighting, migrants could also be collectively targeted in retaliation for their involvement in the fighting. For example, the LNA justified a July 2019 aerial strike targeting the Tajura detention centre on the basis that an anti-LNA militia controlled it. This militia had forced migrants from the detention centre to fight for it and was using the centre as a military base and weapons storage facility (Hayden, 2019). The bombing reportedly killed about 50 migrants, many of whom were Darfurians. Earlier, in February 2019, pro-GNA forces reportedly arrested five Darfurian migrants after a pro-LNA brigade from Tarhuna had forcibly recruited them in Qasr Ben Gashir detention centre.¹⁵⁵

Darfurians seeking asylum in Europe

The majority of Darfurian migrants travelling to Libya intend to work there; only a minority plan to go to Europe. The number of those trying to reach Europe has been on the increase in recent years, however, because of the dangers migrants faced daily in Libya, including kidnappings for ransom and forced labour (Jaspars and Buchanan-Smith, 2018, p. 35). It is increasingly difficult for migrant workers to earn money in Libya, and families in Darfur, rather than receiving remittances *from* Libya, have to transfer money *to* Libya, often to traffickers to secure their relatives' release, which frequently results in both their families and migrants incurring substantial debts. In the face of such dangers and risks, Darfurian migrants, often encouraged by their families, are increasingly hoping to start safer lives in Europe.

Until 2014 only a few thousand Sudanese crossed the Mediterranean each year. Yet since 2015 the number of Sudanese making the crossing has increased sharply (Jaspars and Buchanan-Smith, 2018, p. xv). While 3,100 Sudanese arrived in Italy in 2014, 8,500 arrived in 2015, 9,300 in 2016, and 6,200 in 2017, representing between 5 and 7 per cent of the migrants who succeeded in crossing the Mediterranean (Jaspars and Buchanan-Smith, 2018, pp. 1, 13).¹⁵⁶ In 2018, 8,775 Sudanese applied for asylum in the EU, a slight decrease from 9,690 in 2017, mostly due to the increasing difficulties of crossing the Mediterranean from Libya and the decrease of migrant flows on this route (EASO, 2019, p. 44). The majority of Darfurian asylum seekers in Europe belong to the Zaghawa, Fur, and Masalit ethnic groups—the three non-Arab groups considered to be the main victims of Sudanese government repression since 2003 (Jaspars and Buchanan-Smith, 2018, p. 25).

Like most African immigrants, Darfurians do not want to remain in Italy due to successive governments' attitudes to migrants and asylum seekers. Also, there is no substantial Darfurian community there, in contrast to the United Kingdom, which has both historical links to Sudan—resulting in some (educated) Darfurians speaking English—and a substantial and settled Darfurian community within its borders (Jaspars and Buchanan-Smith, 2018, pp. 35–37). But migrants are deterred from trying to get to the United Kingdom, mostly because of the difficulties of crossing the English Channel.

France was initially just a transit country on the way from Italy to the United Kingdom, but has gradually become a destination for migrants. In mid-2016, of the 7,000-odd migrants who were waiting in the Calais 'jungle' camp in northern France, 32 per cent were Sudanese (Jaspars and Buchanan-Smith, 2018, p. 1). An important Sudanese community also settled in the La Chapelle neighbourhood north of Paris, many living on the streets and depending on the assistance of non-governmental organizations. Gradually the French authorities, wishing to avoid situations such as the one that had developed in Calais, encouraged the Sudanese to request asylum in France, and the community grew. In 2015 and 2016 Sudanese were the largest group of asylum seekers in France, and by 2018 it had become the European country with the highest number

of applications for asylum from Sudanese, accounting for 57 per cent of Sudanese asylum first instance decisions in the EU (EASO, 2019, p. 56).

Sudanese applications for asylum in France, similar to those in the EU as a whole, appear to be slightly decreasing, however (OFPRA, 2019, p. 18). Nevertheless, in 2018, with 4,338 applications, Sudan was still the third most frequent African country of origin for asylum seekers in France (OFPRA, 2019, p. 33). In the same year, with a success rate of 82 per cent, Sudanese represented 14.5 per cent of all asylum seekers who were given refugee status, which is a higher figure than for all other nationalities (OFPRA, 2019, p. 52). By 2017, 30,000 Sudanese, half of them with refugee status, were said to live in France (Baumard, 2017).

Chadian refugee camps as migrant departure points and transit hubs

In 2011 a tripartite mechanism was created comprising the UNHCR and the governments of Sudan and Chad to encourage or pressure Darfurian refugees in Chad to ‘voluntarily’ return home. The UNHCR was motivated to do so by the decreasing international funding for the Darfurian refugee camps in Chad rather than by any improvement in the security situation in Darfur. To justify a risky return policy, however, the UNHCR and other UN agencies depicted the Darfur situation as better than it actually was. It took time for those involved to agree on this mechanism, but in May 2017 a ‘tripartite agreement’ was signed in Khartoum (Allahadjim, 2019). A year later, at the end of April 2018, the first group of returnees from Chad crossed the Sudanese border (UNSC, 2019a, p. 44). Since then a few hundred people have been returned to Sudan, including since the beginning of the unrest in Khartoum in late 2018, and in spite of the uncertain political and security situations prevailing in Sudan, not least in Darfur (Allahadjim, 2019). According to one Darfurian refugee from Tulum camp on the Sudanese–Chadian border:

. . . today, more than ever, no Darfurian wants to go back to Sudan because Hemeti, the leader of the *janjawid*, has become the new strongman not only of Darfur, but of the whole of Sudan. No one wants to return while the *janjawid* are in charge.¹⁵⁷

It is hard to see such ‘voluntary’ returns as being completely motivated by the desire to go back to Darfur. Rather, they seem to be motivated by decreasing international assistance to and the increasingly difficult life in the camps in Chad. The UNHCR is giving cash to refugees who agree to return to Darfur, reportedly XAF 500,000 (USD 851) per head of household, and XAF 250,000 (USD 425) for each of the other household members.¹⁵⁸ The major catch is that by accepting the cash they lose their refugee status. Interviewees stated that many refugees agreed to return in order to receive this cash allowance, but then recrossed the border to Chad more or less immediately and may

still be living in refugee camps, in spite of the fact they are unlikely to get the same amount of aid there that they received previously. Some were only hoping to use the cash to invest in income-generating activities in Chad, but were not always successful. Others simply found the situation in Darfur even worse than they expected.¹⁵⁹

The decrease in relief aid (which is perceived as a form of intentional pressure to encourage migrants to return to their homes) and the fear of being eventually deported by the Chadian government have encouraged Darfurian refugees to travel to Libya or Europe rather than return to Darfur.¹⁶⁰ Mohamed,¹⁶¹ a 26-year-old Darfurian refugee in Iridimi who was trying to find funding for his trip, explained:

I never thought of leaving for Europe until the governments of Chad and Sudan and the UNHCR tried to send us back to Darfur. According to them, the region is secure and we have nothing to fear. But this is not the truth, and even if it were, we have nothing left there: no house, no land to farm. . . . This is why I decided to leave for Europe through Libya.¹⁶²

In addition, UNHCR payments to those agreeing to return to Darfur were often used to fund journeys to Europe and Libya, thus fuelling rather than stemming the migrant-smuggling business. Salah,¹⁶³ a 29-year-old refugee who wanted to go to Europe, left Tulum camp with the XAF 1,500,000 (USD 2,554) that his family had obtained from the UNHCR for agreeing to return to Darfur, leaving the remaining XAF 500,000 (USD 851) with his mother and siblings. He paid XAF 100,000 (USD 170) to travel in a vehicle transporting gold miners to Kouri Bougoudi, at the border with Libya. But on the way an armed group intercepted his convoy:

I don't know if they were bandits or rebels, but they threatened us and stole all our money. Since then I didn't go back to the camp and am living in eastern Chad. My family doesn't know where I am; I don't have the courage to confess to them that I lost all the money they sacrificed, hoping I would succeed in Europe and help them in return. Since then I have given up on migrating to Europe except if a legal resettlement opportunity is offered to me.¹⁶⁴

In recent years Chadian refugee camps have also become transit hubs for Darfurian migrants and others from the Horn of Africa on their way to Libya through Chad.¹⁶⁵ This has particularly increased since 2016, because the RSF's control of the direct routes from Darfur to Libya made them riskier for civilian smugglers who were unwilling to share their profits with the RSF. As a result, both non-Arab and Arab smugglers, including RSF members themselves, began to transport migrants and gold miners alike to the Sudanese–Chadian border (Warin, 2020). After crossing it on foot or by vehicle, migrants could be discreetly hosted in refugee camps, from where other vehicles—often operated by Chadian and Darfurian Zaghawa, including refugees in Chad—would drive them to Kouri Bougoudi, where they would again change vehicle to continue into Libya.¹⁶⁶

Gold mines as migrant transit hubs

Thanks to gold rushes across the Sahara since 2012, new roads have opened up and old roads have again become busy. One of the new ones is the road from the Sudanese–Chadian border to the Kouri Bougoudi gold mines on the Chadian–Libyan border that passes through Faya. Since it opened it has largely replaced other roads between Chad and Libya, including routes from Bao Bilia and from Faya to Kufra, and the route from Wour to Gatrun west of the Kouri Bougoudi route. These routes are now mostly used by large, slow trucks carrying livestock and goods.¹⁶⁷ This road also partly replaced the trade and migrant route from Malha in Darfur to Kufra, where the RSF limits the route to migrant trucks driven or escorted by its members, or which have paid bribes to them.

Kouri Bougoudi has thus become a hub for migrants, particularly from Darfur. Darfuri and other Horn of Africa migrants are driven there on pickup trucks that often belong to Zaghawa transporters, whose journey stops at Kouri Bougoudi. Passengers are dropped off at Kouri 17, a large market/shanty town near the Chadian–Libyan border, where other trucks, often owned by Tubu smugglers, come to sell food, water, fuel, and mining equipment, and pick up migrants who want to continue further north. Those who do not want to travel further can attempt to find work in the gold mines or market.¹⁶⁸

Recently, in order to retain its political and financial support from Europe, the Chadian government has been trying to show that it is effectively preventing migrants from traveling to Libya by arresting those whom it suspects of being migrants. This is another reason why the Kouri Bougoudi route has become so popular among smugglers and migrants, because migrants can travel together with—and pretend to be—gold miners.¹⁶⁹ Even if gold mining is also illicit and Chadian security forces sometimes arrest miners, the risk to transporters of being arrested when transporting migrants rather than gold miners is considered to be higher.¹⁷⁰ According to a transporter of both gold miners and migrants:

. . . some migrants disguise themselves as gold miners to cross Chad safely. Even if both are illegal, it is better to be seen as a gold miner, because people sometimes denounce illegal foreign migrants, but never gold miners. For this reason, I never transport migrants only—I always drive the migrants together with gold miners. If [security forces] surprise me with migrants, I tell them they're all gold miners.¹⁷¹

Another reason for migrants to pretend to be gold miners and hide the fact that they are migrants from even their transporters is that they risk not only being arrested by Chadian security forces, but also being sold to Libyan traffickers. It is arguably easier for Darfurians to pretend to be gold miners, because there are many Darfurians among the Kouri Bougoudi prospectors. It is more difficult for passengers from East and West Africa.¹⁷²

Because the risks of transporting migrants are considered to be higher than those for transporting gold miners, fares to Kouri Bougoudi are often higher for them: it costs

XAF 75,000 (USD 127) for migrants coming from Dar Zaghawa in north-eastern Chad, and XAF 100,000 (USD 170) for those departing from further south, between Guéréda and Abéché.¹⁷³ In contrast, gold miners' fares can reportedly be as low as XAF 50,000 (USD 85). Further, Tubu smugglers will give transporters who bring them migrants a fee corresponding to 10 per cent of the fare the migrants paid to reach Kouri Bougoudi.¹⁷⁴ Even as they bring migrants to the mines, transporters encourage both migrants and miners in Kouri Bougoudi to continue north, describing Europe, according to one transporter, as 'paradise on earth'.¹⁷⁵

If they are lucky, gold mining allows some migrants to obtain enough money to continue their journey to the Mediterranean.¹⁷⁶ According to the same transporter quoted above, 'when they have earned at least XAF 2 million [USD 3,402], they will leave the gold mines and head to Libya'.¹⁷⁷ Gold miners can also fund the journeys of migrant relatives,¹⁷⁸ and mining can allow both migrants and gold miners to travel to Kouri Bougoudi on credit, provided they will agree to work in the mines to pay their debt to the transporters. Migrants who become successful gold miners may also give up their migration projects and stay longer in the mines, or return home with their earnings.¹⁷⁹ By comparison, unlucky miners, or victims of abuses or violence in the mines—including unpaid work; robbery; and attacks by local Tubu armed groups, Chadian rebels, or the Chadian army—may become migrants and leave for Libya, even travelling on credit if necessary.¹⁸⁰ The same transporter of gold miners and migrants quoted above explained:

Some gold miners became migrants because they have been chased from the mines by the Chadian government. As they can't come back home without money, so they prefer to try their luck crossing the sea.¹⁸¹

Even gold miners who are victims of harassment by Chadian security forces became migrants. An interesting case is that of Saddiq,¹⁸² a Darfurian refugee from the Jebel camp in Chad who initially became a gold miner, but, on his way back from Kouri Bougoudi to the camp, was arrested by the Chadian–Sudanese joint force in Goz Beida, accused of being a Darfur rebel, and had his gold confiscated. He then decided to go to Europe and is now requesting asylum in France.¹⁸³

As mentioned above, many former and current rebels work as gold miners in Kouri Bougoudi. Rebel movements also go to Kouri Bougoudi to recruit both former members and gold miners. They may also recruit migrants, but except for those who take up gold mining in Kouri Bougoudi, they tend not to stop long in the area. According to a migrant smuggler, 'rebels are more successful in recruiting among the gold miners than among migrants, who are only concerned with their objective of crossing to Europe'.¹⁸⁴ Rebels may nevertheless have been recruiting among migrants who became gold miners or among gold miners nurturing a long-term plan to migrate. On the other hand, there are cases of rebels who gave up the insurgency to become migrants. This does not seem to apply to combatants currently operating in Libya, however, but rather to

fighters who abandoned the rebellion earlier, in Darfur itself, after their factions were defeated or joined the government side.

Darfurian asylum seekers in Niger

At the beginning of 2018 the town of Agadez in northern Niger, one of the main staging posts on the migratory route between West Africa and Libya, experienced the unexpected arrival of more than 2,000 refugees from far-away Darfur. After escaping the war in Sudan, they had found the situation in Libya so precarious that they had preferred to travel south to Niger, which they had rightly considered to be safer. Some of them may also have hoped that the UNHCR would register them as asylum seekers, because the agency had opened a transit centre in Niger for asylum seekers evacuated from Libya who were to be resettled in Europe and North America.¹⁸⁵

Many of the 2,000 Darfurians who had arrived in Agadez had been imprisoned in clandestine jails or detention centres in Libya, where they became victims of torture for ransom or slave labour.¹⁸⁶ Some had lost their wives or other relatives in Libya.¹⁸⁷ Some of them succeeded in boarding boats on the Mediterranean before being intercepted and brought back to the shore by Libyan coastguards and detained again.¹⁸⁸ One of them, known as ‘Italy’, even reached Ventimiglia before Italian police arrested him and 39 others and deported them to Sudan¹⁸⁹—which may constitute a violation of European law (Jaspars and Buchanan-Smith, 2018, p. 100).

In Niger the Darfurian refugees were not welcomed as they should have been. Nigerien officials seem to have accused them, without any evidence, of being rebels, mercenaries in Libya, and even terrorists.¹⁹⁰ In May 2018 Nigerien authorities arrested 135 of them and sent them back to Libya, which may also constitute a violation of international law (Reidy, 2019).¹⁹¹ Since then, two of the 135 people who were deported were said to have been killed in Libya, about ten others to have drowned during a failed Mediterranean crossing in January 2019, and others to have been jailed in torture centres in Beni Walid.¹⁹² After this several hundred Darfurians, fearing further deportations to Libya or even Sudan, left Niger voluntarily. Some went back to Libya and Chad, other moved west to Algeria (from which some were later deported) and Mali in the hope of reaching Morocco.¹⁹³ Fifteen who were already registered refugees in Chad agreed to return to their camps there in 2018–19.¹⁹⁴ A few others even reportedly agreed to return to Sudan, in particular after Bashir’s fall in April 2019 or with the desperate motto of ‘Better to die at home than live in Niger’ in mind.¹⁹⁵

According to the UNHCR, by late 2019 about 1,300 Darfurians remained in Agadez, including 1,200 who had been moved out of town and hosted in a tented encampment, 15 km north of Agadez, in a landscape reminiscent of Darfur’s most arid areas.¹⁹⁶ Nigerien authorities and the UNHCR call it a ‘humanitarian site’ and ostensibly reject

the name ‘refugee camp’. In early 2019 three Darfurians reportedly attempted to commit suicide in the ‘humanitarian site’.¹⁹⁷ Most Darfurian refugees live with trauma linked to the violence they faced in both Darfur and Libya. The women are afraid of Tuareg camel herders near the camp, who remind them of the *janjawid*.¹⁹⁸

The UNHCR has been slow to register and interview the Darfurians in Niger. By December 2019 only 72 had been selected for resettlement or humanitarian flights to Europe and the United States, with another 100 who were eligible waiting for a flight. Nearly 300 others had been given refugee status in Niger itself.¹⁹⁹ The UNHCR, favouring the latter solution of asylum in Niger over resettlement in Europe, blamed the slow pace of processing these migrants on the Nigerien ‘government’s reluctance to open an asylum space to the Sudanese who came from Libya’, because of ‘suspicions about their civilian status’, as mentioned above (Carretero, 2019). The UNHCR is also ‘examining other durable solutions’, including ‘voluntary return’ and ‘return to the first country of asylum’ for about 200 Darfurians who are already registered as refugees in Chad and who are not eligible for refugee status in Niger.²⁰⁰

On 16 December 2019, 600 to 1,000 Darfurians left the ‘humanitarian site’ to organize a protest sit-in in front of the UNHCR office in Agadez that was reminiscent of the April sit-in in Khartoum (Carretero, 2019).²⁰¹ But on 4 January 2020 the Nigerien authorities violently forced the protestors back to the camp. Some Darfurians then set fire to the camp, burning down 80 per cent of it, including 290 of its 331 tents (Diallo, 2020; Reidy, 2020).²⁰² In response Agadez region’s governor denounced ‘the refugees’ ingratitude’ (RFI, 2020), while UNHCR officials, most notably the agency’s special envoy for Central Mediterranean, Vincent Cochetel, blamed the Darfurian refugees for the ‘Destruction of the site’ and for ‘looting, repeated threats to our [UNHCR] staff, multiple violations of the laws of the host country’ (Cochetel, 2020a) and ‘Destroying the asylum space in . . . Niger’ (Cochetel, 2020b). Cochetel (2020b) specifically pointed to ‘a minority of refugees from Darfur in Agadez who only want to hear about resettlement to Europe’ and stated that ‘a request for automatic resettlement for everyone in Agadez . . . is not just possible’ (Cochetel, 2020a).²⁰³

The UNHCR’s reactions did not mention that the Nigerien security forces beat the protestors and, after the fires, arrested 326 mostly Darfurian asylum seekers, according to the UNHCR, or 335, according to the Nigerien authorities, or up to 453, according to the refugees themselves, while 162 mobile phones were also confiscated, according to an Agadez prosecutor (Diallo, 2020; Dabanga, 2020).²⁰⁴ Those who were arrested then have a criminal record and risk being denied refugee status in Niger, and, according to the UNHCR, will not be eligible for solutions such as resettlement and humanitarian flights out of Niger.²⁰⁵ The UNHCR’s reaction also seemed to ignore the fact that, for the Sudanese, the violent end to the sit-in was also reminiscent of the earlier attack on the Khartoum sit-in, and that the burning of the camp similarly echoed the RSF’s burning of an IDP camp in West Darfur on 30–31 December 2019 (*Sudan Tribune*, 2020). ●



More than 15 years after the beginning of the war, Darfur remains an unresolved conflict that has mutated as the result of new crises in neighbouring countries and in Sudan itself.”

Conclusion

More than 15 years after the beginning of the war, Darfur remains an unresolved conflict that has mutated as the result of new crises in neighbouring countries and in Sudan itself. At the national level, the rise of the RSF's leader, Hemeti, and his opportunistic alliance with Darfur rebels against attempts by actors from the centre to maintain a monopoly on transitional power is the latest metastasis of the conflict. At the regional level, Darfur rebels and civilians alike have fled their homeland and have had to settle in neighbouring countries such as Chad, the CAR, South Sudan, Libya, and even Niger, where the combatants have been involved in other conflicts and the civilians exposed to further violence.

While rebel movements continue to recruit among civilian youths, these movements' low chances of attaining their objectives also mean that many young men, including non-Arab youths and former rebels themselves, have found it more appealing to join the RSF, notably with the motivation of receiving lucrative payment for fighting in Yemen. Darfurian combatants (in particular former rebels) have also been involved in the trafficking of cars, fuel, arms, drugs, and migrants. Without hope, and feeling abandoned by the international community, young men have also increasingly tried to reach Europe. But like those of many sub-Saharan migrants and asylum seekers, their journeys have often stopped long before they reached European shores. Instead, they have become gold miners in various parts of the Sahara, either to earn a living and support their families, as an alternative to risky migrant journeys, or to get sufficient money to pay for their travel through Libya and across the Mediterranean, which is becoming more and more expensive as migrants become victims of extortion and kidnapping for ransom. On their way through lawless Libya many have been kidnapped, jailed, or enslaved.

Nowadays Darfurian mobility differs from both earlier Darfurian migrations fuelled by the 1970s–80s droughts and other contemporary migrations, notably by the fact that it involves both civilians and combatants—categories that are porous and allow movement between them. Earlier Darfurian 'circular' migrants were considered as a cheap and hard-working labour force. At the same time, the Darfurians quickly used their ability to cross borders and turned themselves into skilled transnational traders.

Although it stopped Darfurians' trading activities, the war that started in Darfur in 2003 generated a pool of experienced fighters who could be used in conflicts elsewhere, notably in Libya. This played a part in a gradual shift in the predominant roles of mobile Darfurians from cross-border labourers and traders to activities based on force or possible violence. Even where Darfurians are still involved in trading or smuggling, or have turned to gold mining—another activity spreading across borders thanks to a wave of discoveries across the Sahara and Sahel, in which Darfurian mining skills are in demand—these undertakings have become more militarized and criminalized, mixing licit and illicit commodities and activities. Mobile Darfurian youths thus appear to be highly valued in new transnational, more or less militarized and criminalized marketplaces for combatants, gold miners, smugglers, and bandits.

Nevertheless, what forces most of them out of Darfur—and what makes them different from various other contemporary migrations—is less the *pull* factor of these new labour markets, than the *push* factors of political and economic violence at home. While it is now largely below the international community’s radar, the Darfur conflict continues to evolve. Darfurians are forced into new dangerous roles abroad by the continued insecurity, the failure of the rebellion, and the lack of a political end game in Darfur, which are exacerbated by the recent political ascent in Sudan of the RSF and Hemeti.

“ In recent years the Sudanese government has insisted on presenting the situation in Darfur as secure. Several European countries have backed this narrative.”

To date, Darfurian refugees and asylum seekers in Chad, Libya, and Europe often view the political changes in Sudan since Bashir’s fall in April 2019 with a critical eye, and few accept the idea of returning to Sudan through the IOM ‘voluntary’ return programme, even when they are still at risk of violence in Libya. The rise of Bashir’s former henchman and *janjawid* leader, Hemeti, revives bad memories for most Darfurian non-Arabs. According to one Darfurian exile in Libya:

. . . for Darfurian refugees, a *janjawid* is near to a devil. They will never return to Darfur if a *janjawid* is in power. That *janjawid* may have changed, but the *janjawid* abuses are so firmly fixed in the Darfurians’ minds that it is very difficult to forgive.²⁰⁶

In recent years the Sudanese government has insisted on presenting the situation in Darfur as secure. Several European countries have backed this narrative, and it has ultimately been used to justify the deportation of several hundred Sudanese—mostly Darfurian asylum seekers—back to Khartoum. Four hundred were deported from Europe between 2011 and 2016, half of them from France. Sudanese asylum rates in France have increased since then, but 12 were deported in 2017, 10 in 2018, and 5 in the first half of 2019 (Boitiaux, 2019).

Upon these Darfurians’ arrival in Khartoum, National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) agents have systematically interrogated them, and some have been detained. According to one of them, who was deported from Italy as part of a group of 40 in 2016:

We were terrified. They interrogated us a lot. Some were beaten. First, they asked your name and your tribe. When I said I was Zaghawa, they told me I was Chadian. If you say you’re Zaghawa or from another of Darfur’s non-Arab tribes, they’ll beat you until you say you’re not Sudanese.²⁰⁷

Following the deportation of this group of 40 Sudanese, an agreement between Italy and Sudan signed a few days earlier was made public. In response, a team of lawyers representing the Association for Legal Studies on Immigration, an Italian legal charity, filed lawsuits on behalf of these deportees at the European Court of Human Rights (Prestianni, 2018, p. 11). The cases are currently being considered, and Italy has stopped further deportations to Sudan.²⁰⁸

Other European countries—including Belgium, Germany, and Sweden—have also signed bilateral agreements with Khartoum in order to proceed with deportations (Boitiaux, 2019). Yet others—including Belgium, France, and the United Kingdom—have cooperated with Sudanese agents in Europe in order to identify and deport rejected asylum seekers (Kingsley, 2018; Jaspars and Buchanan-Smith, 2018, p. 90). In Belgium deportations of Sudanese created an outcry in 2017, after the secretary of state for immigration and asylum, Theo Francken—a member of the right-wing anti-immigrant New Flemish Alliance party—invited a Sudanese delegation, including NISS agents, to review the cases of Sudanese asylum seekers and facilitate their deportation (Birnbaum, 2018). In October, after a Belgian League of Human Rights appeal based on Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights, a Belgian court declared such deportations illegal, but they did not stop (Jaspars and Buchanan-Smith, 2018, p. 90). And in December 2018 local media revealed that two Sudanese deported from Belgium had been tortured upon their arrival in Khartoum (Birnbaum, 2018).

Several European countries, including Belgium, Denmark, and the United Kingdom, have for a few years attempted to reassess the risks of return for Darfurian non-Arabs in order to facilitate their deportation (Jaspars and Buchanan-Smith, 2018, p. 91). It is therefore likely that these countries will use the establishment of a transitional government in Khartoum to justify such deportations. Since the fall of Bashir the violent questioning of Darfurian returnees on their arrival at Khartoum airport has reportedly been less systematic, but has not totally stopped.

Perhaps more alarmingly, other European countries, notably including France, have attempted to frame the violence in Darfur itself in a more positive way, paving the way for further deportations of Darfurians. The situation remains precarious, however, with new episodes of militia violence against non-Arab civilians in various parts of Darfur in late 2019–early 2020. More such episodes seem likely with the announced withdrawal of the joint African Union–UN mission in Darfur. Beyond the situation in Darfur itself, the uncertainty of Sudan’s current transitional process suggests that high-level political changes in Khartoum are not necessarily indications of positive change or even stability. These changes should not provide a justification either to return Darfurians to Sudan or to block their journeys in the wider subregion, particularly in Libya.

In 2019 regional EU ‘migration management’ programmes in Khartoum were ‘halted’ or ‘put on hold’ (DW, 2019). One of them was suspended in March 2019, four months after the beginning of the uprising. Another was suspended in June, after the violent

repression of the protests that caused more than 100 deaths, for which the RSF has been widely held responsible. The EU gave no clear reasons for these suspensions except for the lack of ‘government counterparts’ due to the unrest. The EU did acknowledge, however, that its projects involved partnering with the Sudanese police and border guard, two bodies into which the *janjawid* had been integrated since the beginning of the conflict in Darfur in 2003, and who have been known for abuses long before the recent protests (DW, 2019).²⁰⁹

Nevertheless, it is also likely that the EU will continue to engage with Sudan’s transitional authorities in order to curb migration flows. All the components—both civilian and military—of Sudan’s transitional authorities are hoping to obtain European support, not least Hemeti. His rise has made him many new enemies, notably among regular army officers from the centre, which explains why the RSF recently appeared to focus on Khartoum and had stopped patrolling the Sudanese–Libyan borderlands in pursuit of rebels or smugglers. But in September 2019 the RSF announced that it had captured 18 vehicles and arrested approximately 130 mostly Sudanese migrants and smugglers on their way to Libya (SUNA, 2019). This move appears to renew Hemeti’s message that the RSF is ready to act as Europe’s border guards and, as Hemeti again declared in June, the militia ‘protects the Europeans from the influx of millions of irregular migrants. . . . We work on behalf of the Europeans, we protect their national security’ (Ahmed, 2019).

As mentioned above, however, the very fact that Darfurian mobility is less motivated by a pull factor (of wealth abroad) than a push factor (of war and poverty at home) suggests that international interventions would be more effective if they were focused on addressing the causes of migration at home by making local peace and ensuring political and economic equity between Darfur and the centre rather than on border controls. At the regional level, recent movements of Darfurian civilians and combatants are also the latest symptom of the long-standing regional nature of the Darfur conflict. As has often been stated, this suggests that a durable solution needs a regional approach.

The incredible mobility of Darfur’s civilians and combatants should be seen as reflecting acts of survival and adaptation of the same type as their earlier migrations after severe droughts, rather than merely a quest for better socioeconomic circumstances, as anti-migrant propagandists in Europe fear. Mobility is a reaction, this time against both violence and the international community’s own lack of response to the ongoing crisis in Darfur. The extreme mobility of Darfurians sharply contrasts with the international paralysis over the issue of Darfur. ●

Endnotes

- 1 The UN Development Programme defines ‘human mobility’ as ‘the ability of individuals, families or groups of people to choose their place of residence’ (UNDP, 2009, p. 15). In this report we use the term as encompassing both the ability to move and the actual movements.
- 2 Author interview with a former JEM leader, location withheld, December 2019.
- 3 Author interviews with former Séléka members, the CAR and Chad, July 2014–October 2015; Chadian Arab rebels, October–November 2016; and a former Darfur rebel, eastern Chad, May 2019; see HSBA (2016, p. 9).
- 4 Author interview with a Darfur rebel leader, location withheld, March 2019.
- 5 Author interview with a former Darfur rebel, eastern Chad, May 2019.
- 6 Author telephone interview with a former Darfur rebel, February 2020.
- 7 Author interview with a Darfur rebel leader, location withheld, March 2019; see UNSC (2019a, p. 25).
- 8 Author interview with a Darfur rebel leader, location withheld, March 2019.
- 9 See also Murray (2017).
- 10 Author interviews with Hasan Keley and other Tubu leaders, location withheld, November 2018; and with a Darfur rebel, eastern Chad, May 2019.
- 11 Author interview with a Darfur rebel, eastern Chad, May 2019.
- 12 Author telephone interview with a former Darfur rebel, February 2019.
- 13 Author interviews with Darfur rebels, location withheld, March 2019, and eastern Chad, May 2019; see UNSC (2019a, p. 26).
- 14 Author interview with a Darfur rebel leader, location withheld, March 2019.
- 15 Author interview with a Darfur rebel, eastern Chad, May 2019.
- 16 Author telephone interviews with former Darfur rebels, February and September 2019.
- 17 Author interview with a Darfur rebel leader, location withheld, March 2019.
- 18 Author telephone interview with a Libyan analyst, July 2019.
- 19 Author telephone interview with a former rebel, August 2019.
- 20 Author telephone interview with former rebels, December 2019 and February 2020.
- 21 Author telephone interview with a former rebel, January 2020; interview with a Chadian rebel leader, location withheld, February 2020.
- 22 Author interviews and telephone interviews with Libyan and Darfurian sources, various locations, February–April 2020.
- 23 Author interviews and telephone interviews with rebel fighters, eastern Chad, May 2019, and Libya, June 2019.

- 24 Author interview with a Chadian rebel, location withheld; telephone interview with a Sudanese official, February 2020.
- 25 Author telephone interview with former Darfur rebel leader, April 2020.
- 26 Author telephone interview with a Libyan analyst, August 2019.
- 27 Author interview with an international observer, location withheld, January 2020.
- 28 See Dabanga (2019).
- 29 Author telephone interview with a Libyan analyst, July 2019.
- 30 Author telephone interviews with rebels and former rebels in Libya, May–June 2019.
- 31 Author telephone interview with a Libyan analyst, August 2019. The Dabanga article was the basis of the Panel of Experts on Libya report that Hemeti had deployed 1,000 RSF troops to Libya quoted above; see UNSC (2019b, p. 10).
- 32 Author interview with a Sudanese official, location withheld, September 2019.
- 33 Author telephone interview with a former rebel, August 2019. It is also worth noting that a large part of SAF remains implacably opposed to Hemeti and his RSF.
- 34 In the same period Hilal loyalists were holding protests in Khartoum and Darfur (author interview with a Sudanese official, location withheld, September 2019). In late April 2020 Hilal was released from prison but at the time of writing was reportedly still under house arrest.
- 35 Author telephone interview with a Sudanese official, December 2019.
- 36 Author telephone interview with a former rebel, August 2019.
- 37 Author interviews in Libya, 2018–19.
- 38 Author interview with a former rebel, now an RSF member, location withheld; telephone interview with a former rebel leader, May 2019; see UNSC (2019a, pp. 38–39).
- 39 Author telephone interview with a former rebel leader, May 2019.
- 40 Author interview with a JEM combatant in Libya, location withheld, June 2019.
- 41 Author interview with a former rebel, now an RSF member, location withheld, May 2019; see UNSC (2019a, pp. 38–39).
- 42 Author telephone interviews with rebels and former rebels in Libya, Chad, and other locations, May–December 2019.
- 43 Author telephone interviews with rebels and former rebels in Libya, Chad, and other locations, May–December 2019.
- 44 Author interview with a Darfur refugee, now an RSF member, location withheld, May 2019.
- 45 Author interview with a Darfur refugee, now an RSF member, location withheld, May 2019.
- 46 Author interview with a former rebel, now an RSF member, location withheld, May 2019.
- 47 Author interview with a Darfurian activist, location withheld, November 2019.
- 48 Author interview with a Sudanese official, location withheld, December 2017; and with a former RSF member, eastern Chad, June 2019; see Dabanga (2019).
- 49 Author interview with a Sudanese official, location withheld, December 2017; with Darfurian activists in contact with RSF members in Yemen, location withheld, June–July 2018; and with a former RSF member, eastern Chad, June 2019; see Kirkpatrick (2018).
- 50 Amounts may vary depending on the Sudanese pound’s exchange rate, since the payments, after being paid to the RSF leadership by the UAE and Saudi Arabia in US dollars, are reportedly converted to Sudanese pounds at a rate that allegedly benefits this leadership (author interviews with Darfurian activists in contact with RSF members in Yemen, location withheld, June–July 2018; see Green (2019, p. 14) and Trew (2019)).
- 51 Author interviews with a Chadian former rebel, location withheld, December 2017; with Darfurian activists who were in contact with RSF members in Yemen, location withheld, June–July 2018; and with former RSF members, eastern Chad, June 2019.

- 52 Author interviews with Darfurian activists who were in contact with RSF members in Yemen, location withheld, June–July 2018; with a Darfurian (non-Arab) refugee, now an RSF member, location withheld, May 2019; and with a former Darfur rebel, eastern Chad, May 2019.
- 53 Author interviews with Darfurian activists who were in contact with RSF members in Yemen, location withheld, June–July 2018.
- 54 Author interview with a Sudanese official, location withheld, September 2019.
- 55 Author interviews and telephone interviews with rebel and former rebel leaders and a Sudan analyst, locations withheld, February–March 2019.
- 56 Author interviews and telephone interviews with Darfur rebel leaders, some in Libya, locations withheld, February–May 2019. Janna was released in late 2019 and returned to Libya to take part in the LNA offensive on Tripoli.
- 57 Author telephone interview with a former Darfur rebel, December 2019.
- 58 Author interviews and telephone interviews with a Darfur rebel and former rebel leaders, locations withheld, February–May 2019.
- 59 Author interview with a gold miner who witnessed the fighting, eastern Chad, May 2019; telephone interviews with an LJM leader, January 2019, and a CCMSR leader, February 2020.
- 60 Author interview with a gold miner who witnessed the fighting, eastern Chad, May 2019; telephone interview with an LJM leader and interview with a Sudanese analyst, location withheld, January 2019; telephone interview with a CCMSR leader, February 2020.
- 61 Author telephone interview with a former Darfur rebel, February 2019
- 62 Author interviews and telephone interviews with Darfur rebel leaders and Libyan Tubu activist, locations withheld; voice recording of statements by a rebel leader in southern Libya, January 2019; see Wiche (2019).
- 63 Voice recording of statements by a rebel leader in southern Libya, January 2019; author interview with a Sudanese analyst, location withheld, January 2019.
- 64 Author telephone interviews with a CCMSR leader and former Darfur rebel, February 2019.
- 65 Voice recording of Abdallah Banda dated 1 January 2020.
- 66 Telephone interviews with LJM and CCMSR leaders, February 2020. The Chadian army then repelled CCMSR troops in Kouri Bougoudi.
- 67 Author interviews and telephone interviews with various Darfur and Chadian rebels and a Libyan Tubu activist, various locations, January–September 2019.
- 68 Author telephone interview with a former UFDD rebel, February 2019; however, they later returned to Libya.
- 69 Author interviews and telephone interviews with Darfurian gold miners and a former LJM rebel, eastern Chad and Libya, May 2019.
- 70 Author telephone interview with a former LJM rebel in Libya, May 2019.
- 71 Author interviews and telephone interview with an LJM leader, March 2019; and with a Darfur rebel from another group and a gold miner, eastern Chad, May 2019.
- 72 Author interview with a Darfurian gold miner, eastern Chad, May 2019; telephone interview with an LJM leader, March 2019.
- 73 TélÉTchad report seen by the authors, March 2019.
- 74 Author telephone interview with a former LJM rebel in Libya, May 2019.
- 75 Author telephone interview with a Darfurian politician, March 2019.
- 76 Author email exchange with a Sudanese Zaghawa activist, May 2019; see Tubiana, Warin and Saeneen (2018, p. 68); Molenaar, Tubiana, and Warin (2018, p. 57).
- 77 Author interview with a former Sudanese Zaghawa rebel, eastern Chad, May 2019.

- 78 Author interviews with a former Sudanese Zaghawa rebel and Sudanese Zaghawa who joined the UFR, eastern Chad; email exchange with a Sudanese Zaghawa activist, May 2019.
- 79 Author interview with a UFR member, eastern Chad, May 2019.
- 80 Author interview with a former Darfur rebel, eastern Chad, May 2019.
- 81 Author interview with a Darfurian gold miner who joined the UFR, eastern Chad, May 2019.
- 82 Author interview with a former Sudanese Zaghawa rebel, eastern Chad, May 2019.
- 83 Author interview with a Chadian army member, N'Djaména, June 2019; telephone interview with a former Sudanese Zaghawa rebel, March 2019.
- 84 Author interview with a Chadian army member, N'Djaména, June 2019; telephone interview with a former Sudanese Zaghawa rebel, March 2019.
- 85 Author interview with a car smuggler, eastern Chad, May 2019; see Tubiana and Gramizzi (2018, p. 79).
- 86 Author interview with a car smuggler, eastern Chad, May 2019.
- 87 Author interview with a car smuggler, eastern Chad, May 2019.
- 88 Author interview with a car, fuel, and arms trafficker, eastern Chad, May 2019.
- 89 Author interviews with car traffickers, eastern Chad, May 2019.
- 90 Author interviews with car traffickers, eastern Chad, May 2019.
- 91 Author interviews with migrants and asylum seekers, Europe and Libya, 2018–20; see also Tubiana, Warin, and Saeneen (2018, pp. 41–45).
- 92 Author interview with a migrant smuggler, Tina, Sudan, May 2019.
- 93 Author interviews with migrants and asylum seekers, Europe and Libya, 2018–20; see UNSC (2019a, p. 50).
- 94 Author interview with a Darfurian refugee, France, August 2019.
- 95 Author interview with a Darfurian refugee, France, August 2019.
- 96 Author interview with a Darfurian refugee, France, August 2019.
- 97 Author interview with a Libyan analyst, France, August 2019; and Eritrean asylum seekers, Libya, 2019–20. Eritreans have turned the nickname 'Tayara' into 'Durya', which is likely simply a modified pronunciation.
- 98 See Altai Consulting (2017, p. 8). On the difference between 'smuggling' and 'trafficking', see HRW (2015).
- 99 Written testimonies by Eritrean asylum seekers in Libya seen by the authors, July 2019.
- 100 Author interview with a former Chadian rebel, Niger, April 2018.
- 101 Author interview with an Eritrean asylum seeker, Libya, March 2020.
- 102 Author interviews with migrants and asylum seekers, Europe and Libya, 2018–20.
- 103 Author interview with a Darfurian bandit, trafficker, and gold miner, eastern Chad, May 2019.
- 104 Author interview with a Darfurian bandit, trafficker, and gold miner, eastern Chad, May 2019.
- 105 Author interview with a Darfurian bandit, trafficker, and gold miner, eastern Chad, May 2019; see Tubiana and Gramizzi (2018, pp. 93–94).
- 106 Author interview with a Darfurian refugee, now an RSF member, location withheld; and with a car, fuel, and arms trafficker, eastern Chad, May 2019.
- 107 Author interview with a former Darfur rebel who has prospected for gold in various countries, Tina, Sudan, May 2019; see Tubiana and Gramizzi (2018, pp. 66–68).
- 108 Darfurians have considerable experience of working in artisanal, semi-mechanized, and (in more stable regions) industrialized mines in Sudan. Veteran miners often have more than a decade of varied experience, including of using tools that are less well known in Western countries. Mining in the region is dangerous work, even for experienced miners: in September 2019

the collapse of a mine shaft reportedly killed some 70 miners, mostly Darfurians from the refugee camps in Chad.

- 109 Author interview with a gold miner, eastern Chad, April 2019.
- 110 Author interview with a refugee who became a gold miner, Tulum refugee camp, eastern Chad, May 2019.
- 111 Author interview with a refugee who became a gold miner, Am Nabak refugee camp; and with a former Darfur rebel, eastern Chad, May 2019.
- 112 Author interviews with gold miners, Am Nabak refugee camp and other locations, eastern Chad, April–May 2019; see Tubiana and Gramizzi (2018, pp. 68–74).
- 113 Author interview with a Darfurian gold miner who joined the UFR, eastern Chad, May 2019.
- 114 Author interview with a Chadian army member, N'Djaména, June 2019.
- 115 Author interview with a refugee who became a gold miner in Niger, Am Nabak refugee camp, eastern Chad, May 2019; see Tubiana and Gramizzi (2018, p. 69).
- 116 Author interview with a Darfurian gold miner who worked in Niger, eastern Chad, May 2019.
- 117 Author interview with a Darfurian gold miner who worked in Algeria, eastern Chad, May 2019.
- 118 Author interviews with Darfurian gold miners who worked in Mali, eastern Chad, May 2019.
- 119 Author interview with a Darfurian gold miner who worked in various countries, eastern Chad, May 2019.
- 120 Author interview with a former Darfur rebel, eastern Chad, May 2019.
- 121 The authors met Jamal in Dirkou town, northern Niger, in the same month. See Pellerin (2017) for more information on gold mining in Djado.
- 122 Author interview with Jamal, Dirkou, northern Niger, March 2017.
- 123 Author interviews and telephone interviews with a Darfur rebel leader, location withheld, March 2019; and former rebels, eastern Chad and southern Libya, May 2019; see UNSC (2019a, p. 27).
- 124 Author telephone interview with a former rebel, February 2019.
- 125 Author telephone interview with a former rebel, February 2019.
- 126 Author interview with a former rebel, eastern Chad, May 2019.
- 127 Author interview with a Darfurian gold miner, eastern Chad, May 2019.
- 128 Author telephone interview with an LJM leader, February 2019.
- 129 Author interviews with representatives of Sudanese, Chadian, and Nigerien embassies and communities, Libya, November–December 2018.
- 130 Author interviews with representatives of the Sudanese community and activists from Kufra, Tripoli, and Misrata, Libya, November–December 2018; and with an RSF member, location withheld, May 2019; see Jaspars and Buchanan-Smith (2018, p. xvi).
- 131 As mentioned above, however, there are also Sudanese smugglers or intermediaries, Sudanese and other migrants who became migrant intermediaries or traffickers, and Sudanese and other migrants who are forced to work as guards or torturers in clandestine centres where migrants are detained and tortured to extort a ransom.
- 132 Author interviews with Sudanese Zaghawa asylum seekers, Tripoli, November 2018 and March 2020.
- 133 Author interview with a Sudanese Zaghawa asylum seeker, Tripoli, March 2020.
- 134 This report uses a 2018 black-market exchange rate of LYD 1 to USD 0.2. It also uses a black-market exchange rate of SDG 1 to USD 0.02.
- 135 Author interviews with representatives of the Sudanese community, Beni Walid, Libya, November 2018 and July 2019.
- 136 Author interviews with representatives of the Sudanese Zaghawa community, Tripoli, November 2018; and a Darfurian asylum seeker, Tripoli, March 2020.

- 137 It thus only applies to Darfurians and not all Sudanese, even those from other war zones such as South Kordofan and Blue Nile. The other countries or communities listed are Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Yemen, South Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea, and Ethiopia (only members of the Oromo community). A small number of people originating from other regions or countries, including Chad, have also been registered.
- 138 The high proportion of Syrians is explained by the fact that since the deal between the EU and Turkey blocked the Turkey–Greece sea route, many Syrians made their way to Libya, including through Sudan, in order to cross the Mediterranean.
- 139 In 2018, 57,000 people in Libya were registered as asylum seekers or refugees, 19 per cent of whom were Sudanese. Because new registrations took place in 2018, it is difficult to understand the decrease, which can be explained only by resettlements (roughly 2,000 a year since 2017), ‘voluntary’ returns (to which few asylum seekers agree), and even by (decreasing) attempts to cross the Mediterranean, whether successful or not.
- 140 ‘Ahmed’ is a pseudonym used to protect the source.
- 141 Author interview with a Sudanese Zaghawa asylum seeker, Tripoli, November 2018.
- 142 Author interview with a Sudanese Zaghawa asylum seeker, Tripoli, March 2020.
- 143 Author interview with a Sudanese Zaghawa asylum seeker, Tripoli, March 2020.
- 144 Author interviews with Darfurian asylum seekers, Tripoli, December 2018; see Tubiana (2010). A Masalit song recorded in Trejing refugee camp in Chad in 2009 goes as follows:
 ‘You, our men, don’t remain lying in the camps!
 Stop drinking and think of your country!
 The whites are not here for you.
 Believe me, they don’t lose sleep because of you.
 You don’t stop drinking,
 Don’t stop joking,
 Don’t stop chuckling,
 But remember it won’t bring us our country back.
 Omar al-Bashir and his Arabs are happy, because you don’t even think of fighting them.
 What’s wrong with you?
 Have you lost your mind?
 God, enlighten me!
 Liars! Cowards! You hide in Farchana and Gaga camps!
 Are you afraid of death?
 Instead of living like refugees, why don’t you die for Darfur?
 Where are your weapons?
 None of you deserves to be called a man!
 But I know one day we will return!
 That day I’ll point to you, one by one,
 I’ll shame you, I’ll tell everyone you were afraid to fight Omar and his Arabs.
 I imagine my return to Terbeiba, to Geneina, in Darfur.
 I’ll never stop telling everyone you fled Sudan like rabbits!
 And now you’re pretending to be the chiefs of these camps!
 But it’s not your country!
 Idiots! Go back and fight!’
- 145 Author interview with representatives of the Sudanese community, Misrata, Libya, November 2018; with Darfurian asylum seekers, Tripoli, December 2018; and with an IOM official, Libya, July 2019; see Jaspars and Buchanan-Smith (2018, p. 39).

- 146 Author interviews with Darfurian asylum seekers, Tripoli, November 2018.
- 147 Author interviews with UNHCR and IOM officials, Libya, November 2018.
- 148 Author interviews with Sudanese migrants, including Darfurian asylum seekers, Libya, March 2020.
- 149 Author interviews with Sudanese and other asylum seekers, Libya, March 2020.
- 150 Author interview with a Sudanese government official, location withheld, October 2019.
- 151 Author interviews with Libyan GNA officials and activists, various locations, November 2018–July 2019.
- 152 Author interviews with Darfurian asylum seekers, Tripoli, March 2020.
- 153 Author interviews with asylum seekers evacuated from Libya, Niamey, Niger, January–February 2019; telephone interviews with migrants in Libyan detention centres, February–May 2019; interview with a UN official, location withheld, May 2019. See also HRW (2019) and Amnesty International (2019).
- 154 Author interview with an asylum seeker detained in Gharyan, May 2019; see Tubiana (2019c).
- 155 Author telephone interview with a migrant in a Libyan detention centre, February 2019.
- 156 By 2018 Sudanese still comprised 7 per cent of the sea arrivals in Italy, but the absolute numbers of migrants who successfully make the crossing has decreased drastically since then.
- 157 Author interview with a Darfurian refugee leader, Tulum, eastern Chad, May 2019.
- 158 Author interviews with Darfurian refugees, Tulum, eastern Chad, April–May 2019.
- 159 Author interview with a Darfurian refugee leader, Tulum, eastern Chad, May 2019.
- 160 Author interview with Darfur asylum seekers, Agadez, Niger, January 2019, and eastern Chad, April 2019; and with a Darfurian refugee leader, Tulum, eastern Chad, May 2019.
- 161 ‘Mohamed’ is a pseudonym used to protect the source.
- 162 Author interview with a Darfurian refugee, eastern Chad, April 2019.
- 163 ‘Salah’ is a pseudonym used to protect the source.
- 164 Author interview with a Darfurian refugee, eastern Chad, April 2019.
- 165 Author interview with a migrant smuggler, Tina, Sudan, April 2019; and with a Darfurian refugee leader, Tulum, eastern Chad, May 2019.
- 166 Author interview with a Darfurian refugee leader, Tulum, eastern Chad, May 2019.
- 167 Author interview with a migrant smuggler, Tina, Sudan, April 2019.
- 168 Author interview with a migrant smuggler, Tina, Sudan, April 2019.
- 169 Author interview with a migrant smuggler, Tina, Sudan, April 2019.
- 170 Author interview with a migrant smuggler, Tina, Sudan, April 2019.
- 171 Author interview with a migrant smuggler, Tina, Sudan, April 2019.
- 172 Author interview with a migrant smuggler, Tina, Sudan, April 2019.
- 173 Higher, more exceptional fares of XAF 150,000 (USD 255) were mentioned for those from further south (author interview with migrant smugglers, Tina, Sudan and eastern Chad, April–May 2019; and with a Darfurian refugee, eastern Chad, May 2019).
- 174 Author interview with a migrant smuggler, Tina, Sudan, April 2019.
- 175 Author interview with a migrant smuggler, Tina, Sudan, April 2019.
- 176 Author interviews with Darfurian refugees who first became gold miners, then migrants, eastern Chad, April–June 2019.
- 177 Author interview with a migrant smuggler, Tina, Sudan, April 2019.
- 178 Author interview with a Darfurian asylum seeker, Libya, location withheld, July 2019.
- 179 Author interview with a Darfurian refugee, eastern Chad, April 2019; see Tubiana, Warin, and Saeneen (2018, pp. 62–67).
- 180 Author interview with refugees who first became gold miners, then migrants, eastern Chad, April–June 2019.

- 181 Author interview with a migrant smuggler, Tina, Sudan, April 2019.
- 182 'Saddiq' is a pseudonym used to protect the source.
- 183 Author telephone interview with a refugee who became a gold miner, then a migrant, France, September 2019.
- 184 Author interview with a migrant smuggler, Tina, Sudan, May 2019.
- 185 Author interviews with Darfurian asylum seekers, Agadez, Niger, January 2019.
- 186 Author interviews with Darfurian asylum seekers, Agadez, Niger, January 2019.
- 187 Author interviews with Darfurian asylum seekers, Agadez, Niger, January 2019.
- 188 Author interviews with Darfurian asylum seekers, Agadez, Niger, January 2019.
- 189 Author interview with a Darfurian asylum seeker, Agadez, Niger, February 2019.
- 190 Author interviews with a Nigerien security officer, Niamey, April 2018; and with a government official, Agadez, Niger, February 2019.
- 191 Author interviews with Darfurian asylum seekers, Agadez, Niger, January 2019.
- 192 Author interviews with UNHCR officers, location withheld, February 2019; interviews and telephone interviews with Darfurian asylum seekers, Agadez, Niger, January and April 2019.
- 193 Author interviews and telephone interviews with Darfurian asylum seekers, Agadez, Niger, January, March, and April 2019; and with a Darfurian activist, location withheld, April 2019.
- 194 Author email communication with a UNHCR official, January 2020.
- 195 Author interviews and telephone interviews with Darfurian asylum seekers, Agadez, Niger, January and April 2019; and with a UNHCR official, December 2019; see Tubiana (2019b).
- 196 Author email communication with a UNHCR official, January 2020.
- 197 Author telephone interview with a Darfurian asylum seeker, Agadez, Niger, March 2019; see Reidy (2019).
- 198 Author telephone interview with a Darfurian asylum seeker, Agadez, Niger, March 2019.
- 199 Author email communication with a UNHCR official, January 2020; see also RFI (2020).
- 200 Author email communications and telephone interviews with UNHCR officials, January 2020.
- 201 Author telephone interviews with a Darfurian asylum seeker, Agadez, Niger, December 2019; and with a UNHCR official, January 2020.
- 202 Author telephone interview with a Darfurian asylum seeker, Agadez, Niger, January 2020.
- 203 The full texts of Cochetel's successive tweets are as follows: 'Destruction of the site, looting, repeated threats to our staff, multiple violations of the laws of the host country are just unacceptable! "Unresolved issues" are a request for automatic resettlement for everyone in Agadez. It is not just possible' (Cochetel, 2020a); and '80% of the reception centre destroyed by a minority of refugees from Darfur in Agadez who only want to hear about resettlement to Europe. Destroying the asylum space in Niger or elsewhere is easier than building & protecting it. It is a sad day for refugee protection in Niger' (Cochetel, 2020b). Cochetel's various tweets in defence of the EU's anti-migration policies rather than of refugee and asylum laws regularly provoked outrage in the media and among the humanitarian community; see, for instance, Montalto Monella (2019).
- 204 Author email communication with a UNHCR official, January 2020.
- 205 Author email communication with a UNHCR official, January 2020.
- 206 Author telephone interview with a Darfurian exile in Libya, May 2019.
- 207 Author interview with a Darfurian asylum seeker, Agadez, Niger, February 2019.
- 208 Email correspondence with an Italian human rights activist.
- 209 In addition, in 2018 the Government of Sudan announced its intention to dissolve the border guard and integrate (presumably some of) its members into the RSF (UNSC, 2019a, p. 38).

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Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the
Netherlands

A co-publication of the Small Arms Survey's Human Security Baseline Assessment for Sudan and South Sudan (HSBA) and Security Assessment in North Africa (SANA). Support for HSBA comes from the US Department of State. Support for SANA is provided by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.