

Darfur Dairies: The newest and one of the best books on Darfur

Review by David Morse

Darfur Diaries: Stories of Survival

By Jen Marlowe, Aisha Bain, and Adam Shapiro

Preface by Paul Rusesabagina

Nation Books, 2006. 260 pages, \$15.95, softcover

Darfur Diaries offers a sensitive encounter with Darfurians struggling at the edge of survival. It tells that story through the eyes of three independent filmmakers who traveled into Chad and Darfur in November 2004. At one level it is a book about the making of their film by the same name, available on DVD. At another level it is a deeply human book in its own right, not only for its interviews with refugees, IDPs, and rebel fighters, but because Jen Marlowe, its primary author, and the other two videographers Aisha Bain and Adam Shapiro, show their own vulnerabilities in their quest to understand what is happening in Darfur.

Other books portray the history of the Darfur conflict with more authority. (See reviews of Alex de Waal and Julie Flint) or more scholarship (Gerard Prunier). But Darfur Diaries is no less authentic and no less ambitious. It is also timely, written after the failure of the Darfur Peace Agreement signed in May 2006, and conveying the urgency today as Sudan government planes bomb their own people, and as the violence spreads into neighboring Chad.

The writers are keen observers who care passionately about their subjects, and they are also willing to raise critical questions. They press young rebels to learn their motives and whether they joined the guerilla movement freely, and they ask difficult questions of themselves as well. They encounter attitudes ranging from the wish for revenge to the wish for healing, from despair to hope, from shame to pride. The filmmakers also occasionally laugh at themselves. This is clearly a work of great love, and despite the tragic nature of their subject, there is something healing in getting to know the survivors. If you are going to read just one book about Darfur, read this one.

Darfur Diaries, the DVD, runs 57 minutes. It makes a good tool for fundraising and discussion. Screenings can be organized at which the filmmakers discuss their experience. <http://www.darfurdiaries.org/thefilm.html>. The sample footage does not do justice to the DVD.