

TIME

THE FORGOTTEN CRISIS

Photographs by
MOISES SAMAN

Ikawa Al Muhaajer, 27, lost her leg during Sudan's civil war, which has claimed some 150,000 lives and forced almost a quarter of its population of 50 million to flee their homes

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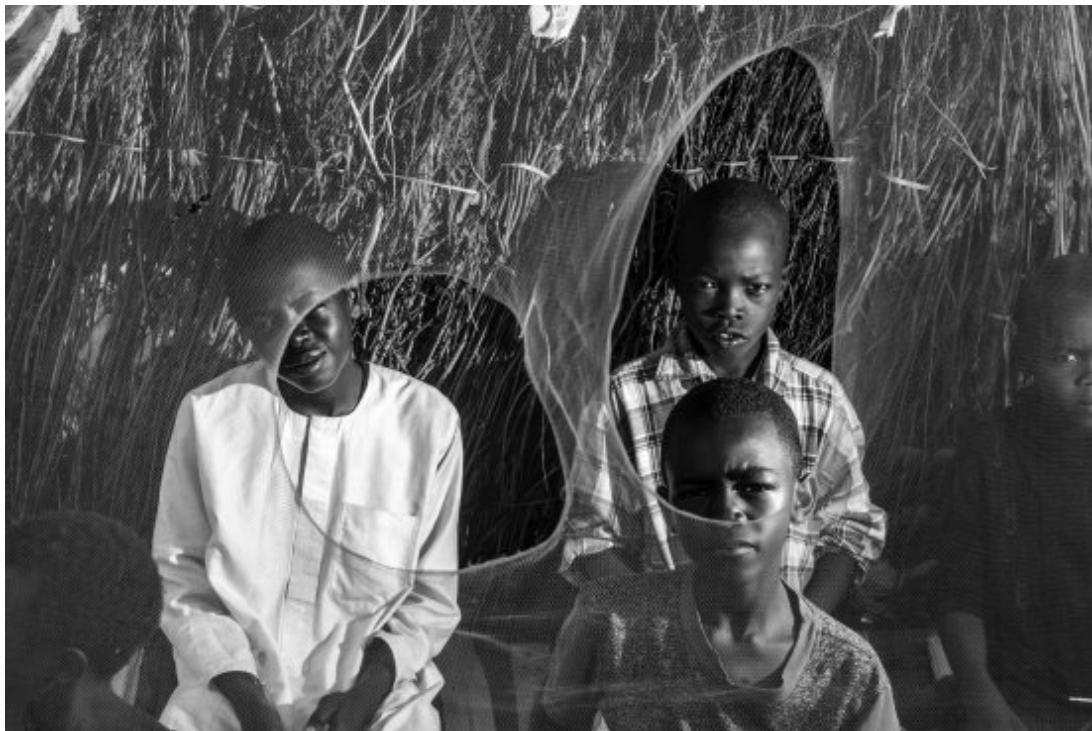
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Sudan's Crisis in the Shadows

Campbell is an editor at large at TIME, based in the Singapore bureau. He covers business, tech, and geopolitics across Asia. He was previously China bureau chief.



Invisible anguish is especially wretched. That has been Sudan's lot during two years of brutal civil war—slaughter that has claimed some 150,000 lives and forced almost a quarter of its population of 50 million to flee their homes.

Yet this forgotten war has received scant attention from an international community preoccupied with carnage in Ukraine and Gaza, and rising tensions in East Asia. That Sudan's plight remains largely hidden is what struck Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer Moises Saman when he spent almost two weeks in Darfur, and Sudanese refugee camps in neighboring Chad, in July and August. A veteran of covering conflicts in Iraq,

Afghanistan, Egypt, Libya, and Syria, Saman hitched rides on U.N. planes and trudged along mud tracks to reach this arcane frontier at Africa's beating heart. By embedding with the international NGO Médecins Sans Frontières, or Doctors Without Borders, he photographed maimed civilians, grieving mothers, and children conjuring games from the trash of people who have nothing to spare.

"What makes this conflict unique is the fact that it's in the shadows," says Saman. "This huge civil war is having such deep humanitarian consequences but has not been given the attention it deserves."

It's a conflict that officially began in April 2023 when a vicious power struggle erupted between Sudan's armed forces and its powerful Rapid Support Forces (RSF) paramilitary group. But the underlying tribal, religious, and political tensions have simmered for decades. Many of the tens of thousands who fled to Aboutengue refugee camp in eastern Chad belong to Sudan's Masalit ethnic group, whose slaughter by militias aligned with the RSF was declared a genocide by the U.S. in January, echoing an earlier genocide designation in 2004.

At Aboutengue, Saman documented how limited access to clean water, shortages of food, and overstretched health services compound the trauma of displacement. Meanwhile, the onset of the rainy season has exacerbated already deplorable conditions, transforming dust into thick sludge, flooding fragile shelters, and bringing swarms of malaria-carrying mosquitoes. Recent aid cuts have deepened hardships for families. Relief organizations estimate that the Trump Administration's slashing of USAID has shuttered 4 of every 5 emergency food kitchens catering to displaced Sudanese.

The U.N. estimates 7 million women and girls in Sudan have lost access to essential reproductive health services, leading to a spike in stillbirths, preventable maternal deaths, and newborn mortality. Saman photographed 24-year-old Khadija, who uses an alias for security and fled the capital Khartoum while eight months pregnant.

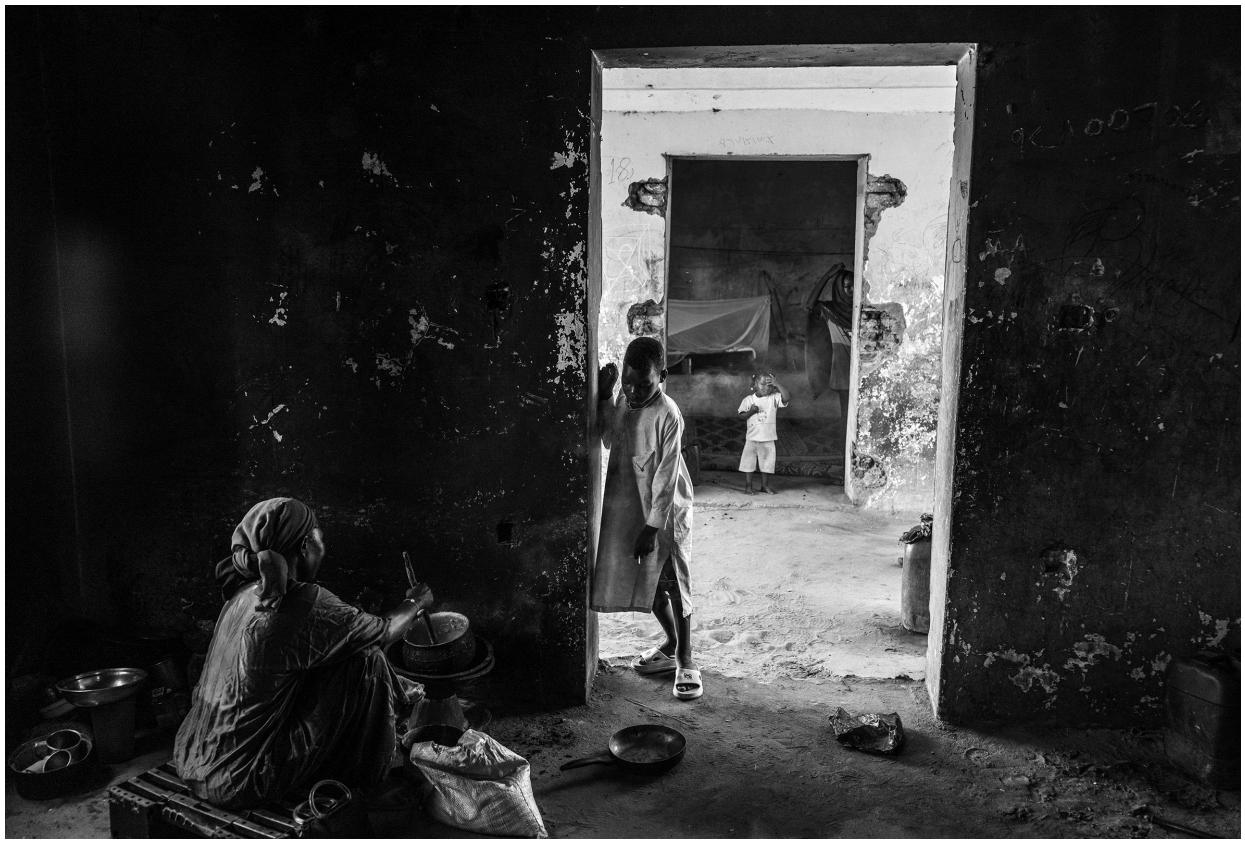
"We escaped as explosions hit near our house," she told him. "We left with nothing." Khadija underwent a clandestine cesarean in a makeshift clinic only for her baby to die hours later.

By traveling across the border into RSF-controlled western Darfur, Saman also met rebel combatants and captured the sorrows of their wounded fighters and bereaved kin.

“What I found interesting is the parallels in how the civilian population is suffering,” says Saman. “Be it families aligned with the RSF, or fleeing the RSF, they find themselves displaced, under a lot of stress, without access to proper food, medical attention, or shelter. It speaks to how this war is affecting everybody.”

Sadly, it’s also a conflict without any glimmer of resolution. For while historic animosities fuel the fighting, Sudan is yet another proxy conflict between the Middle East’s squabbling theocracies, with Qatar and Iran major backers of the Sudanese government, and the UAE bankrolling the RSF, according to U.N. sanctions monitors. (Abu Dhabi steadfastly denies stoking the bloodshed.)

The grim irony of Sudan’s predicament is that Africa’s third-largest country boasts significant mineral reserves, including huge quantities of gold, as well as vast swathes of arable land. Yet foreign powers feuding over these precious resources have destroyed countless lives as well as any hope of a prosperous future. Adds Saman: “These are people that just want to survive until tomorrow.”



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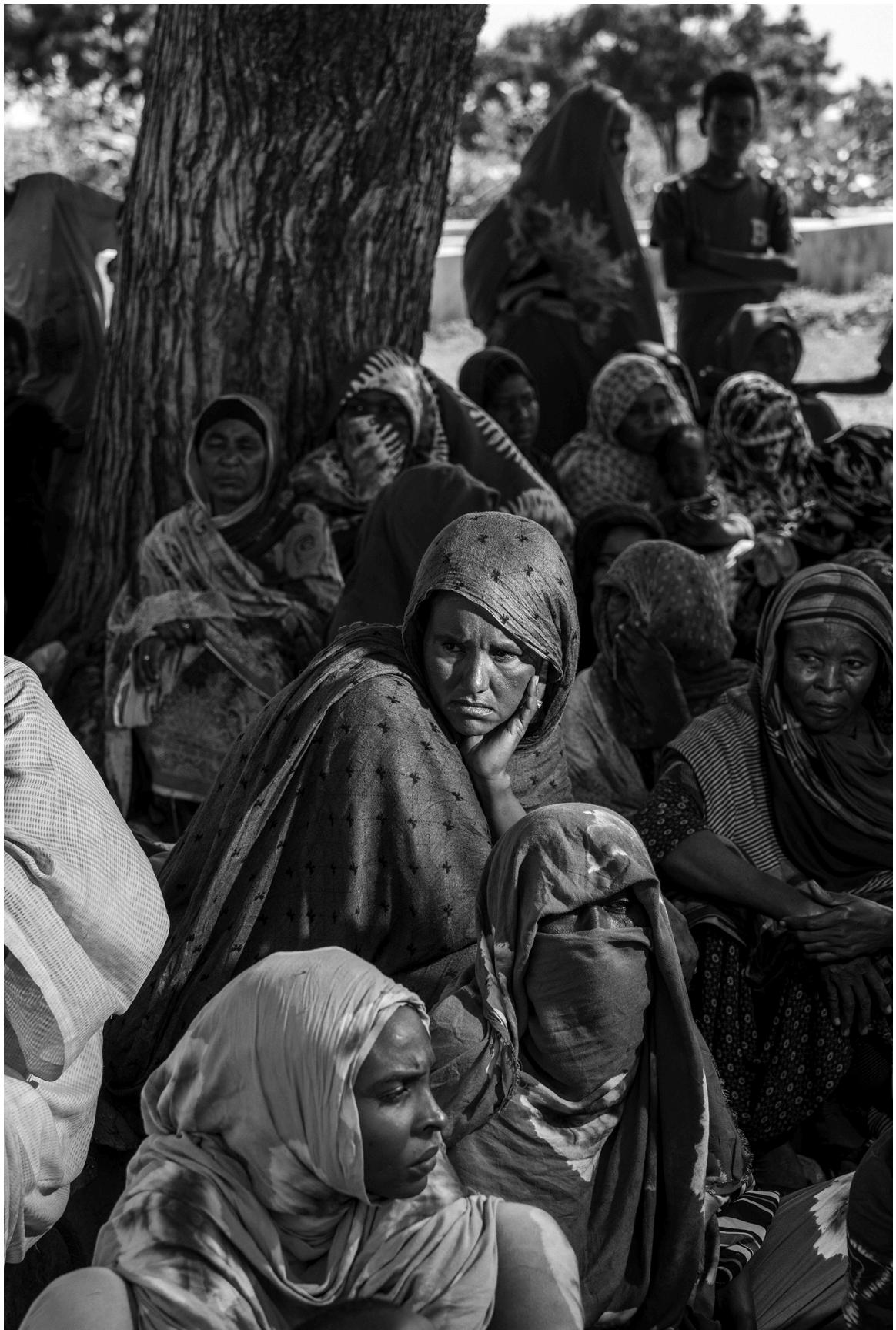












Photographs by Moises Saman—Magnum Photos for TIME

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