Raison D'etre

This multidisciplinary collection of essays is the first comprehensive work to grapple with the question of genocide in the Sudan. While a few recent books address genocidal violence in the Sudan, these books narrowly focus on the current crisis in Darfur, western Sudan. International attention on Darfur has tended to overlook, except in passing, the fact that similar genocidal crises occurred in southern Sudan almost continuously from the late 1950s until 2005, when the government and the Sudan People’s Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M) consummated the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Our approach is more comprehensive than these recent studies in that we address not only the current crisis in Darfur but also the prior decades’ long conflict in southern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains. Our broader approach articulates the historical continuity of genocidal violence in the modern Sudanese state. Our approach vividly demonstrates the interrelatedness of the modern conflicts between the center (the state) and the peripheral regions of the Sudan. It also sheds light on the possible causes of intra-peripheral conflicts.

Using individual case studies as a backdrop, we consider whether several key dimensions of genocide have been present in the Sudan during the postcolonial period (the late 1950s to the present). We present conventional interpretations of the international law of genocide as well as various critiques that advocate a more expansive understanding of genocide. In the latter regard, we suggest that the Sudan is one of the best contemporary case studies for such an exploration for two primary reasons. First, the Sudan exhibits many elements of both physical and cultural genocide; yet cultural genocide is not legally actionable under the conventional legal interpretation. Second, the Sudanese state’s consistent pattern of conduct over time and space – i.e., from the late 1980s to the present and from southern Sudan to western Sudan – seems to satisfy recent, more expansive interpretations of the international law of genocide.

The term genocide has been used to describe the current conflict in Darfur, which is under investigation at the International Criminal Court. However, the issue of genocide was generally avoided in the case of the southern Sudan and, although less so, the Nuba Mountains, where similar atrocities occurred during the 1990s. Consideration of whether the Darfur conflict merits the designation “genocide” thus implicates the same question concerning the earlier virtually identical and arguably similarly motivated atrocities in the South and the Nuba Mountains. It is too circumspect to consider only Darfur when it comes to the question of genocide and, indeed, any investigation of genocide in Darfur will be deficient if it fails to consider the state’s overall political project as manifested by its actions over time and space.

That the warring parties of the North-South conflict achieved a peace settlement in 2005 does not render this study irrelevant as it relates to that particular conflict. Indeed,

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1 These books include *Darfur: The Ambiguous Genocide* by Gerard Prunier (Cornell University Press 2005) and *Darfur: A Short History of a Long War* by Julie Flint and Alex de Waal (Zed Books 2006).

2 Although a long historical process serves as our backdrop, we focus on the postcolonial period.
sustained peace and lasting reconciliation rest fundamentally upon the establishment of truth and justice, however they are administered. Our ultimate aim is to contribute to attainment of these values.

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