

Sudan's Killing Fields: Perspectives on Genocide
Laura N. Beny, Sondra Hale, and Lako Tongun, editors

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.¹ 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).² 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,

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.

Table of Contents

Introduction

“Perspectives on Genocide” by Laura N. Beny and Sondra Hale

I. Constructing the State: Problematics of Identity and Race

“Beyond Darfur: Identity and Conflict in Sudan” by Al-Baqir al-Afif Mukhtar

“The North-South Conflict in the Sudan: An Historical Overview” by Kenneth Okeny

“Making the Sudan’s Tragedy Thinkable: Legacies of Slavery and Colonialism” by Amir Idris

II. Southern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains

“The Chollo (Shilluk) Predicament: The Threat of Physical Extermination and Cultural Extinction of a People” by Peter Adwok Nyaba

“Regimes of Truth: On Genocide in the Nuba Mountains” by M.A. Mohamed Salih

“Beyond Economics: Slavery in the Sudan as Genocide?” by Laura N. Beny

III. Western Sudan

“Disaster in Darfur” by Robert O. Collins

“A Distant Genocide in Darfur: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives” by R.S. O’Fahey

“Religion, Race or Resource Competition in Sudan? The Case of the Massaleit” by Leben Nelson Moro

IV. Gendered Dimensions of War and Genocidal Violence in Sudan

“By Any Other Name: Gender and Genocide – Women of Darfur and the Nuba Mountains” by Sondra Hale

“Women and Genocidal Violence in South Sudan” by Jok Madut Jok

V. Political Economy of Genocidal Violence

“The Political Economy of Oil and Genocide in the Sudan” by Benaiah Yongo-Bure

“Political Economy of Islamism, Revolution, and Genocides: The NIF ‘Salvation Revolution’ Regime in the Sudan” by Lako Tongun

Conclusion

“Sudan’s Genocidal Wars: A Normative Framework for Lasting Resolution” by Francis M. Deng

The Editors

Laura N. Beny is Assistant Professor of Law at the University of Michigan Law School. She received a Ph.D. in Economics from Harvard University and a J.D. from Harvard Law School. Beny is a research fellow at the William Davidson Institute at the Stephen M. Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan. In 2005-2006, she was National Fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

Sondra Hale is Professor of Anthropology and Women’s Studies and Coordinator of the UCLA/Global South Gender Initiative, University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). She works within the fields of gender, politics, and religion—Africa and the Middle East.

She has carried out six years of fieldwork in Sudan, and recently among exile and internally displaced communities, including the Nuba. Hale is the author of *Gender Politics in Sudan: Islamism, Socialism, and the State*, and dozens of articles.

Lako Tongun's Ph.D. is in Political Science. He specializes in comparative politics, international relations, political economy, Africa and Global South. He has published essays in *Imagining Home: Class, Culture, and Nationalism in the African Diaspora*; in *Urban and Rural Development in Third World Countries*; and in *Contemporary Issues in African Administration and Politics*, among others. He is an Associate Professor of International/Intercultural Studies and Political Studies, Pitzer College, Claremont Colleges, California.

The Contributors

Al-Baqir al-Afif Mukhtar is Regional Campaign Coordinator for the Middle East & North Africa, Amnesty International (London). He is the author of "The Crisis of Identity in Northern Sudan: A Dilemma of a Black people with a White Culture" in *Race and Identity in the Nile Valley: Ancient and Contemporary Perspectives*, Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban and Kharyssa Rhodes, eds.

Robert O. Collins is Professor of History, Emeritus, University of California, Santa Barbara. He is a preeminent scholar of African and Sudanese history. Some of his recent books include *Revolutionary Sudan: Hasan al-Turabi and the Islamist State, 1989-2000*, *The Nile, Africa's Thirty Years' War: Chad, Libya, and the Sudan, 1963-1993*, *Requiem for the Sudan: War, Drought and Disaster Relief, 1983-1993* (with Millard Burr), *Problems in Modern Africa, Problems in African History, Historical Problems of Imperial Africa, Civil Wars and Revolution in the Sudan, The Southern Sudan in Historical Perspective, Alms for Jihad: Charity and Terrorism in the Islamic World* (with J. Millard Burr), *Darfur: The Long Road to Disaster* (with J. Millard Burr), and *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa* (with James M. Burns)

Francis M. Deng is former Sudanese ambassador to Canada, the United States and Scandinavia. He is currently a research professor and Director of the Center for Displacement Studies at the School for Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University. He has also served as representative of the U.N. Secretary-General on internally displaced persons. His numerous writings include *A Strategic Vision for Africa* (co-author), *African Reckoning: A Quest for Good Governance* (co-editor), *Masses in Flight: The Global Crisis of Internal Displacement* (co-author), *The Forsaken People: Case Studies of the Internally Displaced* (co-editor), *Sovereignty as Responsibility: Conflict Management in Africa* (co-author 1996), *War of Visions: Conflict of Identities in the Sudan*, *Conflict Resolution in Africa* (co-editor), *Human Rights in Africa: Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (co-editor), and the novel *Cry of the Owl*.

Amir Idris is Assistant Professor of African history at Fordham University. He is author of *Sudan's Civil War: Slavery, Race and Formational Identities* and *Conflict and Politics of Identity in Sudan*, which explores the relationship between history and conflict in Northeast Africa and challenges the prevailing view that violent conflict results from deep hatreds and ethnic loyalties. Both books address the centrality of the historical legacy of slavery and colonialism in the crisis of post-colonial citizenship.

Jok M. Jok, an anthropologist and historian, is Associate Professor of History at Loyola Marymount University and a fellow of the Rift Valley Institute. He is the co-director, with John Ryle, of the Sudan Abduction and Slavery Project, which has created a database of persons abducted from Bahr-el-Ghazel province during the civil war. He is the author of *Sudan: Race, Religion and Violence, War and Slavery in Sudan*, and *Militarization, Gender and Reproductive Health in South Sudan*. In 2003-2004, he was a Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars Fellow in Washington DC.

Peter Adwok Nyaba is former Professor of Geology, University of Khartoum, Sudan and is currently a prominent leader of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). Dr. Nyaba is author of the award-winning book, *The Politics of Liberation in Southern Sudan: An Insider's View*.

Rex Sean O'Fahey is Professor of African History at the University of Bergen, Norway. He taught at the University of Khartoum in the late 1960s and 1970s, and has done extensive fieldwork in Darfur. He has written three books and over fifty articles on the history and cultures of the region. O'Fahey's other interests include African Islamic intellectual history, Sufism and the study of the African Islamic literary heritage. Some of his publications include *Arabic Literature of Africa: The Writings of Western Sudanic Africa (Handbook of Oriental Studies)* (with J.O. Hunwick), *A Catalogue of Fur Documents*, and *Kingdoms of the Sudan* (with J.L. Spaulding).

Leben Nelson Moro is a Student Associate of Queen Elizabeth House (Department of Development Studies), University of Oxford. His area of interest is forced migration. He has conducted research on refugees in Egypt and Uganda and internally displaced persons in South Sudan under the auspices of the American University in Cairo. Previously, he was Lecturer of Management at the University of Juba, Sudan. Some of his publications are "Livelihood Opportunities for Sudanese Refugees," in *Forced Migration Review* 20 (2004); and "Interethnic Relations in Exile: The Politics of Ethnicity among Sudanese Refugees in Uganda and Egypt," in *Journal of Refugee Studies* 17 (4) (2004).

Kenneth Okeny is Associate Professor of History, Salem State College. He was previously a professor of history at Juba University in Southern Sudan. He is the author of numerous articles on southern Sudanese and African history.

Mohamed Salih is Professor of Politics of Development, University of Leiden, The Netherlands. He is the author of numerous books and articles, including *African Democracies and African Politics*, *African Pastoralists: Resource Conflicts, Government and Institutions* (Ton Dietz & Abdel Ghaffar Mohamed Ahmed, co-eds.), "Precipitation Variability and Food Security" (co-author with T. Downing, F. Karanja, S. Karkouk & F. Zaal), in E. Ehlers & T. Krafft eds., *Understanding the Earth System, Local Environmental Change and Society in Africa* (Abdel Ghaffar Mohamed Ahmed, co-ed.), "The Bible, The Qoran and the War in Southern Sudan", in Niels Kastfelt ed., *The Bible and the Quran and Political Systems in Africa, Environmental Politics and Liberation in Contemporary Africa, Environmental Planning, Policies and Politics in Eastern and Southern Africa* (Shibru Telda, co-ed.), among many others.

Benaiah Yongo-Bure is Professor of Economics and Social Sciences at Kettering University. He previously taught Economics and Peace and Conflict at Wayne State University and Economics and Economic Development at the University of Khartoum.

He has published widely on economic development and socio-economic disparities in Sudan. He has also authored articles on regional integration as well as on peace and conflict resolution. His recent book is *Economic Development of Southern Sudan*.

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