BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

SUDAN AND SOUTH SUDAN IN 2015

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Naseem Badiey. *The State of Post-conflict Reconstruction: Land, Urban Development and State-Building in Juba, Southern Sudan*. Woodbridge, U.K.: James Currey, 2014. xv + 207 pp. Maps. Illustrations. Abbreviations. Tables. Appendix. Bibliography. Index. $90.00. Cloth. ISBN: 978–1847010940.

Laura N. Beny and Sondra Hale, eds. *Sudan's Killing Fields: Political Violence and Fragmentation*. Trenton, N.J.: Red Sea Press, 2015. xi + 307 pp. Map. Bibliography. Index. $39.95. Paper. ISBN: 978–1569023853.

James Copnall. *A Poisonous Thorn in Our Hearts: Sudan and South Sudan's Bitter and Incomplete Divorce*. London: Hurst, 2014. xxii + 316 pp. Maps. Abbreviations. Index. £19.99. Paper. ISBN: 978–1849043304.

Katarzyna Grabska. *Gender, Home and Identity: Nuer Repatriation to Southern Sudan*. Woodbridge, U.K.: James Currey, 2014. xv + 223 pp. Maps. Illustrations. Abbreviations. Glossary. Bibliography. Index. $80.00. Cloth. ISBN: 978–1847010995.

Matthew LeRiche and Matthew Arnold. *South Sudan: From Revolution to Independence*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012. xvii + 288 pp. Maps. Index. $37.50. Cloth. ISBN: 978–1849041959.

Mark Fathi Massoud. *Law's Fragile State: Colonial, Authoritarian, and Humanitarian Legacies in Sudan*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013. xxii + 277 pp. Maps. Illustrations. Tables. Appendixes. Bibliography. Index. $99.00. Cloth. ISBN: 978–1107026070.

Edward Thomas. *South Sudan: A Slow Liberation*. London: Zed, 2015. xiii + 321 pp. Maps. Tables. Bibliography. Index. $27.95. Paper. ISBN: 978–1783604043.

Christopher Vaughan, Mareike Schomerus, and Lotje DeVries, eds. *The Borderlands of South Sudan: Authority and Identity in Contemporary and Historical Perspectives*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. xiii + 237 pp. Maps. Table. Abbreviations. Index. $105.00. Cloth. ISBN: 978–1137340887.

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Sudan's and South Sudan's civil wars, secessionist movements, and humanitarian disasters, as well as the interest and involvement of foreign governments and NGOs in these developments, have attracted ever-increasing academic interest. In both traditional disciplines and entirely new fields, books, articles, and a proliferation of web-based ephemera have both vastly increased the amount of information and analysis widely available and made the task of sorting through it all much more difficult. Political developments have rendered certain geographical areas more important but less accessible than they were in the past as governments and other entities have restricted access to types of information and to researchers with particular interests. These policies and practices have affected the amount and quality of published results, although a review of some recent works indicates that general problems of published research on these countries derive less from their turbulent recent history than from the specific research choices and methodologies of scholars themselves, and in many cases from carelessness in the process of publication.

Many years ago Richard Hill told this reviewer of his unwillingness to update his magisterial *Egypt in the Sudan*, which was published in 1959. His reasons for demurring are irrelevant now, but an explanation for the reluctance of anyone else to take up the project is simple enough: Hill had all the major European languages required for the subject, plus, crucially, both Arabic and Ottoman Turkish, a proficiency that few (if any) scholars possess today. Call it the decline of Orientalism or simply "the language problem," this limitation has afflicted historical writing on Sudan in general, and now South Sudan in particular. As the books under review make clear, even some of the best work is limited by the authors' lack of important relevant languages, both for accessing archival material and for communicating with people on the ground. The result is too often work based on secondary sources or on translations or interpretations by others, often reflecting simple ignorance or casual neglect of otherwise accessible source material.

Even for research on northern Sudan, including Darfur, the recent huge increase in interest and published work on the part of foreigners who lack acquaintance with Arabic and European languages has resulted in blithe generalizations and journalistic impressions more appropriate in travel books. In the rapidly expanding amount of published work on South Sudan the problem is worse, because for this region some researchers lack *any* relevant language. With exceptions that are noted below, some writers, rather than recognizing the limits this ignorance imposes and acting accordingly, carry on in ways that render their work interesting but of little or no evidentiary value for either the general reader or the specialist. Methodological choices—such as reliance on anonymous oral sources in dangerous South Sudan—make some conclusions inherently suspect.

Several other general problems may be mentioned briefly. Books on contemporary Sudan and South Sudan seem afflicted by the passage of

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time between research and publication; several works reviewed here exemplify the problem. Another, almost invariably, is the uneven quality of contributions to edited collections. A third is the still-sputtering "War of Methodologies," which surely social scientists have won. Should historians care that E. E. Evans-Pritchard was an anthropologist and eschew his vast researches? (That he was the employee of a colonial government when he carried out some of them is another matter.) Should anthropologists ignore historical writing, even, notably, writing that is based on (boring, difficult- to-read) archival sources? A fourth, less excusable problem is in book production, especially editing and indexing. Helpful peer review may have died with G. N. Sanderson, but now even publishers' copyediting is rare; authors and publishers leave the editing to each other, with the obvious result that neither does it well or at all; publishers do not want to pay for professional indexing, so authors do it themselves, badly.

The best book reviewed here, and one of lasting value, is Edward Thomas's *South Sudan: A Slow Liberation*. Thomas wisely focuses on one of the country's ten states, Jonglei, about which he exhibits thorough knowledge. Through narrative accounts of the second civil war (1983–2005) and postwar years, well-written (even eloquent) extended anecdotes, and occasionally startling insights, he leaves the reader with the clearest reason yet in print to predict a grim future awaiting the newly independent South. The sections on the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) in power, its use of ethnicity, government payrolls, and other forms of patronage, and the concentration of wealth in the capital, Juba, are fascinating. The accounts in part 2, "Jonglei's Mutinies," are depressing and authoritative. And the author's outlook is measured but ominous:

> The war in Jonglei receives attention because it is cruel, intractable and has continued for the better part of the last fifty years. It has completely reshaped society, economic life and youth aspiration, and created new groupings of armed youth, drawing them into struggles between Juba politicians. . . . The armed youth live in a world where crisis is the rule, not the exception. . . . (292)

The book's long sections on historical background and political analysis do not avoid controversy. Though obviously a nonexpert, Thomas writes authoritatively about the Turkiyya (1821–85). He is perhaps too categorical on the political and economic aspects of the Anglo–Egyptian Condominium (1899–1955), but again excellent in analyzing the ideology of the SPLM, whose manifesto, he states correctly, "is little studied and often dismissed" (119). Containing good maps (although a poor index), the book is a welcome addition to the literature on South Sudan.

More ambitious, but less successful, is LeRiche and Arnold's *South Sudan: From Revolution to Independence*. The book surveys the history of the South from Sudan's independence in 1956, but it is mainly concerned with

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the periods of the second civil war and its aftermath up to the independence of the South in 2011. Much of the book's weakness has to do with undisciplined formatting and editing. A great deal of substantive material appears in sixty pages (fully one-fifth of the book) of often very long (and unindexed) endotes. Because the book lacks a bibliography, its short-form references to books and articles are difficult to use. One example illustrates the problem: Robert O. Collins's *A History of Modern Sudan* (Cambridge University Press, 2008) is abbreviated variously as "Collins, *Modern History*," "*Modern Sudan*," "*Sudan*," "O'Collins," and, in an epochal historiographical howler, as "Collins, *Root Causes*." Arabic is inconsistently rendered (and poorly indexed), and knowledge of relevant northern Sudanese background—Arab tribes of the borderlands, sources for North–South relations—is weak. Secondary sources for factual references are poorly chosen. Many substantive notes are "unsourced" altogether. Understandably but problematically, the sections on recent years rely on newspapers and the Internet. The result of these problems is a book packed with information of uncertain reliability.

A work with a similar temporal focus but very different treatment of the subject is James Copnall's *A Poisonous Thorn*. A BBC correspondent in Africa for many years, Copnall provides a personal account intended mainly for the general reader. The book has no bibliography; it relies on mainly secondary and popular sources in English, contemporary media accounts, and, of course, the author's own observations of events. The writing is clear and expressive, but the result is uneven: Copnall is best on the period 2009–12, when he worked in the Sudans, weakest on historical background and the complexities of North–South relations. As an educated and critical eyewitness with a feel for his subject, he nonetheless provides a good deal of local color and personal detail, not least of "ordinary" South Sudanese.

Mark Fathi Massoud's *Law's Fragile State* is disappointing. Although providing acknowledgments to a veritable Who's Who of institutional and academic support for the Ph.D. dissertation and subsequent research on which the book is based, the author apparently found no one willing or able to read the text and correct its many factual errors. The long part of the book (44–119) concerning the time before the National Islamic Front came to power in 1989 is especially weak on the colonial period which, after all, was the *font et origo* of the later and current systems he analyzes. This weakness stems, ironically, from the paucity and type of sources used; despite citing the vast trove of the Sudan Archive at Durham University, Massoud relies heavily—and uncritically—on the papers of two axe-grinding officials, the jovial Donald Hawley (whom he also interviewed) and the baleful bitter-ender, James Robertson (later Governor-General of Nigeria). A bibliography of secondary sources is lengthy yet poorly chosen. The result is the sort of account of preindependence Sudanese history that appears in British officials' memoirs: anti-Egyptian, anti-Mahdist, full of mistakes. Massoud cites the reactionary Harold MacMichael on the Sudan Political Service

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(which in the 1920s and '30s he epitomized) and Hawley on the colonial Legal Department as if they were disinterested observers rather than witnesses for the defense of colonial rule.

At the same time, painful errors are repeated several times. Two examples, offered in evidence of British arrogance, are the author's citations of the "Kitchener School of Law" and the colonial government's having "pointedly named the Islamic law school" (72) after General Gordon. But the Kitchener School was of Medicine, not Law, and the course for *qadis* (Sharia judges) at Gordon College was named after no one at all. These errors would be trivial in another work, but these institutions were central to the legal history that the author presents. An appendix (231–37) titled "Methodological Detail" highlights computer-aided searches at Durham and Dar Al-Kutub Al-Masri in Cairo (The National Library and Archives of Egypt), but its utility may be judged by the almost complete lack of any references in the notes section to more than a few sources from either place. The book's discussion of the period from 1956 to 1989 (85–118) relies mainly on anonymous interviews and again, poorly chosen secondary sources (Robertson once more, and even J. S. Trimingham, the colonial-era Anglican missionary), while the corpus of Sudanese nationalist writing is ignored. References to Arabic sources are welcome, but these are balanced by an apparent lack of interest in or knowledge of the South.

For the period since 1989 Massoud has a much better feel for, and indeed grasp of, the subject. Based mostly on interviews—notably with Babikr Awadallah, the former chief justice, but also with many others, and on official documents and good, up-to-date secondary sources—these well-written sections fully illuminate the decline in the rule of law under the current regime, the complicated interplay of religion and cynicism, the extraordinary rise in the number of practicing lawyers (an inflation purposefully driven by the government to discredit the profession), and the apparent ideological impetus of all things "legal." Where once (at independence in 1956) there was one lawyer for almost half a million Sudanese, by 2010 there was one for every 3,500, the product largely of the fake "universities" that have devalued all credentials in Sudan. The second half of this ambitious book shows enthusiasm for the study of legal history, energy and skill in handling a variety of sources, and an easy style that will be attractive to specialists and generalists alike. What the book needed and clearly did not get was a critical reading at either the dissertation stage or later.

The edited volume *The Borderlands of South Sudan* exemplifies the value of a clearly defined subject addressed by experts in their fields. In "The Rizeigat-Malual Borderland during the Condominium: The Limits of Legibility," Christopher Vaughan marshals discrete provincial (Darfur and Bahr al-Ghazal) and other colonial documents from the Khartoum archives to illuminate the vexed issue of South Sudan's border with Sudan, a frontier as well between the Arab Muslim and African worlds. The incomparable Wendy James asks an important question in the subtitle to her chapter:

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"Whatever Happened to the 'Safe Havens'? Imposing State Boundaries between the Sudanese Plains and the Ethiopian Highlands." Similarly Dereje Feyissa deals with an aspect of the state familiar to most Africanists in "Alternative Citizenship: The Nuer between Ethiopia and the Sudan." Oystein Rolandsen is as usual workmanlike and persuasive in a careful analysis titled "Too Much Water under the Bridge: Internationalization of the Sudan–South Sudan Border and Local Demands for Its Regulation." Edward Thomas's "Labor and the Making of Central African Borders" is an interesting new look at the vexed history of Kafia Kingi as a "Sudanic periphery." However, Guma Kunda Komey's chapter, "The Nuba Political Predicament in Sudan(s): Seeking Resources beyond Borders" is largely a gloss on secondary sources, while Immo Eulenberger's chapter, "Pastoralists, Conflicts, and Politics: Aspects of South Sudan's Kenyan Frontier" needed language editing. A sample is the following:

> In accordance with the habit of the majority of English speakers, I will call these ethnic groups tribes', not because I am not aware of the extensively discussed problems of the term, but because it refers to a *dimension of political organization* and resulting binding norms of cooperativeness and conflict regulation that is indeed much more pronounced here than among other (partly 'mere') ethnic groups who have widely lost it. (84–85, n.4)

By that point this reviewer had "lost it," too, which is a pity because the editors could presumably have done their duty. As befits a book on borders, however, this one has excellent maps, a credit to Durham's Cartographic Unit (but a weak index).

Several of the problems mentioned above may be exemplified in Katarzyna Grabska's otherwise engaging study, *Gender, Home and Identity: Nuer Repatriation to Southern Sudan*. Most of the research for the D.Phil. thesis on which the book is based was conducted in 2006–2007, and subsequent events in the Greater Upper Nile have rendered parts of it dated. The author has competency in Nuer, but apparently not Arabic, and despite the stated permission from her interview subjects that their names be disclosed (viii), she cloaks them in anonymity. The book brims with insights into the harrowing experiences of internal and cross-border refugees, and with sometimes surprising findings about their continuing problems upon return—the sort of information (indeed the sort of people) often lost in the "big picture" of humanitarian crises. A book mainly for area experts, it yet combines methodology and human sympathy to instruct current and future researchers in what is now a burgeoning field of refugee studies.

Naseem Badiey's book, *The State of Post-conflict Reconstruction*, about Juba, the capital of South Sudan, shares several characteristics with Grabska's book on the Nuer. Both had excessively long gestation periods; much has happened in—and to—Juba since most of Badiey's fieldwork took place, and we therefore have to understand the book as depicting the city in the context of the particular optimism that existed in the wake of the Comprehensive

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Peace Agreement of 2005. Fieldwork consisted mainly of interviews, many with people of rank, most identified in an appendix. There is also good use of published primary sources, which seem almost *verboten* in several of the other books reviewed here. A lengthy bibliography lists some irrelevant titles, although the copious notes feature the recent and important work of Oystein Rolandsen, the Durham anthropologist Cherry Leonardi, and Douglas Johnson. (Indeed, this as is good a place as any to mention the continuing and outstanding role Johnson has played in nurturing others' research on South Sudan and bringing it to publication.) But like Grabska's book, also published by James Currey, Badiey's is poorly indexed (an entry on "villages" lists one page, as do many other useless entries; an entry on "Mahdi" asks us to "see also" an entry that is nonexistent; and so forth). More seriously, the early history of Juba, a colonial creation, is poorly drawn. The book states, incorrectly, that "a British Governor-General was appointed to serve as military commander and senior civil administrator for each of the southern provinces"; similarly, the District Commissioners there were not "initially Northern Sudanese and Egyptian officers" (35). A few of the historical references checked by this reviewer were also erroneous. However, Badiey combines use of near contemporary documents, an array of impressive "gets" in interviews, and a feel for the people of Juba—during a period of tribulation reminiscent of medieval European sieges—to make a solid contribution to South Sudan studies.

As if more tales of woe were needed, we turn finally to Laura N. Beny and Sondra Hale's edited volume, *Sudan's Killing Fields*, which exhibits all of the weaknesses adumbrated above. Although published in 2015, the book includes pieces written much earlier or based on old fieldwork and other research now open to questions about its relevance. The decision to include Collins's "Disaster in Dafur" (sic), parts of which were published elsewhere as long ago as 2004, although memorializing the author, seems odd on several grounds. For example, placed midway through the book, it begins soporifically, "Darfur (Land of the Fur) is the western region of the Republic of the Sudan (*Jumhuriyat as-Sudan*) . . ." (141). A draft of Leben Nelson Moro's chapter on the Masalit was presented to a conference in 2001. Laura Nyantung Beny has nothing new to say about slavery. Several other chapters are similarly warmed over. It seems fair to say that no new research was conducted for any of the chapters. Most are based on secondary sources, and some exhibit the language problem in terms of source materials and analysis; the editors throw up their hands over transliteration (x). Why bother? But O'Fahey on Darfur, though brief, is always welcome, as is M. A. Mohamed Salih on the Nuba.

Sudan's Killing Fields thus fails both as a book and as a collection of essays. Far from fulfilling its grandiose goal of "establish[ing] a comprehensive record for posterity of the numerous assaults against human dignity in the Sudan" and thereby "facilitat[ing] ultimate reconciliation and lasting peace" (8), the book is neither comprehensive nor a record (nor particularly

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directed at Sudanese). It might have been doubled in length, or halved, without alteration to its impact. The partial bibliography serves no purpose; the index is almost useless. Unlike the other works reviewed here, which despite their faults have many strengths, it serves no clear purpose.

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