Chris Vaughan, *Darfur: colonial violence, sultanic legacies and local politics,*
*1916 – 1956*. Oxford: James Currey (hb £45 – 978 1 8470 1111 4). 2015, 246 pp.

This book sketches a detailed picture of the nature of indirect colonial rule and the
centrality of local systems of power and its agents in a part of the British Empire
most contemporary observers saw as a backwater. It is an especially important
contribution to the growing body of literature on chiefs and chieftaincies in colo-
nial Africa.

The author makes two important arguments on the essential nature of the state
in Darfur, despite its almost continuous transformations in the nineteenth and
twentieth centuries. His first claim is about the continuity of violence as a
defining element in Darfur politics, employed to extract wealth from the popula-
tion, to keep refractory local chiefdoms and their highly mobile populations in
check, and to generally coerce people into obeying the various projects of the
state. His second claim is about the ways in which political authority and its appli-
cation of violence was and is legitimated in Darfur, and the local perceptions of
these legitimations.

The book focuses on the colonial state but, as the introduction makes clear, it
does so in an effort to demonstrate the continuities between what is known
about the periods immediately before and what is known about the nature of
the current political situation in Darfur since the beginning of the millennium.
It is therefore a bit disappointing that the connections between the main exposé
on the sultanic and condominium eras is followed by only brief descriptions of
the political developments in Darfur in the new millennium, as well as on those
of the preceding period of state rule under the Sudanese Republic; these receive
only a paragraph in the final conclusion. Like the sultanate and the Mahdiyya
periods, which Vaughan describes in some detail, the independence period and
its political implications deserved a full chapter to do more justice to the
author's well-founded claims of continuity of rule in pre- and postcolonial Darfur.

Vaughan sketches the continuities in the ways in which the British use and abuse
of violence in Darfur were inspired – and, in a way, even justified – by the violence
they knew to have been in place prior to their arrival. Although the techniques of
violence have changed – the machine gun simply made violence cheaper and more
efficient than the cavalry-based armies of the sultanate ever could have been – the
reasons for its deployment have remained essentially similar. The inhabitants of
Darfur expected the state and its various agents to behave violently, but not too
violently. The legitimacy of the higher echelons of rule rested in part on their cap-
acity to curtail the rapaciousness of their underlings, be they princes of the sultan-
ate or some local village *shaykh*. Both the common population and members of
the state elite could lodge formal complaints or direct petitions against their super-
iors to higher echelons of power – either the sultan on the eve of colonization, or
the district commissioner in colonial times, or the leaders of the *umma* or National
Umma Party (NUP) on the eve of independence.

Vaughan's claims are substantiated by a detailed analysis of the interactions
between various layers of state policy at the local level, from the sultan and his
*aba diimang*, *abbo uumo*, *firsha* and lower power holders, to the governor and
his district commissioners and their *shartays*, *omdas*, *dimlijs* and *shuyuck*, to the
local population; and from the government in Khartoum to the governor and
the various insurgent and pro-government movements. These interactions are
shown in the core chapters of the book, which deal with the nature of colonial vio-
lence (Chapter 3), native courts and chieftaincy disputes (Chapter 4), territorial
administration and the policing of nomad society (Chapter 5) and the transfer
of colonial power to the new republic (Chapter 6). These chapters describe a

host of different types of local rule and rulers in various time periods, as well as their ever-changing levels and means of authority. Unless one is as familiar with Darfur's systems of rule as the author is, one can easily get lost between the *agawids*, *hakims*, *mandubs* and *maqdums*, despite the extensive glossary. But this murkiness is exactly the point the book makes: the adaptation of one system of rule by another and the constant tinkering characteristic of indirect local rule in those parts of the empire seen as peripheral – be it the sultanate, the British Empire or the empire on the Nile that is the Republic of Sudan – lead to a certain incoherence. This murkiness creates room for manoeuvre for local populations and power holders to shape the system of rule to their needs, and has allowed for continuities in old power games under new names. These dynamics are shown in concrete examples of disputes over leadership and their resolution.

As well as these continuities, Vaughan craftily writes of the slow and subtle changes that occurred in the nature of rule, its legitimation, its exercise and its contestation over the colonial period. Party politics, regulated taxation, the curtailment of direct physical punishment in favour of court rule and imprisonment, and the spatial reorganization of nomad land rights all helped transform the expression of violence in rule, as well as the right to claim redress against it, in the hundred years since 1916.

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Scott Straus, *Making and Unmaking Nations: war, leadership, and genocide in modern Africa*. Ithaca NY and London: Cornell University Press (hb US $79.95/£68.95 – 978 0 8014 5332 8; pb US$26.95/£17.95 – 978 0 8014 7968 7). 2015, xiii + 386 pp.

How do we understand and explain when and why genocide occurs? What causes states to systematically kill parts of their own populations? These are big and important questions that scholars and policymakers alike struggle to answer. If we knew which factors triggered genocide, we might be able to prevent them through early-warning systems. Scott Straus takes on this daunting task by trying to balance large-scale quantitative studies that have tended to be superficial and miss important local variables with more qualitative case-specific historical or anthropological studies that shed light on context and detail but lack explanatory power. Instead, he explores five case studies in some depth, in order, as he claims, to *build* theory rather than to *test* theory.

Often, genocide scholars compare the usual high-profile cases of genocide – Armenia, the Holocaust, Rwanda, Cambodia and Bosnia – when building theory. Straus, however, is more systematic, as he compares modern African states that, despite a number of differences, share a number of similarities. This approach makes his claims more modest but also more convincing. What makes his study even more convincing and methodologically systematic is his use of negative cases: places where one might expect a genocide to have taken place, given our knowledge of what triggers genocide, yet where genocide and other systematic violence have not occurred. His main conclusion is that ideologies and the agency of political leaders matter, and that the 'founding narratives' of the nation determine to a large degree whether states respond to rebel movements and other unrest with genocide or not.