

Sudan's Wars and Peace Agreements Edited by Jay Spaulding et al.

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Sudan's Wars and Peace Agreements is a collection of twelve papers that were to be presented at the 2008 Annual Meeting of the Sudan Studies Association in Florida, a meeting that was severely disrupted by extreme weather conditions in the USA and an attempted coup in Khartoum, resulting in many papers not being delivered in person. The subsequent decision to bring together a number of the contributors' papers in a published volume has resulted in an eclectic collection of scholarship on Sudan, with contributions from fields as diverse as linguistics, law and sociology. This diversity is both a strength and a weakness – the wide range of disciplinary backgrounds of the contributors makes for a fascinating grab-bag of articles – but despite an attempt to roughly group the papers into three thematically congruent sections ('Discourses', 'Resources' and 'Legacies'), there is an overall lack of focus that sometimes descends into incoherence.

The timing of publication also adds a note of cognitive dissonance to some of the essays in this collection. In mid-2008, when the papers were developed for presentation, Sudan was three and a half years into its Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and two and a half years away from the January 2011 referendum in which South Sudan would vote for independence or unity. Despite independence looking like the overwhelmingly more likely option for South Sudan, mid-2008 remained a time of great uncertainty and upheaval in both the North and the South, with

the political developments of the subsequent few years far from a foregone conclusion. By 2010, when the collection was published, however, the pro-independence Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) had gained an overwhelming majority in the South in the first democratic elections held in over two decades. Less than a year later, in January 2011, South Sudan held the referendum that resulted in the Republic of South Sudan becoming the world's 191st independent nation. In this context, many of the papers, such as Mousa M. Elbasha's exploration of the principle of voluntary unity as applied to South Sudan in the post-CPA, pre-referendum environment, while remaining intellectually interesting, have lost a great deal of their applicability and relevance. Mey Eltayeb Ahmed's paper on the CPA and its likelihood of promoting lasting peace suffers similarly from being overtaken by events. Since July 2011, the period of the CPA is over, and North and South Sudan are grappling with what this means, both in terms of their internal politics and their relationship with one another. It is natural for the focus of Sudan-related discourse to shift as a result, leaving Elbasha and Ahmed's contributions somewhat outdated.

Given the current political and historical context, the title of the collection sometimes feels misleading. The inclusion of papers written from a historical perspective, including Jay Spaulding's paper on medieval ironwork in North Sudan and Elena Vezzadini's paper on Sudanese slavery policies between 1898 and 1925, offers a degree of depth, but does not necessarily link with the book's overarching theme. While both these papers are interesting, and indeed touch on issues of peace and conflict, they do not necessarily have direct relevance to Sudan's wars and peace agreements, as implied in the collection's title.

Another issue of concern is the lack of Southern Sudanese voices in this collection writing on issues of political import. Although some contributions

from Southern Sudanese authors are included in this publication, their subject matter, such as Sam L. Laki's paper on the management of Nile waters, is largely unconnected to the political issues surrounding the wars and peace agreements which the book purports to discuss. While this is not a criticism of papers such as Laki's, which is of strong economic interest, the inclusion of only Northern Sudanese (and non-Sudanese) voices speaking on issues directly related to the CPA leads to the ultimate imbalance found in the final collection. This degree of one-sidedness is a direct reflection of the background of the Sudan Studies Association and the predominance of Northern Sudanese intellectualism, and as such is not something that the editors of this collection could have easily remedied. However, the existence of this bias is worth bearing in mind, especially for those reading these essays with limited knowledge of the political and historical context of Sudan's movements towards unity and separation.

Despite these concerns, this collection of articles offers much for those with a strong interest in Sudan. In particular, Ulrike Schultz's paper, 'Negotiating Belonging after the CPA: the Case of Bari Youth in Khartoum, Sudan', offers a fascinating perspective on issues of identity and belonging pertaining to Southern Sudanese remaining in the North in the post-CPA context. In addition, 'A Very Dark Number: Estimating Direct and Indirect Mortality in Southern Sudan, 1983-2005' by Catrien Bijleveld, Oliver de Gomme and Shanna Mehlbaum makes a valuable contribution to gaining an understanding of conflict's real impact on South Sudan during the most recent civil war. As is perhaps typical for papers developed for conference presentation rather than for publication, most of the papers in this collection raise more questions than they answer, but many offer indications of potentially absorbing and worthwhile areas of future research.

This is not a collection that should be recommended for readers without an existing level of knowledge of and familiarity with North and South Sudan. However, stemming as it does from the Sudan Studies Association, this is not necessarily the book's intention. With its breadth of approaches and levels of expertise, *Sudan's Wars and Peace Agreements* makes a stimulating contribution to twenty-first century scholarship on Sudan, and, as such, is of interest to academics working on issues pertaining to both North and South Sudan. It is perhaps most useful as a collection to be dipped into rather than read from cover to cover, as only the most devoted scholars of Sudan are likely to have an interest in the vast array of disciplinary and academic approaches presented in this collection. However, it is unlikely that anyone with an interest in Sudan would not find at least one article of relevance within this book.

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