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New Histories of New Nations: South Sudan and Sudanese  
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Nicki Kindersley

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## **New Histories of New Nations: South Sudan and Sudanese history**

*A History of South Sudan: From Slavery to Independence*  
By Øystein H. Rolandsen & M.W. Daly. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

*Anti-Colonial Resistance in Sudan*  
By Elena Vezzadini. Oxford: James Currey, 2015.

*Darfur: Colonial violence, sultanic legacies and local politics 1916–56*  
By Chris Vaughan. Oxford: James Currey, 2015.

*South Sudan: A New History for a New Nation*  
By Douglas H. Johnson. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2016.

*Civil Uprisings in Modern Sudan*  
By W.J. Berridge. London: Bloomsbury, 2016.

*Breaking Sudan: The Search for Peace*  
By Jok Madut Jok. London: Oneworld, 2017.

The Sudans have undergone major upheavals over the last fifteen years. By 2005, fifteen years of civil war was brought to an end in South Sudan, but conflicts escalated across Sudan's other borderlands, particularly in Darfur and in the Nuba Mountains. President Bashir's regime has continued to entrench itself in Khartoum, moving from a sanctioned pariah state to a partner in Europe's attempts to control north African migration. South Sudan has taken the opposite trajectory. From its secession in 2011, its state- and nation-building project has foundered: its militarised elites have continued patterns of violent and repressive government of an alienated and impoverished citizenry, while competing over resources and power, and sinking the country into renewed civil war and myriad internal conflicts.

Over this period, there has been opportunity for a new wave of research on Sudan and South Sudan. This opening up is not just of new travel and internal research opportunities, but of archives and a growing international and local academic

community. The work reviewed here, all published over 2015 to 2017, is part of this resurgence. All the books here (and the nature of reviewing them together) support a key point made by many scholars of the region: that Sudan and South Sudan must not be studied separately, and broken off from each other into the intellectual peripheries of Middle East and African studies respectively. These works demonstrate the necessity of reading the Sudans' history as multiple, entangled political histories across newly-established borders.

All the reviewed books also attempt two things. They fight against national and international stereotypes and oversimplifications of the countries, rooted partly in a significant dearth of research into the Sudans over the twentieth century. And more specifically, they seek to challenge dominant national narratives of history and historical memory. Both Berridge and Vezzadini work to situate their Sudan scholarship within both Middle East and Africanist literature, and in doing so, challenge each field; Vaughan and Johnson set out strong cases against the "isolation" of Darfur and South Sudan, in turn; and Jok, Rolandsen and Daly all fight against the supposed inevitability of South Sudan's secession and "failure."

Those of us who study the Sudans often feel we have to do this quite basic fire-fighting for two main reasons. Firstly, there are powerful common narratives around the Sudans, particularly around South Sudan's secession and descent into renewed civil war over from 2011 to the present; and secondly, as Rolandsen, Daly and Johnson point out here, there is still a dearth of deeply researched work on both countries, and so much work still to do to bring the Sudans' precolonial, colonial and post-independence historiography up to speed with either Middle East or African studies in general. And so all of the reviewed books are working towards common ends: to bind the Sudans into their geographical and intellectual context; to illuminate histories previously hidden by a common but limited research focus on Sudans' states and wars; and to re-examine methods and sources, particularly in the search for histories beyond elites and central state politics.

### **New Histories for New Nations?**

Many scholars are engaged in writing a 'new national history' for the newest country in the world, and there are two examples here: Øystein H. Rolandsen and

Martin W. Daly's *A History of South Sudan: From slavery to independence* (2016), and Douglas H. Johnson's *South Sudan: A new history for a new nation* (2016). These national histories are best read together, because their arguments and perspectives cut across each other in reflective ways. All three authors, though, note their common problems of historiography and approach, and each book deals with the framing of Sudan and South Sudan's national histories very differently.

The smallest book has the widest historical remit. Douglas H. Johnson's *South Sudan* is a pocket-sized long durée history in 184 small pages. It begins in the last millennium—the book often works in centuries—in a huge survey of South Sudan's historiography, which is effective, even if highly dense in places. Johnson takes on the idea of the “isolation” of Sudan's peripheries, and of South Sudan specifically, and a question that challenges the other authors reviewed here: of how to “combine the internal history of indigenous communities with a record of South Sudan's involvement with the wider region” (19), and to counter the state archival view of Sudan's supposed “peripheries” as remote, alien, hostile and primordial.

Johnson attempts to write against the archives, taking the broadest view of historical sources of all books here. This is a brisk account, relying on some level of confidence on the part of the reader. Johnson spends as much time on the common “bovine idioms” and cattle cultures that cut across South Sudan as he does on laying out his reading of tribe and ethnicity at pages 19 to 20, and religion, chiefs and languages over 20 to 21. The book expounds on the heterogeneous and changing dynamics of precolonial authority over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries using short examples of key figures, and only reaches the history “of contested nationalisms and the failure of the politics of national unity” of the mid-twentieth century onwards on page 116; this is very satisfying for a fellow historian interested in longer-term structural forces shaping Sudanese politics and society, and a real welcome challenge to many recent histories of South Sudan that primarily start from external invasions in the early 1800s, of which Rolandsen and Daly's work is an example.

Like all the authors here, Johnson asserts and evidences South Sudan as not isolated but rather deeply engaged in a broader and deep precolonial African history. He sets out South Sudan's history as one of mobility, hybridity and long-established

cultures of polity-making and societal organisation. As an anthropologist and archivist of Sudan for around fifty years now, Johnson has a significant archive of diverse material to work with—from folktales and interview records with long-dead elders, to his work on the South Sudan National Archives and colonial papers—and he gives lively examples of individuals and events across the slaving states of the Darfur and Sinnar sultanates, the assimilationist empire of the Azande, and the “anti-state” social alliances of the Padang Dinka. In a Sudanist literature that is dominated by studies of the creation of the colonial and postcolonial state, this is refreshing.

The nineteenth century’s colonising and enslaving private traders and state agents are thus set in context. This period, Johnson argues, was not just a time of brutal violence, but also of engagement and adaptation: establishing patterns of flight to “deeper rurals” (page 76), the creation of regional diasporas and languages, and a complexity of definitions and self-definitions that underpin the issues around being “South Sudanese” today. Moving beyond Sudanese independence in 1956, the book then whips through southern Sudan’s contemporary history, including a summary of recent literature on military recruitment, violence against civilians, the instrumentalisation of ethnic ties and customs; a survey of South Sudan’s governance crisis is fitted in at the end. Some readers will find this book frustrating in its chronology and balance, but it effectively fulfils Johnson’s own remit of an “interim report” aiming to “stimulate conversation, debate, and further research” (28).

Øystein H. Rolandsen and Martin Daly’s *History of South Sudan* is similarly “brief and sweeping” (viii), but follows a more usual pattern and chronology for its national history, moving (as the title describes) “From Slavery to Independence.” This means that the book falls slightly into the trap of the “standard” nationalist narratives that it aims to critique: its first chapter deals with the geography, “peoples” and ethnicity of South Sudan in a manner similar to the “‘natural’ and timeless” portrayals of “the South Sudanese” that the authors explicitly criticise in their Preface. Here, Rolandsen and Daly also set out their huge mission: How did South Sudan become a political and administrative entity? Why did it separate from Sudan? These questions continue throughout the book, with sections handily structured around key issues: “[was the first] civil war inevitable?” (77); “was the [second civil] war unnecessarily prolonged?” (118); was the Comprehensive Peace Agreement that ended the Second

Sudanese civil war in 2005 “a missed opportunity?” (139). This framing, and the tightly-written book’s authoritative voice, makes this a useful entry text and reference for those interested in South Sudan.

But while Johnson argues that even precolonial South Sudan was not isolated or remote, Rolandsen and Daly portray South Sudan as at very least a “geographical dead end,” and argue that its modern history is one of “steadily increasing interaction... [with] the outside world” (vii, 2). Johnson may also dispute the authors’ summary of South Sudan’s ethnic groups as largely “territorial.” with “internal mobility... exceptional and temporary” (3). This is partly because Rolandsen and Daly are more cautious than Johnson when it comes to deploying local (hi)stories of precolonial migrations and origins; instead, they call for further interdisciplinary study that includes archaeology, immunology and climatology, to apply science to these oral histories (8).

Rolandsen and Daly also strive here to rebalance their history against a dominant literature that describes (if accidentally) outsiders as change-makers and South Sudanese residents as passive actors. They focus extensively on Zande imperial history, for example, which they rightly note has been occluded by histories of imperial intervention in the region. But the authors maintain a focus on the emergence of states and military powers—“the chief agents of politics and warfare” (viii)—and as such this book is primarily a history of military and political elites. Histories of everyday life and survival for the majority of the population living and surviving within the colonial and postcolonial orders are relegated to brief statements and notes such as “most communities suffered permanent insecurity and disruption of livelihoods” (132). The authors instead focus their attention on the militarisation of South Sudanese politics, which they date from the first civil war in the 1960s. After a detailed study of the two civil wars, they move to a consideration of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement and South Sudan’s independence period. In this final section, Rolandsen and Daly ask “what South Sudan’s sovereignty entails and what limits it” (159): they argue that today’s state has limited control over its territory and people because of the contested structures and violent cultures of governance the region inherited from colonial incursions and the postcolonial Sudanese regimes. The authors subsequently question whether South Sudan could be “at the forefront of a global trend of fragmentation” (159).

While these three authors place different emphases on governance legacies and nineteenth-century histories, both books rightly stretch the roots of South Sudan's national history back in time. They demonstrate, also, that significant areas of the region's history have been written by relying on limited, foreign and state-centred sources and which demand further study; most notably the histories and legacies of slavery, for example the administrative and slave trading fort of Deim Zubeir, recently listed for consideration as a UNESCO world heritage site. And both books usefully highlight new fields of literature and possible research: Johnson through in-text references to recent studies, and Rolandsen and Daly in an excellent bibliographic essay appendix.

Jok Madut Jok's book *Breaking Sudan: The search for peace* (2017) is an example of the extent of research still required to build both Sudan and South Sudan's national histories, particularly from the perspective of their ordinary residents. Jok, a South Sudanese anthropologist and public intellectual, sets his book directly against the common idea—reflected on at the end of Rolandsen and Daly's work—that South Sudan's new state is an immediate “failure,” or that it was “pre-failed” in production.

Jok sets the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005 as the turning point for the book, and reflects back on Sudanese and South Sudanese history from the vantage point of South Sudan's renewed civil wars from 2013. This means he struggles with the question of when to publish, and what to address, immersed as he is in the politics, intellectual culture and historiography of his own country. While he writes with urgency and passion, Jok sets out a vastly ambitious agenda, and the book struggles accordingly: he aims, among other things, to set out “an ethnographic study of how people lived with and in war for so long”; to ask “what changed in social structures, cultural norms, and the perceived moral universe?”; “to document, analyse and problematise the relationship between Sudan and South Sudan”; to contribute to “the debate among the Sudanese people about the new agreements, rules and regulations that govern population movement, citizenship, cross-border trade and social networks across the new international border”; to set out the history of post-colonial Sudan; to “weigh the challenges that have faced the two Sudans since the CPA was signed”; and to trace how the 2011 secession of the South set out the paths to new wars in both

countries, and to provide an account of the current climate for both states' efforts to control their own sovereignty and security.

The book thus covers significant ground, but with inconsistent depth and focus, and with some repetition. The most valuable chapters deserve to be books in their own right. Chapter Three is the most successful and exciting, based on Jok's years of research experience and reflections: he sets out a "story" of a particular remote village, Ror Col in Warrap State, in 2005. This is a close anthropology of village-level impacts and understandings of the civil wars. Jok sets out direct speech of residents, writing local voices back into this national history; the chapter focuses on a trek Jok took with a young rebel soldier, Bol Kuek, and explores Bol's narrative of recruitment, his conceptualisation of the war and its political theory, and how he makes sense of the dynamics of survival within the rebel movement and the war in general. Similarly, although less rooted in detailed narratives, Chapter Five—on the media in the Sudans' wars—could be a monograph in itself, exploring information flows across hard-to-reach areas of the Sudans in war, and the politics and practice of recording atrocities, inciting violence and driving mobilisation. This is also true of Chapter Six's quick survey of the theory and practice of corruption in South Sudan.

Jok's extensive aims also contribute to some conceptual worries: the book aims to cover "192 years" of acrimonious history between the "two new Sudanese states" (x) but this framing reads current politics, boundaries and states too far back in time and conceals a more complex and fragmented history—set out in the previous two works—that would otherwise support Jok's discussions of the complex bases for the Sudans' nationalisms and identities. In contrast to the above books, Jok sets out overarching ethnic categories in his work, including in his map of South Sudan, which blocks out territory according to the "key ethnic groups" of Dinka, Nuer, Murle and "other." Rightly, Jok's clear frustrations with, and anguish over, the current situation in both Sudans are made plain here. But I would suggest that he could be more creative, and more positive, in his reading of the strength of ethnic identifications and the pursuit of a collective national future. As Johnson points out, there are many commonalities and shared ideas in South Sudan that can be built on. And despite stating, in his introduction, that he would not take a personal position on the events he details, Jok does make some provocative statements. Throughout the book, Jok repeats the idea that people expected

too much out of their new government; that their expectations “far outweighed the abilities and willingness of government officials to respond adequately” (251). And controversially, he sets out the argument that Riek Machar planned and engineered a violent coup against President Kiir in December 2013, a reading of events disputed by all the other authors in this review.

### **Histories Reconsidered: Colonial and postcolonial Sudanese political organisation**

The second set of books under review here take a different path to tackling national/ist histories and historiographical questions. Each author tackles a key frustration. Elena Vezzadini’s book *Lost Nationalism: Revolution, memory and anti-colonial resistance in Sudan* (2015) and W.J. Berridge’s book *Civil Uprisings in Modern Sudan: The “Khartoum Springs” of 1964 and 1985* (2016) both take up incidents of popular revolution—successful, and failed—to challenge particular readings of Sudanese nationalisms, forms of political action, and intellectual history. Along with Christopher Vaughan’s *Darfur: Colonial violence, sultanic legacies and local politics, 1916–1956* (2015), all three authors take up the challenge of writing against the grain of state archives, hunting out Sudanese histories of political action and local theories of governance.

Vaughan’s much-needed and well-written book examines Darfur’s own modes of governance and resistance, examined through his core argument about the interconnection of state power and local politics. Like Johnson, he writes explicitly against the idea of Darfur as a remote blank space (at least in the imagination of outsiders), and against the more general idea of precolonial, pre-invasions, and pre-slave trade Darfurian history being a “land outside time.” Vaughan sets out a “deep history of independent statehood” back to at least the late seventeenth century, and places the region within a wider network of trade, slave routes, and Hajj migrations (2). This history is set against accounts that focus “blame” for Darfur’s contemporary violent politics specifically on the colonial state, particularly that of Mahmood Mamdani, who argued that colonialism caused a fundamental break in patterns of governance and ethnicity in Darfur.<sup>1</sup>

Instead, Vaughan argues, the colonial era was more a “dialogic process” than a rupture. His chapters aim to demonstrate the “enduring pre-colonial conceptions of political authority” and how many of what we see as colonial state actions—the propagation of violent militias, tribal territorialisation and centralisation of power—were sometimes enthusiastically engaged with by local elites (201). This interaction between state and local politics is, he argues, at the heart of how the state took root as idea and practice in Darfur. Vaughan picks up from Cherry Leonardi’s excellent recent book *Dealing with Government in South Sudan* (2013) in emphasising that the Sudans’ “chiefly authorities” are not some kind of benign representative for local populations (13–14), and that the colonial and postcolonial state is better viewed as a process, not a remote institution.<sup>2</sup>

Vaughan’s exciting source material allows him to demonstrate these continuities in governance practice over the pre- to postcolonial period here. As the machine gun undermined possibilities for rebellion, local authorities sometimes found their interests aligned with the under-resourced colonial state, which devolved responsibility for security and the use of force to local militias. Vaughan argues that these local authorities were, like the colonial regime, also engaged in making the local population legible (following James Scott),<sup>3</sup> for instance in the (failed) colonial attempt to divide “ethnic populations” into *dars* (homelands). Colonial officers were not the only people trying to assert “legible territorial boundaries” on mixed and mobile populations (156).

The book ends its analysis at independence in 1956. The late colonial setting, Vaughan argues, saw the rise of internal competitions and the extension of local Darfur elites into national and state spheres, but no revolution in the state’s conceptualisation. In this reading, Sudan inherited “a hybrid state” at independence, a pluralistic “and often contradictory institutional and discursive political landscape bequeathed to post-colonial states, which continues to shape political dynamics and indeed expectations and visions of the state to the present day” (7).

Vaughan does not spend much time on the postcolonial or present-day comparatives, but does note some key continuities. He argues that the horrific violence of 2003 and 2004 was not a change in the “essential dynamics” of Darfur. Violence, he

says, “was always the defining context for the local negotiation of political authority” (7–8); echoing an argument of Rolandsen and Daly’s book. Vaughan notes how the Sudanese state has continued to “licenc[e] the violence” of local groups and individuals in efforts to bring “peace and order”; this counterinsurgency on the cheap is not a new invention of the 1980s, but a revival of old strategies by an “over-stretched colonial state,” “playing on and exacerbating local divisions in order to find ways into the societies it wished to control” (4).

W.J. Berridge takes a more explicit route to comparative history as a reflection on current-day struggles in Sudan in *Civil Uprisings in Modern Sudan*. Berridge compares Sudan’s two civilian uprisings of 1964 and 1985, specifically to ask the question: “Why is it that the Sudanese public were able to overhaul two military governments and establish liberal democracies in their place in an era where autocracy was the norm?” (215)

The book is focused tightly on answering this question, and leaves very little room for wider questions, but the comparison does provide a useful way in to discussing Sudan’s political topography and processes of change—at least of change at the centre of the Khartoum government. This is an implicitly political project, provoked by the Arab Spring uprisings, and set within the shifting Sudanese historiography of the uprisings: not least that of President al-Bashir’s government, who has recently tried to overwrite the history of two popular uprisings against military regimes, claiming Sudan’s *intifada* for his own 1989 military coup. Berridge states that a historical reassessment of these two civilian uprisings “is crucial to conserving and understanding Sudan’s pre-1989 democratic heritage.” The book ends with a chapter reflecting on this 1989 *intifada*, with an eye on the 2011 protests in Sudan.

In this book, Berridge is working—like the other authors here—to challenge a specific dominant narrative of these events within the broader regional historiography. She argues that both uprisings have been written out of, or ignored in, Middle East-centred studies of regime change because they are anomalies to a standard academic narrative of Middle East exceptionalism and political order. Berridge also argues that these are anomalous to an Africanist historiography that—she says—generally asserts that pro-democratic uprisings occurred after the end of the Cold War in the 1990s wave

of democratic reform. This argument is less effective than its Middle East literature counterpart; recent works on 1960s uprisings across East Africa would have supported a more developed Africanist analysis here.<sup>4</sup>

The strength of this work is its dense and focused study of the political topography of each uprising, based on extensive and generally overlooked Arabic-language newspaper archives as well as interviews. The body of the book is set out specifically to guide us through this new detailed history and comparison: Chapters One and Two tackle the causes of the October 1964 and the 1985 *intifadas* in quick succession; Chapter Three compares the state of political parties in both revolutions; Chapter Four looks at the supposed “modern forces” of students, professionals and unions in both uprisings; Chapter Five is an exciting study of the internal topography of Sudan’s security and army in both cases; and Chapters Six and Seven deal with the aftermaths of each insurrection, surveying the missed opportunities and powerful opportunists in both.

Berridge’s main statement concerns the nature of “revolutionary” actors in Sudan. She argues that the line drawn between Sudan’s “modern forces”—the Communists and the educated middle classes of the left—and Sudan’s Islamists is too rigid. The book’s detailed studies of both uprisings demonstrates the complexity of Khartoum society, and how difficult it is to differentiate between these supposed civil, secular forces and Islamist actors; instead, we see “civil” revolutionaries engaging in various forms of political Islam and secular civil activism at the same time. The book asks: What constitutes specifically “Islamic” or “secular” revolutionary action in uprisings that supported both democratic and liberal principles and the idea of an Islamic constitution? Possibly most compelling is the chapter on the army and security forces, which draws on Berridge’s past work on police and public order laws to explore security forces and the military as manifestations or reflections of fragmented political and social forces in Sudan in general.

Although the book recognises the Khartoum-centred nature of these uprisings, involving a minority of Sudan’s population, Berridge does try to evidence that 1964 was “a genuinely national revolution.” She posits that the 1964 and 1985 (and indeed the 2011) uprisings failed to generate long-term change because of Sudan’s long-

discussed centre-periphery dynamic, where the situation on Sudan's peripheries can be exploited by Khartoum-centred actors, both to spark central change and to entrench central power. She notes that there were "flashes of hope" on each occasion that this centre-periphery dynamic might be broken (219).

This is an area where the tight focus of the book precludes further questions based on its exciting source material. Were the manifestos "in support of the October Revolution" from the General Union of the Nuba Mountains (and similar statements made by various Anya-Nya factions at the same time, if she looks further south) really demonstrations of direct support for the uprisings, or expressions of more localised revolutionary ideas? How did the Khartoum-focused propaganda of the 1985 *intifada* interact with other "peripheral" movements' political ideologies of the time? Berridge's book highlights the necessity of studies that include regional demonstrations and reactions to these moments, and a wider intellectual history of political insurrection written from outside of the urban centre.

Elena Vezzadini's book *Lost Nationalism* endeavours to do this. She looks at another "failed" Sudanese revolution, that of the White Flag League in 1924. Of all the books reviewed here, Vezzadini's looks most specifically at Sudan's shifting historiography; the book is a study of both history and historical memory. This is a labour of love, to reconstruct a revolution that "has been lost twice" (7): she notes that many people in Sudan today could not identify Ali Abd al-Latif—the leader of the White Flag League—when his image appeared next to that of the Sudan People's Liberation Army leader John Garang de Mabior on a celebratory banner in Khartoum in 2005. (Vezzadini does not reproduce this image here, but it can be found in Johnson's book at page 98.)

Like Berridge, Vezzadini aims to expand Sudan's historiography into both Middle East and African studies. The book develops the study of early Sudanese nationalism beyond its continued dominant focus on Egypt-Sudan relations. More broadly, Vezzadini argues that nationalism as a political force has been overlooked in recent trends within African studies, relegated to a "failed" elite-focused reactive or imitative force emergent after 1945. This study of a pre-1939 nationalist uprising, she says, demonstrates the subtle impact of the First World War, as well as this broader

idea of African nationalisms. The book also speaks to the revived research field of Arab nationalism, in which nationalist movements are non-linear, heterogeneous, and populated by activists who struggled to set out both moderate and radical agendas in fast-moving and confusing times.

The book's activists are similarly complex. Vezzadini builds on a small but important literature in Sudan studies that details the complex pre- and postcolonial position and politics of the *Sudani*, the colonialist's "detrribalised natives," of mixed African heritages and slave descent, who complicate the emergent Sudanese Arab national narrative and identity, of whom Ali Abd al-Latif is a key example. As such, Vezzadini focuses on the events and actors of 1924 as a means of discussing the politics of representation, and of the violent, racialised history of slavery in Sudan.

The book follows a narrative arc of the establishment, growth, regional participation, ideology and membership of the movement. Chapter Two is a study of how early colonial-era Sudanese nationalisms formed and spread from the 1910s, and Chapter Three focuses on the organisation of the 1924 revolution. More interestingly, Chapter Four moves into a reconstruction of the structure of the White Flag League, drawing on state papers' marginalia, personal archives, and newspapers; the chapter should be linked to the final sections of the book, where in Chapters Eight to Ten Vezzadini looks at how colonial education, labour and military systems linked men in networks that made political action across racial and class backgrounds somewhat possible.

This is where Vezzadini's work is exciting: she challenges the dominant historiography by demonstrating that the movement was far larger than previously supposed, and that it drew in significant popular support. This is most successfully done in Chapter Five, which focuses on the movements in Port Sudan and El Obeid, where local activists adapted the aims of the League to their own priorities and political understandings. The main criticism of this book would be that it attempts so much in so little space: Chapter Six's study of eighty-five texts circulated in 1924, demonstrating the ambiguities of nationalist language, and Chapter Seven on the symbols, songs, and emotions of the movement, need expanding to do their work most effectively. The book ends with a reflection on how fragments of this historical

evidence, found outside of the main colonial archive (or on its margins), set out a story of change different from the “colonial gaze” of the intelligence services. It is possible that Vezzadini’s energy to revive a more collective history of Sudanese nationalism makes this too positive an analysis; if the book extended into the 1950s, the picture might be more depressing.

### **Common Reflections**

It seems, from these recent works, that study of the Sudans is still dominated by a key issue for South Sudanese and Sudanese people: the extent to which historical legacies of violent, racialised governance from the precolonial to postcolonial eras continue to shape the politics and societies of both Sudans today, and whether this politics of the core and periphery (and indeed the core-periphery analysis itself) can be disrupted or challenged.

The political stress of writing about both countries continues to show in this literature. It is difficult not to write with an eye to current suffering and state crises; and there are still a lot of historiographical battles to fight. This puts us at risk of, as Johnson puts it, “let[ing] the present define that past” (18). Berridge is testing structures of anti-regime mobilisation post–Arab Spring, with an eye to the Girifna movement, and Vezzadini likewise is working out revisionist histories of Sudanese radical political solidarity; Vaughan is writing under the shadow of continued proxy wars in Darfur; Jok is explicitly, and Rolandsen and Daly are more implicitly, reflecting on how we reached the present destruction in South Sudan.

The practical and methodological problems of writing about either country do not help. These books are part of a body of scholarship that has been produced at a moment of accessibility in both countries, and that moment has possibly gone, at least for many areas and types of study in South Sudan. But all these books demonstrate the possibilities for more creative study and approaches, both of material and of research questions. Vaughan, Vezzadini and Berridge’s work all demonstrate the power of marginalia and of re-reading colonial archives across the grain, and of using personal archives and accounts. The South Sudan National Archive in Juba—still accessible—and the expanding collections of the online Sudan Open Archive and the Sudan

Archives in Durham are powerful resources for this. Johnson asks for “a more systematic collection of South Sudanese oral testimony” (23) as a means to generate a more Sudanese-focused historiography; this requires renewed focus on the historiographical complexities of using common stories of migration and social change as part of histories. There are Sudanese projects engaged in this work, for instance the Likikiri Collective in Juba.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Rolandsen and Daly’s work highlights the extent of interdisciplinary research still needed and possible on the archaeological and geographical histories of the Sudans. The old *zariba* Deim Zubeir’s recent shortlisting as a possible UNESCO world heritage site, and new projects on the material cultures of South Sudan, mark out new directions for study here.<sup>6</sup> And Johnson’s book ends with a note about Saakam, a South Sudanese satirical “news” site.<sup>7</sup> Studies of comedy and satire are productive in the study of Sudanese people’s own histories of engaging with government.

These approaches might help to engage with some of the unanswered questions and frustrations of the books reviewed here. The most significant of these is the generally limited history of Sudan’s regional precolonial politics, vital to any consideration of the impact of colonial (mis-)rule; a study of the expansionary politics of the Azande kingdoms, for instance, would look at the rise of colonial stateness from a new angle. This reflects a consistent concern in all these books over the location and study of popular political thought: What constitutes the historical narrative of Sudan and of South Sudan, and who gets to define it? Can we expand what is considered “governance history” away from the state? And where are the “ordinary people” in the Sudans’ political history? Intellectual histories, emotional histories, and histories of blackness, racism, political access and action written from the margins, rather the urban centre, all seem urgent.

These questions highlight a significant problem of colonial and postcolonial Sudanese and South Sudanese historiography today: its domination by non-Sudanese scholars. It is an extremely difficult time for Sudanese and particularly South Sudanese students and academics to be constructing radically different histories. We must look to further our support for them, and to foreground the voices of Sudanese and South Sudanese people, in historical scholarship if we are to begin to tackle these questions.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, *Saviours and Survivors: Darfur, politics, and the war on terror* (New York: Pantheon, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Cherry Leonardi, *Dealing with Government in South Sudan: Histories of chiefship, community and state* (London: Boydell & Brewer, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Adam Branch and Zachariah Mampilly, *Africa Uprising: Popular protest and political change* (London: Zed Books, 2015); T. Parsons, *The 1964 Army Mutinies and the Making of Modern East Africa* (London: Greenwood, 2003); Ian Speller, “An African Cuba? Britain and the Zanzibar Revolution, 1964,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 35/2 (2007): 283–302.

<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.likikiri.org>.

<sup>6</sup> Deim Zubeir was shortlisted on 4 October 2017; see <http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6275/> (accessed 1 November 2017). Among other smaller projects and studies, the South Sudan Museum Network (<http://southsudanmuseumnetwork.com>) is currently endeavouring to develop a research agenda on largely unused and unstudied collections of South Sudanese material objects across European museums.

<sup>7</sup> *Saakam!*, <http://saakam.wordpress.com> (accessed 1 November 2017).