

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.

This book – like Straus’s other works – is very well written. He is extremely clear in stating the aim, approach and findings of the book right from page one. (I will give this book to all my postgraduate students as a model of how to write academically.) The first part of the book clearly describes the main arguments explored in the genocide literature. From these discussions he argues that perpetrators need certain capacities – in terms of coordination and resources – yet the enemy must also be perceived as posing an imminent threat to the in-group. After showing what is needed for genocide to take place, he systematically and logically explores the various factors that may restrain genocide at macro-, meso- and micro-levels, arguing that all levels need to be mobilized in order for the group to successfully commit large-scale violence against the population.

His main conclusion, developed in Chapter 3, is that genocides rely on founding narratives based on the belief that ‘we’ need to defend ‘our’ core identity from ‘them’. If the reader has a rough idea of the debates on ethnic conflict and violence in anthropology, there is not much new in this finding. However, the strength of Straus’s book is that he combines this insight with a discussion of the other factors that need to be in place for genocide to occur: namely, elite consensus, cooperation from local actors and popular compliance. In other words, where others may have provided more sophisticated studies of the ideology of genocide, he combines it with the conditions for genocide and explores capacities and restraining mechanisms at the national and sub-national level. The book also provides some helpful critiques of normative and legalistic studies concerned with finding ‘intent’ in cases of genocide. Straus demonstrates that there may not have been intent by the perpetrators all along but that things simply developed that way over time.

The last section of the book is devoted to five case studies. The first three – Côte d’Ivoire, Mali and Senegal – are cases where genocide could have taken place, given the circumstances, according to the theories that Straus has outlined, but where it did not. The last two cases – Darfur and Rwanda – are cases of state-driven genocide. Straus has written extensively on the Rwandan genocide and has also done fieldwork in Côte d’Ivoire, Senegal and Mali over a six-year period, where he has conducted elite interviews for this book. The Sudan case is based on secondary literature. In order to get beyond the superficial analyses of comparative genocide studies, the case studies are thorough and detailed, revealing substantial knowledge of the local contexts. This approach allows for systematic analysis rather than simply cherry-picking. If I should point out a weakness in his approach, it would be his reliance on ‘elite’ interviews in which he seems to take their statements at face value. He even mentions this problem himself – but then continues to use their statements as facts. In that sense, the Darfur case, although reliant on secondary literature, is less problematic, while the Rwanda case builds on a large selection of interviews at all levels.

In sum, *Making and Unmaking Nations* is an important and well-written book that deserves attention from anyone interested in understanding mass violence. It is also of great interest to anyone interested in African politics. My only critique is the title. Why choose *Making and Unmaking Nations* when the whole book focuses on the subtitle: *War, leadership, and genocide in modern Africa*? I can guess the implicit link but I wish the author had elaborated it more. Perhaps this question is food for the next book.

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