

***Genocide by Attrition: The Nuba Mountains of Sudan***. Samuel Totten. New Brunswick (USA), and London (UK): Transaction Publishers, 2012. Pp. 156. Hardcover.

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Genocide studies draw increasingly on empirical evidence from atrocious events to argue that traditional concepts of genocide need a rethinking. With *Genocide by Attrition* Samuel Totten contributes an excellent account of field research to the rising scholarship that argues that contemporary examples of genocide deploy various methods of attrition that drag on for years, do not render one specific place into an easily comprehensible crime scene, and therefore go beyond targeted killings and massacres. While the massacre of black Africans at Darfur is widely known, the genocidal attack on the Nuba people in central Sudan is largely unknown. Totten provides empirical evidence for the debate by conducting interviews with Nuba villagers and fighters of the liberation movement in 2010, 2011 and 2012. The Nuba are a black, Christian minority of farmers living in the Nuba Mountains of central Sudan. Trapped between the political aspirations of the South, and the racist, Arabic elite in power in the North (Khartoum), the Nuba were the declared the inferior, non-believer enemies of the north. As the case of Sudan shows, complex political, tribal and post-colonial sentiments shape various methods of targeted killing and demand to view genocide by attrition as genocidal process rather than as a specific event.

On a note on the sources, it is impressive how Totten went out of his way to consult locals over years, and used Africa-based research and hands-on reports of international organisations, rather than to affirm politics-sponsored rhetoric and universal acclamations. With the interviews being at the centre of the presentation, it is an authentic report of the events, people, ethnic agendas, local interests and religious tensions, from the onset of the persecution to the effects of an ill-advised CPA in post-2011 Sudan. Although a highlighting of the terms would make the read easier, the glossary provided at the end offers a very helpful reference to terms, people and events in detail and in the Sudanese context.

In the main part, twelve interviewees share experiences of attrition spanning over 20 years. The interviewees were chosen to represent a range of ages (teen to fifties), and demonstrate different levels of emotionalisation and rationalisations of the events. Witnesses were also chosen to cover different methods of attrition (aerial bombing, starvation, burning of crops, etc.) and events in different parts of the Nuba Mountains, to counteract the misleading effects of the concepts of genocide used by mainstream media, which often do not acknowledge the most atrocious persecutions in rural areas. Early accounts start 1989, when the Sudanese government of the North aerial bombed Nuba villages to cleanse the area of the people, aerial bombed schools to massacre the next generation, and to seize the Nuba land. Other narratives confront the reader with appalling accounts of survival in the 1990s. Imposed starvation was complemented with armed attacks and forced the Nuba to retreat deeper into the mountains and to survive on grass, roots and leaves that they often did not know as they had not previously been part of their staple diet. Common themes of personal experience are the existence-threatening nature of the attacks, such as starvation, pillaging of villages, burning of crops and grain, and persecution of men, women and children to cleanse the mountains from the Nuba people.

Having provided an excellent historical overview of local politics and ethnic tensions in the introduction, and a range of personal experiences of attrition in the main part of the book, Totten's afterword is a clear critique of the "anemic" and "vacuous" response of the international community to the decade-long pursuit of genocide by attrition in the Nuba Mountains.[106] A 'Comprehensive Peace Agreement' was brokered under leadership of the USA and UN and without consulting the Nuba people in 2010, despite many Nubian civil

activists and political advocates demanding participation. It went into effect in 2011. Shared political concerns among the interviewees were: the non-consultation in negotiations for a Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which split Sudan and forced the Nuba to stay with the north; the absence of a national referendum; and the ineffectiveness or non-existence of international aid.

The case of the Nuba, as presented by Totten, is an excellent account of genocide by attrition. It provides precise examples of a continued persecution with the aim to cleanse an area of its people, for reason of their race, religion and culture in a state that is not at war with another country. The absence of theorising decorum and political rhetoric makes it a fascinating read. Totten gives voice to the targeted people without any guidance as to what he wants to hear and let them talk in their language. The data for analysis is found in the witness accounts rather than in pre-conceived political or scholarly frameworks. The interviewees provide detailed retrospective accounts within their own realms of emotional, social, political judgments of the attributive actions. It is an empirical report of which oral history, the emotional experience and conceptualisations are obtained from among the targeted group, and which become the foundation of Totten's assessment in the afterword.

The main points of Totten's critique are the international failure of response, the failure to acknowledge the genocidal persecution of the Nuba people and a critique of sporadic political exploit of atrocious events in world politics. It seems that for the international community the split of Sudan into a South and a North was a sufficient response. However, that process did not guarantee human rights and fundamental rights of religious expression and preservation of cultural rites and customs are still not granted, and the discriminatory, exclusive CPA process of 2010 did not help at all to bring necessary change to the Nuba Mountains or an acknowledgement of the Nuba's persecution. Further, Totten argues for the importance of grass roots investigations and empirical, case-based research in ways that provide evidence for an overdue rethinking of genocide concepts for conflicts in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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