

Research Africa Reviews Vol. 6 No. 3, December 2022

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Sara de Simone, *State-Building South Sudan: International Intervention and the Formation of a Fragmented State*. Publisher: Brill, 2022. 217 pages. ISBN: 1568-1203. ISBN 978-90-04-51189-7 (paperback)/ ISBN: 978-90-04-51190-3 (e-book)

Reviewed by: Donald Peter Chimanikire, Senior Lecturer in International Relations, Midlands State University, Zimbabwe.

This book is the result of a six-year qualitative research project (from 2010 to 2016) that included several field visits in South Sudan, by a writer who was both a researcher and consultant for development agencies. In my opinion, the author has brilliantly analyzed various dimensions of these visits. In 2005, the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement / Army concluded a peace agreement, formally ending the 22-year-old civil war. Following a referendum, South Sudan seceded; donors put billions toward the new state and Sudan's recovery, supporting — among other things— the development of new state institutions for both countries. However, in December 2013, war broke out again in South Sudan.

The fieldwork provided over one hundred semi-structured interviews with a variety of local actors, which provided extremely interesting ethnographic material to inform the author's analysis. These interviews helped shape the understanding of the context of the South Sudanese situation. The ethnographic part of the work relied on four kinds of research tools: interviews with “key informants”; group interviews; casual encounters with ordinary people the investigator met at the market, on Sunday morning walks, while waiting for some bigwig to show up; and direct observation of a number of situations. While most of the government officers spoke English, all the interviews with traditional authorities or rural communities were translated into English from Dinka, Nuer or Juba Arabic with the help of local translators.

Sara de Simone forcefully argues that, to understand the political dynamics of contemporary South Sudan, there is a need to look at the

intersection between externally supported state-building projects and the historical process of state formation; these shaped by endogenous forces and they have, since the very inception of Southern Sudanese statehood, captured and reinterpreted resources of various kinds provided by external actors.

De Simone raises a few critical questions: How did South Sudan become one of the most striking examples of state-building failure and state collapse after years of international support? What went wrong in the state-building enterprise? How did external intervention overlap and intertwine with local processes of accumulation of power and of state formation? This book addresses these questions by analyzing the intersection between international and local actors and processes. Based on original ethnographic and archival data, it provides a unique account of how state-building resources were captured and manipulated by local actors at various levels, contributing to the deepening of ethnic fragmentation and the politicization of ethnicity.

She discusses the challenges that face the new-born state of South Sudan; this being a very important example of secession in post-colonial Africa and one that is based on an internationally recognized referendum on self-determination. She attempts to give a theoretical review on the correlation between two concepts, namely secession and self-determination, before she presents her basic idea. She opines that the current state structures and institutions in South Sudan, unlike those of Somalia or Somaliland, owe their origin to the interim period 2005-2011; these were stated in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement that was concluded in 2005 between Government of Sudan and Sudan Liberation Movement SPLM/SPLA; this was before the secession from the (mainland) Sudan. Based on the historical sequence of events towards statehood in South Sudan, one can easily see that, although state building in South Sudan started some six years before 2011 (the date of secession), the process rests on a tradition much earlier than that. The author probes into the ever-growing debate on federalism and its suitability to situations in South Sudan as an oil-producing country from the start; a fact that has influenced its relationship with Sudan. Analytical and descriptive approaches were used to arrive at conclusions that disclose a pressing need for developing an appropriate political culture to inform current state building processes and to help harmonize the performance of government components

Prevalent approaches to state building— such as those employed in Sudan and South Sudan from 2005 to 2013— focused mainly on infrastructure and

bureaucracy; these were based on the underlying assumption that service delivery fosters state legitimacy. Recent research, however, questions this assumption, arguing that it ignores the role that political structures, ideas and history play in legitimization or de-legitimization of the state. This report uses South Sudan as an example to interrogate people's perceptions of the state, asking what truly fosters state legitimacy. Post-conflict South Sudan was neither stable nor peaceful. The signing of the earlier mentioned Agreement represented an important step towards the normalization of the security situation in the area; localized violence and militia attacks have, however, remained a constant feature of people's everyday lives.

The book concludes by stating that Sudan's deep societal fragmentation remains extremely difficult to deal with and is dangerous for the sustainability of peace and state-building. Sara de Simone tried to explain the evolution of South Sudan's state into its collapse in 2013; and she searched for a delicate balance between a perspective that would attribute the outcomes of South Sudan's state-building failure to structural constraints, either imposed by the international system or entirely depending on historical legacies of state formation; and another perspective blaming it on a local corrupt elite or on hopelessly "tribal" masses.

It is a valuable effort that advances our knowledge about state-formation and the role of international intervention. It is a useful handbook for governments, universities, the United Nations, NGOs, and students of development studies and international relations.

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ISSN 2575-6990