Manfred Öhm (2014), *War and Statehood in South Sudan*, Baden-Baden: Nomos, ISBN 9783848718436, 235 pp.

The current devastating political and military (re-)negotiations in the emerging Republic of South Sudan bluntly unveil that even though the country has fulfilled the declarative international law requirements for a state, there is no context in place for establishing "internal sovereignty." Despite the highly fragmented authority structures, the warring parties continue to hold on to the goal of building a South Sudanese "nation state" and perceive the ruling Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) as the only political entity that currently has the legitimacy and capacity to achieve this. But how can the non-violent dispute between divergent interests in negotiating statehood be organised when the prevailing models of state(hood) seem to fail in our non-ideal-typical world? For a better understanding of what statehood is, and how it is continuously moulded, one needs to ask what kind of specific socio-historical, external, and internal influences come into play.

Those questions underlie Manfred Öhm's *War and Statehood in South[ern] Sudan* – an extraordinary, empirically grounded account of South Sudan's pre-independence period (1999–2005). His central theme is the functional relationship of war and state formation. By considering the socio-political history and complex conflict dynamics of the Second Sudanese Civil War (1983–2005), Öhm challenges the common assumption that long-lasting wars lead to state fragility. In fact, he proves that the civil war actually contributed to broader state formation.

In his study Öhm utilises different theoretical perspectives on war and critically engages with the so-called *new war debate*. His historico-political study relies on multidisciplinary concepts such as *war economy*, *warlordism*, and *ethnopolitics* as well as on the social functions of civil war to grasp the changing dynamics of war and to link them to statehood. A *state-in-society* approach allows him to analyse not only local-level politics but all different modes of social organisation by taking into account multiple actors including international agencies.

Accordingly, Öhm's study on "the creation of the SPLA state" (61) sheds light on the nature of war and state and, specifically, on local statehood and war dynamics, which enables him to draw conclusions about the potential for peaceful conflict regulation. He contends that "[t]he institutions and types of social organization that existed or emerged during the war [bear] a considerable positive potential for stability" (213) despite continuing conflicts in South Sudan and between the North and the South. Specifically, this book focuses on the "rebel" Su-

dan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) and its relations with the local populations and institutions of statehood as well as on international interventions.

Using an empirical basis of two diverse socio-political case studies (Thiet in Warrap State and Yambio in Western Equatoria), Öhm analyses how, in the absence of a central administration, multiple interacting actors both strengthen and contradict the administrative logic of the state due to contending interests and authority claims. Besides the crucial roles played by the competing military and civil administration structures, Öhm particularly sees chieftaincy and churches as having a potentially major role in peaceful conflict resolution, which is evidenced by his analyses of local peace conferences on intercommunal conflicts. According to Öhm, international agencies need to be seen as a "special group of internal actors" (134) that fulfils public functions even though many of this group's interventions are not beneficial to state-building or conflict resolution. These organisations' predefined programmes and lack of knowledge of local context contribute to their ambiguous role.

Öhm emphasises the significance of identity politics in creating the "SPLA state," pointing out that the common unifying element in Southern Sudan's identity was "negatively" constructed during the civil war. Thus, one can say that state actors' current efforts to construct a South Sudanese collective identity appear to be based on the presence of an "enemy" (the political elite in the North) that practically no longer exists. Communal identity is another challenge, as Öhm shows that local political and military actors are currently creating privileged roles by mobilising people along ethnic lines in order to negotiate political spaces and control access to resources and collective identities – as was done during the war. Öhm rightfully predicted that a "recipe for further conflict" would be that "the emerging opportunities for the new political and economic elite [lead] to the segmentation of society along communal lines" (214). These exclusion–inclusion dynamics fuel the historical "distrust of any form of central or representative government […] among the Nilotic people" (216); this can currently be seen, for example, in the dichotomous instrumentalist debates on "federalism versus centralism."

Öhm explains that the "simultaneity of peace and violence" and "repeated outbreaks of regional uprisings in form of ethnic rebellions […] indicate that a level of organization characteristic of a stable state has yet to crystalize" and that the idea of the central government having a monopoly on power is "still challenged by other logics of social organization" (218). The preconditions to breaking the conflict spirals include not only the discontinuation of the war economy but also profound

knowledge of local politics and societal organisation as well as an inte-
grative approach by the SPLM government. In light of current power
struggles between the political and military elites, such an approach
would require the SPLM/A to truly transform into a political party that
is willing and able to accept political competition and integration (212).

Öhm concludes that "South Sudan is an example not of state failure,
but of state formation" and that its "independence […] is proof that it is
still possible to create new countries and nations" (213). One might also
argue that state formation and so-called state failure are mutually exclusive.
The idea of classifying the world's "sovereign" states follows a binary logic
that fatally presumes the existence of the "modern" territorial state with its
constitutive elements – which, in fact, are not always present. Accordingly,
accounts such as the *Fragile States Index 2014* have already classified
emerging South Sudan as "failed" or "extremely fragile" on the basis of
ideal-typical concepts that are not universally given, such as collective
identity, agreed territory, and monopoly on power.

As Öhm correctly points out, it is "impossible to predict peace and
to manipulate conflict from outside [since] violence during war creates
its own logic, which is independent of its political situation" (33). To
understand state formation processes, one has to start from uncertainties
and practices with contingent outcomes. Accordingly, one can also read
Öhm's empirical evidence in relation to the problematic notion of the
nation state as follows: Establishing a state apparatus with its complex
infrastructures does not necessarily result in a "nation." Believing in the
possibility of a state apparatus that exists independently of the people and
shapes the people into a nation is an equally essentialist fiction. South
Sudan's highly militarised society, fragmented authority structures, and
multiple actors are not solid building blocks upon which to construct a
"nation state," but rather components that constantly change as they
negotiate. Manfred Öhm's empirical study on the complex processes of
state formation in Southern Sudan under conditions of war significantly
contributes to a deeper understanding of how and why context-specific
dynamics need to be taken seriously as a starting point for analyses on
war and statehood in South Sudan.

■   Katrin Seidel