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## Review of *South Sudan: A Slow Liberation*

Laura Nyantung Beny

*University of Michigan Law School, lbeny@umich.edu*

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*South Sudan: A Slow Liberation.* By Edward Thomas. (London, United Kingdom: Zed Books, 2015. Pp. 321. \$27.95.)

This is a remarkable book. It offers a complex and nuanced analysis of South Sudan's prolonged and troubled march to political liberation—first from Anglo-Egyptian colonialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, then from hegemonic Arab rule in post-independence Sudan [1956-2011], and now from South Sudan's internal political and economic contradictions.

Edward Thomas's primary methods are historical framing and analysis of South Sudan's long and problematic liberation. The book takes a long historical view of patterns of uneven development within the Sudan (and later, South Sudan) between the "center" and the "peripheries," and between the Sudan and global markets for slaves and commodities. One of the book's recurring themes is the continuity of asymmetric economic and administrative development between the central state and the peripheries in pre- and postindependence South Sudan; and the resulting violence, justified by ethnicity, "as constructed" historically.

The author's theoretical framework is deliberately neither Marxist nor neoliberal. Rather, he proceeds from notions of dependency theory, such as the idea of uneven development. Thomas then moves beyond this framework, as he seems to view it as too narrow and insufficient to explain the complex dynamics of South Sudanese history within the Sudan and the global economy and unto itself.

Jonglei, a large, swampy and diverse region of South Sudan, is the focal point—the lens through which Thomas explores South Sudan's as yet unfinished liberation despite the country's formal independence in 2011.

One of the great strengths of the book is the author's reliance, for primary sources, upon hundreds of interviews with a diverse range of indigenous South Sudanese, from government officials and party leaders to militia members and laypersons who have experienced firsthand various defining moments in South Sudan's long and troubled liberation. Many prior works on South Sudan fall short in this respect.

Thomas's secondary sources include many prior historical works on South Sudan. Here, again, he prioritizes works (books, articles, dissertations, etc.) by

South Sudanese authors. He also presents official South Sudanese statistics, such as government revenues versus expenditures, to illustrate the autonomy of the state vis-à-vis the means of production in South Sudan and the constraints such autonomy imposes on liberation, and data on violence casualties, to illustrate the impact of internal conflicts, for example.

Several features distinguish this book from other recent books on South Sudan. A major strength, as noted, is Thomas's primary emphasis on South Sudanese works and voices. Another strength is the book's rich historical overview of South Sudan's terrain, diverse people, development, contradictions, and conflicts. From the vantage point of Jonglei, Thomas provides a vivid bird's eye view of the historical continuity of South Sudan's uneven development, political and military contradictions, and resulting ethnoregional conflicts.

Finally, though the text is dense and makes for intense reading, Thomas forces readers to broaden their understanding of South Sudan's struggles from the typical narrow framework of racial and religious marginalization of South Sudanese in Sudan to a more complex understanding of South Sudan's internal agency and contradictions.

*A Slow Liberation* is a phenomenal book and should be read by anybody who desires a serious understanding of South Sudan.

*University of Michigan Law School*

Laura Nyantung Beny