

# WE WERE REBELS

(Germany 2014, 93 min)

A film by Katharina von Schroeder and Florian Schewe,  
developed from the collaborative online film project [www.thetwosudans.com](http://www.thetwosudans.com) with  
filmmakers from Sudan and South Sudan

Cast: Agel Ring Machar, Yolanda Awel Deng, Nyadeng Agel Machar, Mayom Ajuong Majok,  
National Basketballteam South Sudan



World premiere at DOK.fest – International Documentary Film Festival Munich 2014



Grimme  
Preis



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## LOGLINE

WE WERE REBELS tells the story of Agel, a former child soldier who returns home to help build South Sudan – the youngest country in the world.

## SHORT SYNOPSIS

The documentary film WE WERE REBELS tells the story of Agel, a former child soldier who returns to South Sudan to help build up his country. The film accompanies him over a period of two years – from South Sudan gaining its independence in 2011 to the renewed outbreak of civil war in December 2013.

As captain of the national basketball team of South Sudan – the youngest country in the world – Agel coaches the team through their very first international match against Uganda. The conflicts within the team bear a striking resemblance to the political problems festering across the country. An injury ends up forcing Agel to leave the basketball team, and he goes on to form an NGO that provides the country's most remote areas with clean drinking water. His journeys give him time to reflect on his country – on how it was, how it is, and how he hopes it will be one day. As a child soldier, Agel had to kill and also lost almost all of his male relatives. Later he managed to flee via Kenya to Australia, where he became a professional basketball player and returned to South Sudan a free man.

Today, just two years after gaining its independence, the world's youngest nation is once again teetering on the edge of a precipice: More than half a million people are fleeing the country, and Agel is fighting as a soldier once again.



## LONG SYNOPSIS

The civil wars between the predominantly Arab Muslim north and the African Christian south of Sudan raged for decades. It was only in 2005 that a peace agreement was finally signed that allowed Southern Sudan to vote on its independence. With a majority of 99%, the Republic of South Sudan was declared an independent state in July 2011. The atmosphere was euphoric, and the country's people were full of hope for a better, self-determined future.

The documentary film *WE WERE REBELS* tells the story of Agel, a former child soldier who returns home to help build South Sudan – the youngest country in the world. Agel becomes captain of South Sudan's first national basketball team, hoping that sporting success will help his people regain the sense of self-dignity that they lost during the years of war. Over 2.5 million people died in the conflict, and a large part of the population fled the country. Agel himself lost almost all his male relatives, including his father and two of his brothers. He and his mother fled to Ethiopia where he trained in a military camp. At just twelve years old he went off to war, armed with an AK-47. Later he managed to flee via Kenya to Australia, where he was able to complete school and continue his education.

Agel sees himself as one of the lucky ones for having had this opportunity, and wants to use his knowledge to help develop his homeland. But this is no easy task: South Sudan is still flooded with armaments and the country's infrastructure was never really developed – there are barely any proper roads, schools or hospitals. In addition, the top-ranking politicians are all former generals and still militaristic in their outlook. Even in the country's first international basketball game against Uganda, conflicts soon emerge over (game) tactics and hierarchies. But Agel remains optimistic, motivating the team to work harder. "These problems don't just arise in sport – they are evident across the whole country," he says. "We must have the strength to keep on fighting until something changes."

Following an injury, Agel's sporting career comes to an abrupt end. He starts managing an NGO that drills drinking water wells in some of the country's most remote areas that are still affected by war. With unwavering faith and a great deal of humor, Agel faces the obstacles of everyday life – from unhygienic food to broken roads that even all-terrain vehicles cannot navigate. When his two-year-old daughter falls ill with malaria, he firmly believes that she can overcome the illness.

But the country's economic recovery is not advancing as hoped. South Sudan is dependent on oil revenues, which account for 97% of the national budget. However, the pipelines for the oil's export run through the north of the country, where this position is exploited to exert political pressure. Disagreements over the course of the border bring oil production to a standstill, and many development projects grind to a halt. Even worse, however, is the increased internal political tension. Just two years after the founding of the state, a power struggle escalates between the president and former vice-president that plunges the country into chaos. The conflict spreads among the country's tribes, turning into what Agel describes as a "pointless war". After getting his family to safety, he sees no other option than to fight as a soldier once again.

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*Sud = "black"; Sudan = "country of the blacks"*

## CAST

Agel Ring Machar, Yolanda Awel Deng, Nyadeng Agel Machar, Mayom Ajuong Majok  
National Basketballteam South Sudan

## CREDITS

Director	Katharina von Schroeder, Florian Schewe
Camera	Florian Schewe, Katharina von Schroeder
Camera – Destruction Bore Town	Simon Lokwang
Camera – Interview Agel Soldier	Martin Clement
Camera – Cattle camp night shots	Christoph Lumpe
Editing	André Nier
Sound Recording	Katharina von Schroeder
Executive Producer	Inka Dewitz
Music	Kaan Bulak, Jan Cziharz, André Nier
Sound Mixing	Niklas Kammertöns
Sound Design	Thomas Wallmann
Audio Postproduction	Neuton Berlin
Postproduction	Edelbytes Postproduction
Color Correction	Jakob Wehrmann
Graphics	Carolin Röckelein
Camera Equipment	Camelot Broadcast Services, Berlin
Translation	Cholhok Dut, Sara Hanafi, Mahgoub Mohamed Eltayeb
Production Assistance South Sudan	Simon Lockwang, Leila Osman, Alphonse O Yoasa
Editorial Department	Burkhard Althoff, ZDF / Das kleine Fernsehspiel
Author	Katharina von Schroeder, Christoph Lumpe
Associate Producer	Katharina von Schroeder, Christoph Lumpe, Florian Schewe
Producer	Inka Dewitz, Michael Bogár



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## FILM INFORMATION

German Title	Wir waren Rebellen – Krieg und Frieden im Südsudan
Original Title	We were Rebels
Shooting Location	South Sudan
Shooting Format	HD / 1,78:1 / 16:9
Screening Format	DCP, HDCam, Blu-ray
Sound	Dolby 5.1, Dolby 2.0, Stereo
Original Language	English, Arabic, Dinka
Subtitles Version	English, German
Production Company	Perfect Shot Films GmbH
Country, Year:	Germany, 2014

World Premiere (Germany): May 9, 2014, 29<sup>th</sup> DOK.fest – Munich International Film Festival, Germany

TV Premiere (Germany): July 22, 2014, ZDF / Das kleine Fernsehspiel





## QUOTES FROM THE FILM BY AGEL RING MACHAR

Even though our generation got traumatized, we must find a way to be good citizens and make sure this country is prosperous, united and democratic.

You have seen a lot of death as a child. It's not easy, being trained to be a killer, to be a soldier. At that age. It distorts a lot of things in your head. I was 7,8.

If you find somebody that has been shot by AK-47 you will think this person has been hit by a truck. This guy [Mikhail Kalashnikov] designed this good, for poor people like us. It's not sophisticated, doesn't have night vision or silencers or anything. But it just kills.

I have my own country now. It's my own. This is the only country you can build. You feel you are part of building it, you are part of history.

The current crop of leaders are former generals. And they are militaristic in mind. If they fight it out in a democratic way, good. If they sink to their tribal groupings and pick up arms, then I don't think we will have a country.

If we give up, our country's not moving anywhere. We need the resilience, bounce back, come back. Until something changes.

How do you expect us to act like America? Obama is taking benefit of 200 years of experience. We only have two years! We were just rebels, the other day. We are doing very good, at least we are not shooting each other.

The current situation across South Sudan is appalling. People always say, it is hard to build something but easy to break it down. I just experienced it for the first time properly.

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT KATHARINA VON SCHROEDER, FLORIAN SCHEWE

We began working on the online documentary THE TWO SUDANS ([www.thetwosudans.com](http://www.thetwosudans.com)) in collaboration with local filmmakers back in 2011.

At the time, it seemed likely that Sudan – then the largest country in Africa – would be divided. A brutal war between the regime in the north and rebels in the south, spanning several decades and costing millions of lives, came to an end in 2005 with the signing of a peace agreement that allowed the people of southern Sudan to vote in a referendum on independence. An overwhelming majority voted for the formation of an independent nation.

On 9 July 2011, we were able to capture this historical event on camera. Full of hope for a better future, the people celebrated the birth of South Sudan, the newest nation on Earth. It was a time of euphoria, and we were in the midst of it. The people of South Sudan were hopeful for a new nation that would bring them prosperity, improved healthcare and education, and a more secure future. But the cracks had already started to show: funds went missing, and some individuals got rich while others could hardly afford to eat.

So would the people's high expectations be fulfilled in any way?

Amidst independence celebrations, we began filming with Agel Ring Machar, the captain of the national basketball team, and we realised that his life story seemed to mirror the country's history. Before the war, he had fled the country as a young boy, only to return later as a child soldier. He had lost many friends and relations in the war, and had suffered physical and mental traumas. Over 20 years on, he was now fighting for the development of his homeland. He was very proud, yet thoroughly critical, and always spoke with a hint of irony.

Inspired by his personal experiences, we decided to document the nation's progress. We filmed with Agel in South Sudan over a period of more than two years. The country was struggling with various economic problems, particularly since crude oil production – its main source of revenue – was continually disrupted due to disputes with the north. Indeed, in late 2013, all initial hope and expectations were shattered. A political power struggle triggered a war that spread across the entire nation and cost thousands of lives. While hundreds of thousands of people fled, Agel became a soldier yet again.

That means the end of the film is not the one we were hoping for, since progress has been significantly worse than even the pessimists could have predicted. But, just like Agel, we refuse to give up hope that the people can coexist peacefully once the power struggles subside.

## BIOGRAPHY AND FILMOGRAPHY KATHARINA VON SCHROEDER, FLORIAN SCHEWE



### **Katharina von Schroeder**

Katharina studied Montage at the Film and Television University "Konrad Wolf" (HFF) in Potsdam Babelsberg, but soon began directing projects of her own. She concluded her studies with the film *MY GLOBE IS BROKEN IN RWANDA*, which won the Documentary Film Prize at the Max Ophüls Film Festival in 2010. Since then, she has continued to work in documentary filmmaking, and has created the collaborative online film project [www.thetwosudans.com](http://www.thetwosudans.com), among other projects. She produced her second feature-length documentary film, *WE WERE REBELS*, in collaboration with Florian Schewe.

#### Films (Selection):

- 2010 "My globe is broken in Rwanda", 74 min., Doc., HFF
- 2013 "The Red dress - African Photographers", 25 min., Doc., Al Jazeera (International)
- 2013 "Nigerian Monarchs - African Photographers", 25 min., Doc., Al Jazeera (International)
- 2014 "We Were Rebels", 93 min., Doc., ZDF Kleines Fernsehspiel
- 2014 "Sowjet Bruce Lees", 40 min., Doc. (in production)



### **Florian Schewe**

Florian studied Directing at the Film and Television University "Konrad Wolf" (HFF) in Potsdam Babelsberg. His graduation film *LEBENDKONTROLLE* won the *Dialogue en perspective* prize at the Berlin International Film Festival in 2010. Since then, he has worked on television documentaries and independent film productions. He also worked on the collaborative online film project [www.thetwosudans.com](http://www.thetwosudans.com). He is currently developing the plot for his feature film debut. He collaborated with Katharina von Schroeder on *WE WERE REBELS*.

#### Films (Selection):

- 2005 „Moharram“, 82 min., Doc., K5Film
- 2006 „Tohuus“, 11 min., Doc., HFF
- 2007 „Tim“, 14 min., Feature Film, HFF
- 2008 „Amiland“, 75 min., Doc., HFF, dffb, ZDFdokukanal
- 2010 „Lebendkontrolle“, 30 min., Feature Film, HFF, RBB
- 2014 „Wiener Ecke Manteuffel“, 94 min., Doc., HFF
- 2014 „We were Rebels“, 93 min., Doc., ZDF Kleines Fernsehspiel



## COLLABORATIVE ONLINE FILM PROJECT “THE TWO SUDANS” ([www.thetwosudans.com](http://www.thetwosudans.com))

On July 9th 2011, Africa’s largest nation was split in two to become Sudan and South Sudan. In the run-up to that date, we, a group of young filmmakers from Sudan and Germany, felt the need to capture the impact of this unique and historic moment on camera. When we met for the first time in December 2010, Sudan was still a united country, but it was foreseeable that this would soon no longer be the case.

In this time of political turmoil, our team was driven by the common interest to understand how these events are affecting the lives of the people in the North and the South of the country. The Sudanese directors started to follow their protagonists – sometimes friends or family members – and to ask questions about their lives, hopes and dreams. What will change in your future life? What does home mean to you? How can you achieve your personal goals? How do you define your identity?

THE TWO SUDANS is an ongoing web documentary, which embarks on a visually and emotionally gripping journey into Sudan and South Sudan.

**Watch the Trailer:** <http://thetwosudans.com/msudan/>

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# PRESS PICTURES AND TRAILER “WE WERE REBELS”



Agel Machar with a Kalashnikov Photo: Katharina von Schroeder © Perfect Shot Films



Juba, July 9, 2011 crowd celebrating the independence of South Sudan - Night Photo: Florian Schewe © Perfect Shot Films



Juba, July 9, 2011 independence day South Sudan Photo: Florian Schewe © Perfect Shot Films



South Sudan national basketball team at the first international match with Uganda, July 2011 Photo: Katharina von Schroeder © Perfect Shot Films



South Sudan national basketball team at the first international match with Uganda, July 2011 Photo: Katharina von Schroeder © Perfect Shot Films



South Sudan national basketball team at the first international match with Uganda, July 2011 Photo: Katharina von Schroeder © Perfect Shot Films



Agel with his wife and his daughter at home in Juba Photo: Florian Schewe © Perfect Shot Films



Street sign „Victory“ with the image of John Garang Photo: Florian Schewe © Perfect Shot Films



Agel has become a soldier again, Juba, December 2013 Photo: Martin Clement © Perfect Shot Films



Film Poster WE WERE REBELS © Perfect Shot Films

Trailer: [www.perfectshotfilms.com](http://www.perfectshotfilms.com)

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