




DOI: 10.22363/2313-0660-2023-23-2-404-407

EDN: JIROLF

**Book Review:**  
**Markakis, J., Schlee, G., & Young, J. (2021).**  
**The Nation State: A Wrong Model for the Horn of Africa.**  
**Berlin: Max-Planck-Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaften, 184 p.**

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**For citation:** Bayeh, E. (2023). Book review: Markakis, J., Schlee, G., & Young, J. (2021). *The Nation State: A Wrong Model for the Horn of Africa*. Berlin: Max-Planck-Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaften, 184 p. *Vestnik RUDN. International Relations*, 23(2), 404—407. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-0660-2023-23-2-404-407>

**Рецензия на книгу:**  
**Markakis J., Schlee G., Young J. The Nation State:**  
**A Wrong Model for the Horn of Africa. Berlin : Max-Planck-Gesellschaft**  
**zur Förderung der Wissenschaften, 2021. 184 p.**

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**Для цитирования:** Bayeh E. Book Review: Markakis J., Schlee G., Young J. *The Nation State: A Wrong Model for the Horn of Africa*. Berlin : Max-Planck-Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaften, 2021. 184 p. // Вестник Российского университета дружбы народов. Серия: Международные отношения. 2023. Т. 23, № 2. С. 404—407. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-0660-2023-23-2-404-407>

The book *The Nation State: A Wrong Model for the Horn of Africa* (Markakis, Schlee & Young, 2021) has seven chapters. Chapter one is “Introduction” written by John Markakis, Günther Schlee, and John Young. It introduces the crisis of the state in the Horn of Africa (HoA) in terms of legitimacy, sovereignty, and democracy. The states are exposed to unending intra-state and inter-state conflict. The authors stated that the West attributes this crisis to the failure to properly follow the prescription of the West. And, the West insists on forcing them to adhere to their neoliberal and nation-state model. The writers of

this chapter argue that the crisis is attributable to the nation-state model itself. They added that the post-independence leaders attempted to build a nation-state but found it incompatible with the prevailing ethnoculturalism. States have engaged in many-sided conflicts because of conflicting nation-state projects. The state failure further opened an opportunity for Western intervention. The West used different approaches to undermine the sovereignty of African states and exploit their resources. Thus, at the core of the political history of the HoA is a forceful pursuit of the nation-state project which embroiled it in an ending conflict.

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Chapter two also deals specifically with “*The Crisis of the State in the Horn of Africa*,” which is written by John Markakis. He blamed state disfunction in the HoA on the Western model. The postcolonial African leaders were preoccupied with pursuing the project of nation-building, which requires homogenizing the diverse ethnic groups incorporated into the arbitrarily demarcated colonial state boundaries. This was waged against the local African traditions, which are relegated as nonsense. Thus, African elites are executive agents of the West’s hegemony in the region. Nation building was carried out mainly via assimilation in the image of the culture of the ruling elite. This was not, however, easy as encountered with fierce resistance. Because the elites have a narrow power base, they rely on force to stay in power and execute their mission. To this end, they hunt for an ideology that gives them excessive power, eventually being military rule. The author illustrates this by taking country cases. Accordingly, he stated that the Ethiopian imperial nation-building was underpinned by the Abyssinian identity that enjoys a superior status in all aspects.

The Derg regime decimated the Abyssinian privilege and pronounced equality of all nationalities though, practically, it became offensive for all. Rebels, inter alia, *the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front* (EPLF) and *the Tigray People’s Liberation Front* (TPLF) fought it fiercely and the latter came to power and the former secured its long-fought for independence. TPLF / *the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front* (EPRDF) rejected the Western model by adopting ethnic federalism, but still conflict remains unresolved.

Like Ethiopia, Sudan’s *Arabization-cum-nationalism* also marginalized the rest ethnic groups. By using socialism and Islamic fundamentalism, the ruling elite tried to maintain its position and stifle all other challenges. This eventually resulted in the secession of South Sudan in 2011 and unending conflict in other areas like Darfur. Because of the dismemberment of its parts by imperialists, the primary concern of post-independence Somalis nationalists was Somali unification, which compelled them to support dissident groups in neighboring countries. After nearly a decade-long democratic rule, Siad

Barre came to power and formed a unitary, centralized state, thereby offending northerners who need a decentralized arrangement. Then, like Ethiopia and Sudan, he adopted socialism to consolidate his hegemony in any respect to suppress resistance and clannishness. The clan-based conflict resulted in the demise of the regime and the collapse of the state itself and the secession of Somaliland. From that time on, Somali nationalism shifted to Islam to transcend clan division as manifested by the rise of Al-Ittihad al-Islami (Islamic Union), the Joint Islamic Courts (JIC), and Al Shabaab.

Chapter 3 is devoted to “*Bolshevism and National Federalism in Ethiopia*,” written by John Young. He discussed EPRDF’s ideological turn to the East (Soviet Union) and a radical refusal of the West’s nation-state model. Rooting on the Bolshevik writings and Soviet Union experience, EPRDF adopted ethnic federalism as an alternative mode to the West. He discussed the similarity between the two in considering the previous imperial regimes as prison houses of nationalities, ethnic chauvinism imposing their culture, language, and religion on others, and the recognition of self-determination of nationalities including succession through adopting ethnic federalism. He states that the disintegration of the Soviet Union was not attributable “solely to the rising nationalism of its component parts and instead to growing anger at the unaccountable elites ruling the federation and a misconstrued reform process” (Markakis, Schlee & Young, 2021, p. 56), and warns Ethiopia of the same fate unless it addresses the turmoil it is in. Indicating various scholars’ opinions on the causes of the crisis in Ethiopia including the ethnic arrangement itself, the author argues that the main reason is the fact that Meles suppressed all contenders and developed almost a single-man rule. Though it appreciates the cultural diversity, it has no tolerance for political pluralism and dissent voices. Accordingly, “the chapter concludes that Ethiopia’s ongoing crisis is not due to the EPRDF’s national federalism, and a reformed version of it still provides the best hope that the country can survive” (Markakis, Schlee & Young, 2021, p. 57). Not retreat to the previous nation-state, which is a failure.

Chapter 4 deals with “*The Afar*,” written by John Markakis. This chapter takes the Afar region of Ethiopia as the best example of the peripheral territories which have been subject to subordination, marginalization, and alienation due to the nation-state project by the consecutive Ethiopian regimes. Under imperial Ethiopian law, “pastoralist land was considered unoccupied and classified as state domain” (Markakis, Schlee & Young, 2021, p. 85). Because of this, lands in Afar were given to external investors for free, which had a detrimental impact on the local people in terms of reducing pasture land, blocking access to water, reducing water flooding, causing health problems, and denying compensation. Derg adopted nationalization of land and all investments in the area causing resistance and security problems in the region with repercussions to the center. The EPRDF’s federal arrangement allowed self-rule by new local elites who still are dependent on the center and deplored traditional authorities.

The government’s program to change pastoralism to agro-pastoralism, which is by itself an aspect of nation-state building, could not bring much success. This is because pastoralism is beyond an economic activity rather it is their way of life and identity. Demographic change is another major impact on the people as across the consecutive regimes other people came to the region as the local people have no the necessary skill and capital to participate in central government initiatives. The history of Afar shows the continuous resistance to outsider incursions and commitment to preserving their identity, but with, inter alia, the influence of Western education the resistance is now being weakened.

Chapter 5 deals with “*Borderlands and Trans-border Processes in the Blue Nile Region*,” written by Günther Schlee. This chapter analyzes the cross-border interaction in the region which covers Sudan, South Sudan, and Ethiopia. The chapter discusses the separation of Sudan and South Sudan and the resultant brutal expulsion because they refused to see minorities in their territory. Despite the secession of South Sudan, Sudan has still violent areas namely Darfur, South Kordofan, and the Blue Nile constituting what some call an evolving “Third Sudan” or another

layer of the periphery (Markakis, Schlee & Young, 2021, p. 113). This also holds for South Sudan which reverted from the north-south to Nuer-Dinka conflict. There are various ethnic groups, but the Dinka-dominated government fights with the Nuer because they are the second dominant group with almost similar features, including fighting spirit, with them. The author also indicates the support from South Sudan to the fighters in the new peripheries of Sudan against the Khartoum government. Moreover, in this chapter, the author also shows that the state in the region including Ethiopia identifies itself (based on cost-benefit analysis) with a given group and considers others as different, entailing different treatment.

Chapter 6 deals with “*South Sudan: The Fractured State*” written by John Young. It begins by showing how the diverse, undeveloped, and poor nature of the state unfits it to the Western nation-state model. British administration isolated southern Sudanese who are Christian Africans from the north Sudanese who are Muslim Arabs and intensified the difference by inculcating in them bad sentiment against each other. With this difference, Britain merged them towards the end of its rule on the condition that South Sudan will be treated in a federation, which was later abrogated assuming it as a precursor to secession. A West-dominated negotiation (*Comprehensive Peace Agreement*, CPA) ended the continuing resistance to the independence of South Sudan.

The West imposed the nation-state model on a culturally diverse newly born South Sudan. As opposed to the West’s peace-making assumption that South Sudanese make up a nation, *the Sudan People’s Liberation Army* (SPLA) represents the collective will of the entire South Sudan, and SPLA is capable of administering it, the new state has no unified national army because of division along ethnic lines, basically Dinka and Nuer, and “the security organs were the principal cause of violence, social dislocation, and ethnic tensions” (Markakis, Schlee & Young, 2021, p. 58). The political figures are preoccupied with monopolizing government offices and exploiting state resources. Salva Kiir is good at tribal politics and is establishing “Dinka ethnocracy” (Markakis, Schlee & Young, 2021, p. 159). The

nation-state model is a complete failure in South Sudan. And this is the failure of the West-controlled peace processes which, inter alia, were elite and Western-interest oriented, excluded the local people and other oppositions, overlooked the level of cultural diversity, and misunderstood the capacity of the *Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM)*.

Chapter 7 is the “*Conclusion*” by John Markakis, Günther Schlee and John Young. It shows how the West especially following the end of the Cold War with its triumphant success intensified its dominance on African and particularly HoA countries. The West preached to the African countries that the vehicle to modernization and development is to follow them. They compelled them via international financial institutions. African institutions such as the African Union and the *Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)* as well are instruments of the West. Africans have no independent foreign policy. Looking at what is on the ground, a nation-state is a wrong model for the HoA. Countries in the region do not have the necessary capacity to perform their functions. They concluded that there is a fundamental incompatibility between the nation-state model and the realities in the HoA and a huge disparity between what the states pretend to be and what they really are. By so doing, the authors advise Africans that such a euro-centric model is no more a path to follow.

Concerning the strength of the book, the book is meticulously written. It is worth admiring the high scientific rigor they employed in the work. They have a deep understanding of the realities in the study area. They succinctly summarized the

political history of and the patterns of conflict in the HoA countries. The book quite clearly revealed the alien and incompatible nature of the nation-state model to the HoA. The authors advised in black and white that countries in the region should not follow this model anymore. There is a high degree of consistency across all chapters that the model is a complete failure. The book is a meticulous work with an immense contribution to challenging the West's domination and revitalizing the debate on the subject. In a nutshell, the book is the groundwork for boldly challenging the application of the Western nation-state model in an entirely different reality.

However, the book has the following minor blemishes:

- 1) the authors didn't adequately justify ethnic federalism, nor did they say anything bad about it;
- 2) the nation-state model could have been better conceptualized by adding other features of it;
- 3) it seems that they took all dominations as an aspect of homogenization;
- 4) they made no clear differentiation between ethnicity and nation;
- 5) chapter 3 written by John Young has some sort of bias favoring TPLF and blaming the crisis on the incumbent government;
- 6) the authors considered Abiy's administration as the revitalization of the nation-state project without adequate justification;
- 7) the authors didn't say anything about the possible alternative model to adopt, instead they left it completely it to Africans.

However, these minor drawbacks by no means compromise the insightful nature of the work. One misses a lot by not reading it. It is a must-read for political scientists.

Received / Поступила в редакцию: 29.09.2022

Accepted / Принята к публикации: 17.04.2023

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