

Book Review

Markakis, John. (2011). *Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers*. Woodbridge, Suffolk; and Rochester, NY: NY: James Currey. xvi+ 383 pp. ISBN 978-1-84701-074-2

As a political historian, John Markakis's exposure to explore the dynamics of Ethiopian political history dates back to 1965. Since then, he had the opportunity to closely attend to the major public demands and political actors challenging the legitimacy of the imperial government of Haile Sellassie. Also, he had a very rich experience in consulting various opposition parties within and outside Ethiopia. Moreover, he had been working within the Ethiopian Ministry of Federal Affairs from 2005-2008. In addition, he has served as an academic at Addis Ababa University for a long time. He has published many books and articles in his major areas of research— the political history of Africa, the Horn and Ethiopia. In this regard, his latest work, *Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers*, was published in 2011.

This book has the prime objective of critically disclosing "the tale of a long drawn out struggle to forge a nation-state in Africa " (p.1). This work intends to provide us with detailed historical descriptions and explanations about various successive attempts and challenges of the Ethiopian state-building project from the late nineteenth century to 2010. It critiques the use of violence by the Christian Abyssinian highland core elites as a means to integrate the country's non-Abyssinian high and lowland peripheries into the nation-state, and it attempts to disclose the historical profiles of these peripheries in detail.

To achieve the aforementioned objectives, Markakis adopts Charles Tilly's theoretical framework that war and violence are the engines of the state-making process. As a result, he argues that, similar to seventeenth or eighteenth-century Europe, the Abyssinian highlanders in Ethiopia monopolized and used war to give birth to the Ethiopian state. He also employs the center-periphery perspective to describe and explain the power relation between the Abyssinian highland core political elites and the two Ethiopian peripheries throughout the process of the Ethiopian state building project. He follows general historical and comprehensive approaches about different cases of almost all lowland peripheries.

The highland and lowland peripheries represent 'the last two frontiers' of national integration, and Markakis argues that the latter has posed the biggest challenge for the Ethiopian state. From the late nineteenth century to 2010, all successive regimes used violence to bring these peripheries under the central hegemony of the Abyssinian center. In Ethiopia, this was an imperial project until the second half of the twentieth century, when the political priority shifted from state-building to nation-building. To this effect, successive regimes employed different strategies: cultural assimilation under Haile Selassie, socialism under Mengistu Haile Mariam, and ethnic federalism under Meles Zenawi. In addition, unequal socio-economic development has further marginalized the peripheries, especially the lowlands. Therefore, according to Markakis, these frontiers have to be crossed in order to build a coherent nation, i.e. "to redress the imbalance of power that marginalizes the majority of its people..." and to integrate the "lowland periphery" with the rest of Ethiopia without destroying the pastoralist realm in the process (pp. 15-17).

The book is divided into five major parts. Part one introduces the geographical, historical, socio-cultural, economic and political backgrounds of the lowland peripheries. These features of the peripheries were less impacted by the State's national integration efforts until the twenty-first century for different reasons such as administrative isolation, health dangers to highlanders, a low-surplus pastoralist economy and cultural independence, share similar

traits of egalitarianism and decentralization. Part two covers the imperial era of state formation from Minilik II's colonial expansion to Haile Selassie I's cultural assimilation projects. Part three focuses on Mengistu's socialist model of state integration. Part four discusses how the EPRDF has managed to strengthen its power over the last two decades, by converting its socialist legacy into authoritarian versions of the liberal market economy, ethnic federalism and cultural pluralism. The last section, part five, looks into the political history of the peripheries over the last twenty years.

A critical review of the details of Markakis' book reveals the following strengths and shortcomings about the work. To begin with its strengths, methodologically, it puts established theory of state formation to cogently describe and explain the dynamics of Ethiopian political history. The quality and volume of both secondary and primary data sources he employed to substantiate his central arguments deserves recognition. His methodological and theoretical consistency to logically describe and explain his basic research questions demonstrate his intellectual maturity and experience. Finally, the coherent organizational structuring of the book through well-articulated chronological order of contents can be considered as an exemplar to potential authors in the area.

By adopting Charles Tilly's idea that war and violence are the engines of the state-making process, Markakis bases his work on a strong conceptual and theoretical foundation. The book aptly describes and explains the political history of the Ethiopian state formation in light of this dominant theoretical model stipulating that war has given birth to the Ethiopian state. Also, given the dynamics and the violent nature of the Ethiopian state formation, his selection of this theory has allowed him to cogently describe and explain Ethiopian realities. His conceptualization and explanation of the project of state building beyond acts of physical control of a particular people and territory is well-articulated.

Markakis' empirically grounded descriptions and explanations of the geographical, economic, and socio-cultural conditions of both the core and the peripheries as well as the different state building strategies across regimes captures the enirity of the political history of the state about these particular topics. His premise that the undemocratic Ethiopian nation building project has not been finished particularly in the lowland peripheries is worth careful reading and reflection. Besides, his observation that land has become 'the real issue behind the debate on federalism' represents one of the dominant existential challenges in Ethiopian politics (p.356). Finally, his well-substantiated policy recommendations, which include redressing the imbalance of power that marginalizes the majority of its people, and integrating the low land peripheries without violating their socio-cultural and economic interests, are vital inputs to the success of Ethiopian state building project.

One of the limitations of Markakis' book is its tendency to make unnecessary generalizations about all highland cores and lowland peripheries has been found to be logically weak and factually exaggerated. Instead of following normative historical comparative approaches about different cases or experiences of almost all highland cores, high and low land peripheries, his work could have been better if it were based on a single case study, which would enable him to engage in an in-depth investigation of the centre-periphery relation. Finally, his Neo-Marxist center-periphery perspective has also been found to be reductionist, which might have forbade him from adopting multiple theoretical orientations to investigate the diversity of challenges to the Ethiopian state building project.

As to its technical shortcoming, Markakis' book does suffer from poor proofreading to the extent that some of the references quoted in the text have not been incorporated in the bibliography section. Moreover, significant lists of acronyms of the various political and military groups at the beginning of the book have been overlooked in the text. Most importantly, the maps are not correctly dated, which is a problem as internal boundaries are often changing; also, most are too small to be useful and some of the names given on the maps do not match the names used in the text. Finally, the text also suffers from unnecessary repetitions of content.

Concerning its other notable shortcomings, the book employed Marxist terminologies; class, surplus appropriation and means of production without sufficient conceptual clarifications (p.163). Also, its weak analogical reasoning between Emperor Menelik's expansion and Western colonialism is highly exaggerated interpretation of the history of Ethiopian state building project. His attempt to project all problems related to the Ethiopian state building project only to the Abyssinian core could not be viewed as a balanced and logical conclusion. By capitalizing only on the victimization of both high and low land peripheries, the book also failed to appreciate their historical legacies, roles and involvements in the Ethiopian state building project. By focusing on the power relation between the Abyssinian core and the peripheries, the book overlooks the dynamics within both the core and the peripheries. It could have revealed more about the current government Ministry of Federal Affairs' strategies of indirect control of lowland peripheries.

As to its relevance, the book does not come up with a completely new theoretical as well as historical explanation. However, it can provide an additional and more comprehensive input to the discourse on the Ethiopian state building. Also, it significantly contributes to the wider scholarship in the literature of the history of state formation and building. Hence, it deserves to be read by any researcher stepping into research in Ethiopia, or any development worker about to be sent to Ethiopian lowland peripheries. It can provide historical background for researchers working particularly in Ethiopian lowland peripheral area especially when it comes to post-1991 developments. Markakis' work can also help public policy makers to properly understand the existential problems, particularly in the lowland peripheries, to develop better policy intervention strategies for a viable nation building project.

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