

Book Review

**State building and national identity reconstruction in the Horn of Africa, 2017
edited by Bereketeab Redie**

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This book, which is edited by Bereketeab Redie, is a collection of chapters and is based on a multidisciplinary and mixed methodology. It pursues the courses of state building, state reconstruction, and the making of national identity in four states the Horn of Africa, namely Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, and Somaliland, in the post-secession and post-transition periods. It also seeks to analyze the challenges states confront in the processes of state-building and national identity formation.

The book demonstrated that secession in Sudan and Somalia did not bring stability and homogenous identity to old and seceded states, which provides the insight that secession is seldom used to solve the political problems of states. It illustrates that the challenges of national identity formation in the selected states are associated with complex societal settings as well as incompatible, weak, and dysfunctional institutions, ethnic marginalization, clashes over national and sub-national identities, disagreements over the federal arrangement, neighboring states' intervention, the attacks of Al-Shabaab, clans' demands for self-rule, and problems of transition to a regularized political culture and civic government. As far as the barriers to Somaliland's quest for recognition were concerned, clan opposition and the unwillingness of the international community, mainly the UN, AU, EU, and USA, were mentioned. In this regard, this work vividly shows the role of external actors in shaping the dynamics of statehood in Africa. It also explains the role of traditional institutions and authorities as well as the effects of elite bifurcation, clans, and Islam on Somalia's state reconstruction. The book discussed efforts to achieve sustainable negotiations between Somalia's transitional federal government and the government of Somaliland. It uncovers the actions Somaliland has taken in its quest for recognition and the challenges it has faced in the process, including weak institutions, unprofessional politicians and diplomats, insubstantial foreign policies, unclear positions among

negotiating figures, and pressures from dominant Arab states, primarily Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. It elucidates the process of reconciliation and peacemaking in Somaliland and how Somali National Movement (SNM) and elders affect the process. The book shows that the reconfiguration of national identity in Somalia is attributed to trigger factors like its geostrategic location, the split between state and nation, and the tension between state and society. While clannism is mentioned as a challenge to Somali nationalism, lack of belongingness to the new political entity, reliance on traditional laws, strained relations with Somalia and other neighbors, and international organizations' support for Somalia's unity are impediments to national identity in Somaliland.

The book demonstrates that disagreement on federalism, undeveloped professional governance, poorly maintained infrastructure, oil politics, insecurity, and inappropriate political culture are challenges associated with state building in South Sudan. It explains that the dynamics of building national identity in South Sudan are characterized by Afro-Arab culture, which is more African than Sudanese. It elucidates that the secession of South Sudan caused economic and political bankruptcy in Sudan. The challenges to state reconstruction in Sudan include war-related violence, public discontent with the comprehensive peace agreement (CPA), lack of political will, disagreement over border demarcation, ethnic marginalization, and economic injustices. On the other hand, illegitimate power, Arab and non-Arab and Muslim and non-Muslim groupings, socioeconomic marginalization, and discriminatory regionalization are discussed as hurdles to national identity formation in post-secession Sudan.

The vitality of the book begins with its contributors being professionals who have in-depth insights into the respective states they studied. This provides readers with firsthand knowledge accompanied by a contextual and credible analysis of the topic. The book helps comprehend the dynamics of state building, state reconstruction, and national identity formation in the context of secession, state collapse, and transition periods in the Horn of Africa. It covers timely and eye-catching issues as far as the Horn of Africa is concerned, where states face intricate problems in their quest for state-building and national identity formation. As such, it provides valuable lessons for other states in Africa facing similar experiences.

Nevertheless, the organization of the book can be criticized as it contains extended chapters with redundant ideas that can be condensed into a few chapters. It would have been possible to comprehend the similarities and differences of state building and national identity formation in the Horn of Africa if the book had been organized through comparative study. Besides, it is difficult to understand the common problems that affect the states included in the study. Although the book acknowledged that clashes between modern and traditional institutions pose a challenge to state-building and national identity formation, it did not address how the clash can be resolved (Bereketabe, 2011). The book does not cover how civil society organizations and diaspora communities affect state-building and national identity formations, given that they play a significant role in these processes (Dahre, 2008). Despite describing clannism and religious marginalization as challenges to the development of national identity, the book does not outline a strategy by which these problems can be addressed in multiethnic and multi-faith in states in the Horn of Africa. Moreover, the book states little about authoritarian rule (Clapham, 2023; Markakis et al., 2021), which is one of the crucial features of the Horn that hindered the region's state-building and national identity-making.

The book's methodological strength is manifested in its use of multiple data sources, which is useful to triangulate the results of the study so that well-articulated interpretations are made. However, the book did not mention what types of primary data it used and how they were collected. While it is important to use case studies with multiple sources of data, this does not imply the book employed a mixed approach as it described. This is because the mixed approach involves the use of quantitative data, which is not considered in the methodology. In addition, the book did not describe the theoretical framework that guides its arguments, findings, and overall analysis. Despite its methodological limitations and leaving out certain important details, the book is generally substantial and can contribute to academics and policymaking. It helps us comprehend the intricate dynamics and difficulties associated with state building, state reconstruction, and identity formation processes experienced in the Horn of Africa, which are attributes of internal and external factors.

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