

Book Review

The horn of Africa: Intra-state and inter-state conflicts and security. By Redie Bereketeab. London and uppsala: Pluto press and Nordic Africa institute, 2013, XI, 208 pp. Paperback .No price

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INTRODUCTION

Conflicts are natural and historical and hence they are everywhere and every time. They are part of social phenomenon of human life. The difference lies on the magnitude, complexity, sequel and repercussion. The horn of Africa, with some exceptions, is one of the most politically sensitive and fragile regions of the world. The virtue of this book lies in its providing comprehensive and critical examination of conflicts and their dynamics in the region under consideration. There is no space to deal with all issues discussed in the book but I will focus on the central issues of each contributors. The book has three parts. Each part has three chapters. The first part of the book describes the causes of conflicts including conceptual framework of conflicts and their types. The editor and author of the first chapter of the first part, Redie, critically outlines how conflicts evolve, develop and widespread in the horn. As a prelude to the presentation of classification of conflicts and methodology of conflict resolutions in general and the horn in particular within a theoretical frame work, the author gives a general description on factors that made the region to be fragile and insecure.

The author tries to put all drivers of conflict at the same level of strength. It is safe to say that subsistence nature of the economy and poor governance systems are the main factors for the cause and wide spreading of conflicts in the horn. Redie also describes that whatever type the conflict is, the cause is the state (p.6). I may argue that in this multi-ethnic and complex region, state may not be the only maker and unmake of conflicts. Nature and society, for instance, may constitute the foundation for conflicts.

In similar fashion, there is little attention to issues related to the coming of colonialism and the making of artificial boundaries and boundary demarcations that contributed in creating of differences and conflicts in the region. Boundary dispute is still sensitive and live issue between Ethiopia and Eitrea. Yet, the author devotes less attention to those

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issues. There are also two more issues that seem to have factual and conceptual errors: the coming to power of the Därg to power and the formation of the Ethiopian people's democratic movement (EPDM). In the case of the former, Redie argues that the presence of bitter rivalry between the Ethiopian people's revolutionary party (EPRP) and all Ethiopian socialist movement (Me'ison) made the *Därg* to hijack power. In the eve of the revolution, the provisional military administrative council (PMAC), also known as the *Därg*, was the only organized force to assume state of power in the face of EPRP and Me'ison which lacked organizational structure and ideological orientation to challenge and take power (p.11). Bahru writes:

Despite the growing intensity of confrontation, the outbreak of the Ethiopian revolution in 1974 caught both the regime and the students unawares. The regime had scarcely thought the end was so near. The students, (who constituted the dominant section of EPRP), their years of opposition notwithstanding, had not yet formulated a clear and viable alternative.¹

In discussing the formation of EPDM, the author writes as if the founders were the returnees from the Sudan. They were not returnees. Following the defeat of EPRP by the Därg in towns and TPLF in northern Ethiopia, some of remnants, not all, founded EPDM. The most perceptive part of Redie's piece is its attempt to give theoretical framework and picture on the nature and dynamics of conflicts in the Horn. Redie writes such coherent account having clarity and attractive language command.

Second chapter in part I deals on state identity and inter-state conflicts. The author, Kidane, shows how poverty, inequality, and state identity interconnected and resulted in cross-border conflicts and inter-state wars. In the main, he uses comparative and contrastive explanations between theories and models with the realities on the ground of the Horn which, among other things, makes the study of Kidane to be more critical and objective. Kidane's work has a methodological break as it is characterized by careful interpretation and analysis of theories and concludes that all theories he mentions does not characteristically correspond with the realities in the Horn. In addition, Kidane uses tables to show regional distribution of social index, power, inequalities and poverty which makes his study more live and fascinating (pp.35-36).

What seems lacking in this study is the tendency of only looking fluid borders and boundaries as the source of conflicts and problems. No consideration is given the potentials of fluid borders and the resultant free movement of people in the making of cohabitation and spirit of togetherness among different communities of countries in the region. Otherwise, the work is critical and analytically sober.

The last chapter of part I treats governance and leadership in the horn from the *Emic /Etic* theoretical perspective. The novelty of this chapter is its detail explanation on historical background to the evolution and development of leadership since antiquity. The author, Mahadallah, is fair and accurate in showing how Quran and Bible contributed in the making of good personalities of leadership (P.42). The author writes on the origins of the modern studies of leadership and scholarly interpretations on figures who contributed for the growth of good leadership. Attempt has been made to the meaning, connotations and dynamism of leadership in multiple setting and complex social relationships. He has reviewed colonial literature on African leadership which in turn shows how colonialism destroyed the stable and traditional qualities and arrangement of leadership in Africa (p.47). The author well describes why the horn of Africa, which established kingdoms and towns before in other areas of Africa, has become in crisis of leadership.

The weakness of this study lies in the discussion of the history of leadership/kingship in Ethiopia. Correctly, Mahadallah argues that traditional Africa leadership had been distributed between the chief and the clan headmen. The same was true in Ethiopia. Yet, the author describes that in Ethiopian history it was by eliminating the rivals, not by orderly succession, that the rulers came to power (p. 51). I may argue that this is a hasty generalization as the Ethiopian state, with some breaks, has longest tradition of leadership and transfer of power for more than two millennia. Local rulers and dynasties were always in power on the condition that they recognized the over lordship of the king of kings. In addition, in the history of Ethiopian leadership tradition, there were less likely to have rivals to be vanished as the leaders were always from royal family.

The other weakest side of this study is the identification of the Ethiopian state as a colonial state. True, before colonialism, territorial aggrandizement was the features of African empires. Territorial incorporations and making of empires should not put empires like Songhai, Mali, Ghana and others as colonial states. The main feature of colonialism

¹ Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1974*. 2nd ed. (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 1991),p.226

was capital accumulation. No African state, including Ethiopia, expropriated and accumulated capital in history. In the territorial expansion of emperor Menilek of Ethiopia, for example, northern Shewans were the main actors in the course of incorporating new areas and yet no resource was expropriated and accumulated in their place of origin that today, northern Shewa, by Ethiopian standard, is the poorest region of the country. Otherwise, Mahadallah has tried to manage and identify historical patterns and developments of leadership in Africa which in turn might refresh original interpretations of the issue under discussion.

Part II focuses on conflict dynamism and the first chapter of this part examines the repercussions and implications of conflicts in the horn of Africa. In his stimulating study, Kassahun Berhanu of Addis Ababa University has provided an alternative explanation on repercussions of conflicts in the Horn of Africa. In doing so, he opens a window in the understanding of the interconnectedness of conflicts in the Horn of Africa. Kassahun analyses the manifestations of conflicts and security deficiencies in the Horn.

In chapter II of part two, the reader is offered the nature and dynamics of borders and boundaries of the Horn with reference to the Sudan today. The author, Saeed, starts with historical background on the issue and essence of borders. The author has made a balanced discussion on the activities made by technical border committee in the course of demarcating and delimiting the border line belt of the two states. The study, though it is more of desk work, gives important account on how and why Abyei becomes the center of dispute between the two contending parties. The author rounds up his discussion by recommending the need for quick action in solving post-separation movements and problems. The study is not substantiated with adequate sources. As a reference, the author puts six materials to be referred for his work.

The last chapter in part II tries to give framework analysis on the political violence of the horn. This chapter is somewhat unique in style and content from other chapters of this book. State failure and state disintegration are the central issues of the discussion. It is the most substantiated and methodologically well written piece of work. The author also examines the available sources and citing documents wherever possible. Accordingly, in relative speaking, there is better comprehensiveness, balanced judgment and interpretations on the need to revise political boundaries based on historical and natural setting of the horn.

The third part of the book focuses on the international and regional interventions in the conflicts of the horn. In the first chapter, Woodward writes on the formation and the role of inter governmental authority for development (IGAD) in ending civil wars and border conflicts in the horn. IGAD is the focus of discussion of the author. The study describes how scarcity of resources and Nile water issue would be the potential challenges in the effort of IGAD in attempting to unite the horn. The author, with reasonable justification, unlike the ongoing popular perception, is optimistic on IGAD and its future.

Chapter two deals on Somali crisis and the role the internal and external actors have played. Starting with analysis on the consequences of the transformation of socio and cultural values and fabrics into political identities, the author, Samatar, examines processes on the birth and the collapse of the Somali state. The author describes that the demise of the democratic tradition of Somalia was abrupt and was the result of military coup (p.164). The details of the author's interpretation of Somali conflict are comprehensive and original. Unlike most of aforementioned authors, Samatar, interviewed a number of informants. Interviews were, for example, made with former Somali government officials abroad. The author constantly reminds us inequalities and grievances as among the causes of conflicts and eventual disintegration of the Somali state. In short, marvelous reading, the study is informative and wide ranging in its coverage.

The last chapter of part III describes recent developments in the horn in general and Somalia in particular. Piracy and role of militia are the theme of the study. Moller has tried to show how political crisis culminated with the collapse of the Somali state and the attempted but failed state building and peacemaking processes by external powers, the USA in particular.

The author focuses on the most recent development in Somalia that brings the attention of international community: piracy. In addition, attempt is made to show the external actors' alignments and antagonisms in Somalia. The author, with weak justification, tries to show who supports whom. The author has tried to show as if there is strong alignment and antagonism between European union (EU), IGAD, African union (AU), united nations (UN), and Ethiopia vis-à-vis Arab League, Egypt, Yemen and others in the internal issues of Somalia. The author, I argue, may need to revisit his sources to show if there is as such on overt alignments and antagonisms among countries and organizations mentioned on the Somali case (P.186).

In conclusion, generally, all authors, despite rare factual, conceptual and historical errors mentioned above, make a worthy contribution to our growing knowledge on conflict, security and border issues in the horn. All of them depend on written sources, of their own memories and experience to write their respective work. Oral sources are rarely used. They present detail, accurate and lively description with excellent narrative skill on the subject under discussion.