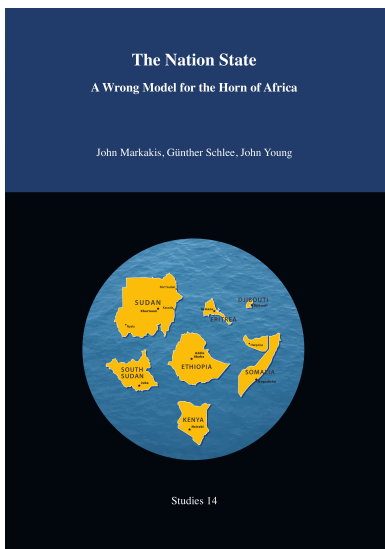# Max Planck Research Library for the History and Development of Knowledge

Studies 14

John Markakis, Günther Schlee, and John Young:

Conclusion

Chapter 7
Conclusion
John Markakis, Günther Schlee, and John Young

The principal concern of this book has been the international factors and modes of engagement that have shaped and distorted contemporary states in the Horn of Africa. In a region in which scarcity, endemic poverty, uneven development, and the repeated involvement of outside powers have produced and exacerbated a host of armed struggles, the establishment of two independent states and with the outbreak of war in Tigray in November 2020 possibly more in the offing, and the highest numbers of refugees and internally displaced people in the world, it is important to emphasize the link between these problems and a failed model of statehood adopted, imposed, and directed by the West.

Since its domination by the West in the nineteenth century, Africa has served as an experimental laboratory for metropole notions of economic and political development from imperialism through Keynesian notions of state-led development, neocolonialism, and neoliberalism, but in each case power was ultimately held by people and organizations outside the continent and aid projects were designed to meet their needs. The drive for independence in the 1960s was a high point in the effort of Africans to control their destinies even if power was turned over to a self-serving comprador elite who ensured that the interests of the former colonial powers were paramount. As pointed out by Frantz Fanon and Walter Rodney, the ruling bourgeois classes in the West had gained economic power before gaining state power, and thus could relinquish power through elections and be assured that their interests would be protected. In contrast, the petty bourgeois rulers in Africa had their origins in the state, had no independent economic basis, and clung to political power, which has regularly precipitated conflict. Although basking in the legitimacy of self-proclaimed democracies, Western policies in Africa over many years have been designed to separate the rulers from the people, make these rulers accountable to the West and not their own people, and thus preclude the possibility of democracy taking form in the continent.

The Cold War was a mixed blessing for Africans. On the one hand, it involved the capitalist West and the socialist East demanding that its allies conform to their economic and political conditionalities, while on the other it provided a measure of political space and the possibility of playing off the two super-powers. In addition, the Cold War permitted a proliferation of anti-imperialism, neo-colonialism, dependency, and world systems theories that provided critiques of the state in the developing world and its relations to the developed West.

While the West's victory in the Cold War ended the great ideological confrontations that loomed large in the Horn of Africa, it also gave rise to new demands that states follow the dictates of the new international order, which further undermined African sovereignty. It also reinforced the intellectual hegemony of the West and fostered an environment in which the critical theories that informed much analysis are now only studied only at the margins

of universities and are rejected outright by mainstream economics and the powers that be. However, such acts of theorizing remain building blocks to understanding the inability of the African state to meet the needs of the people and the inequitable relationship of Africa to the West. It is also key to bring Africans to their rightful role in the international community.

The transition of the OAU to the AU was supposedly based on the advance of African states, but the new organization followed its predecessor and did the bidding of the West, including implementing the precepts of neoliberalism and working to ensure the maintenance of the Western-dominated global state architecture. By the end of the Cold War, hopes that African and Asian states might collectively come together and avoid entanglement with the superpowers and achieve autonomous development as aspired by the 1955 Non-Aligned Conference in Bandung, Indonesia, had all but evaporated. The West has further constrained the development of independent policies in Africa by establishing a formidable network of economic and security institutions and treaties that bind the continent to the developed world. IGAD was one such regional organization that was initially established under Western impetus to pursue development objectives and serve as an interlocutor between the Horn of Africa and Western donor states. Later, at the encouragement of the West it moved into peacemaking, and were the region not so internally divided it would have assumed a security role as well.

African governments have largely accepted the role of their states in the international economy to be one of supplying raw materials to the West (i.e. their supposed comparative advantage) and increasingly to China and other Asian powers. While China's rapid development served to undermine Africa's fledgling manufacturing base, it is also providing infrastructure that may eventually help the continent escape from its marginalized position in the international economy. Furthermore, it gives developing countries opportunities for realizing alternative approaches to development, and in the case of Ethiopia until recently it was assisting in the rapid expansion of the country's textile industry but even before the 2020 war internal strife had slowed the country's economic boom.

While continuous Western efforts to impose neoliberalism is lowering living standards, producing uneven development, fostering conflict between governments beholden to the West and a welfare seeking population, societal tensions, and in some areas is providing an environment in which jihadist and other extremist views can take hold, Africans are also engaged in a growing global campaign of resistance. Given the present balance of international power, it is unrealistic to imagine that Africa will assume a leading role in the fight back. With this in mind, the case of Ethiopia is instructive.

The EPRDF was committed to a socialist transformationand it had the enormous advantage of coming to power without being beholden to foreign powers. Nevertheless, the Front felt compelled to embrace capitalism, bend to the demands of the Bretton Woods agencies, and align its foreign policy to that of the West. This decision came from the realistic perspective that pursuing the EPRDF's initial programs would likely be defeated by a reinvigorated and triumphalist West in 1991 and thus pose a threat to its existence. If the EPRDF with its many advantages compared to other ruling parties in Africa at the time did not have the capacity to pursue an independent program, there was little hope of success elsewhere on the continent. Those states had already been captured by elites beholden to the West.

But that was then, and the present situation is very different. The uncontested Western hegemony of 1991 is being undermined and challenged on multiple fronts. The most significant event in turning around these realities may have been the economic crisis of 2008.

The implications are still felt, and include continuous but sluggish growth, historically high rates of unemployment, and increasing inequality. Modern circumstances have also been changed by the emergence of a politically and militarily confident Russia which is able to block Western initiatives in various parts of the world, the growth of China as an economic giant, and the inability of the West to escape from a never-ending GWOT. Hegemony is also undermined by multiple cracks in the Western alliance that has served as the bedrock of the global order since the end of World War II, in particular, the impending withdrawal of the UK from the EU and growing tensions between the EU and the US. This division is also manifest in the election of the American nationalist president, Donald Trump, and the proliferation of right-wing parties in Europe on the one hand, versus the electoral successes of Bernie Sanders in the US and Jeremy Corbyn in the UK, espousing socialist ideas thought to have been relegated to history's dustbin with the defeat of the Soviet Union on the other hand.

As a result, the ideological environment is opening and the political space is expanding so that countries on the periphery, or what used to be called the weak links to global capitalism, now have a measure of maneuverability that has not been the case since the height of the Cold War. But the growing conflict between the US led West and China, and to a lesser extent Russia, means that more pressure is being placed on African governments to fall in line with their former colonial masters and the US. In both Sudan and Ethiopia one can also observe the key role played by client states of the US in their internal affairs. Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE both shaped the course of the popular uprising against the Al-Bashir regime in 2019 and are continuing to influence the course of the transition. Meanwhile, the UAE from its base in Assab, Eritrea has become a party to the war by Abiy Ahmed and Isias Afwerki against the TPLF insurgency. In addition, Egypt is trying to use this conflict as a means to press its demands regarding Ethiopia's Renaissance Dam. And at the macro-level countries in the Gulf and Turkey are increasingly militarizing the Red Sea.

African governments, which are typically more responsive to Western demands than to those of their own constituents, cannot be expected to use this freedom to press for more than marginal changes. But among the people of the Horn, new horizons are opening up and nowhere is this more apparent than in South Sudan.

South Sudan owes its existence to the US. When it collapsed into civil war in December 2013, the US led the peace process and propped up the government. However, not only is US state building now recognized as a failure, so are its peacemaking efforts, as is the mechanism that the US and its Western allies used to pursue their efforts and which it created, funds, and directs—IGAD. Moreover, the US-backed SPLM and its leader, Dr. John Garang, who was publicized as an African hero, has been irrevocably tarnished by the ruling party's maladministration, endemic corruption, and responsibility for sparking civil war in 2013. As a result, the US, the West, and broadly the international community, which had been held in high esteem by South Sudanese only a few years ago, are now viewed with distain by many in the country.

Although conditions in South Sudan favor the emergence of political forces to challenge the West's inappropriate models of governance and the economy and alternatives have been proposed, change is sadly not happening. Instead, both the government and rebels are clinging to outworn models that their own experience proves do not work and are increasingly subject to attack in the West. This also appears to be the case in other countries examined in this study. Whether this represents a time lag in which new political formations will catch

up with new conditions is not known. Africa may be entering a stage described by Gramsci a century ago when he wrote, "The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear" (Gramsci 1971).

White men have repeatedly promised to lead Africans to a better future and repeatedly failed to do so, and it is not our intent to follow in those footsteps. The objective of this book has been to expose the falsehoods, illusions, and sometimes outright lies upon which the Western modeled state has been constructed in the Horn of Africa.

At the end of this exercise it might be good to come back to its beginning and to examine what we have set out to do. Already the title of the book states that the nation-state is the wrong model for the Horn of Africa. This statement can be read in two different ways, depending on whether we understand "model" in a normative or in a descriptive way.

Evidence abounds, in this book and elsewhere, that the nation-state as a descriptive model does not fit the Horn of Africa. It simply does not describe what we see there. According to the Weberian model of the nation-state, it should have a state territory that it fills with its sovereign power. What we find in the northeast African reality is power at the center that peters out as we move towards the margins. Instead of the monopoly of violence held by the ideal nation-state, we find armed counter powers. Instead of or in addition to a bureaucracy following rules, we find personalized forms of power, networks of patronage, and markets of violence. Instead of universal citizens and a government at the service of the entire citizenry who is responsible for its welfare, we find the expectation that leaders help their own people first and the idea that a leader who does not first help his own people cannot be a good leader.

Thus, the hypothesis expressed in the title, namely that the nation-state is a wrong model for the Horn of Africa, has been corroborated beyond doubt if we understand model as a descriptive model. What we find in Africa is at great variance with it. But how about model in the normative sense? As a model *for* with an emphasis on the for (rather than a model *of*)? Would the problems of the Horn of Africa be solved if we managed to establish nation-states according to the Western model there?

In the preface, we vowed not to fall back into the old habit of telling Africans what to do. This book therefore does not end with a list of explicit proposals, apart from the recommendation to listen to Africans and for students of African politics to work to expose Eurocentrism. In several of the chapters we have noted the lack of inclusivity of peace processes, of economic policies, of resource sharing, of politics in general. Western sponsored post-conflict reconstruction programs (misnamed so because they often take place during conflicts and sometimes are a cause of their prolongation) often "marginalize local institutions and alienate local citizens from the state-building process" (Englebert and Tull 2008, 138).

By pointing out some incongruences, like the disjointedness between the nation-state model and African realities, between what states pretend to be and what they really are, we hope—in a small way and within our limited purview—to lift the veil and encourage the emergence of an intellectual environment in which old and failed Western conceptions of statehood can be challenged and new formulations developed.