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BOOK REVIEW

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In accordance to Bahru, one of Ethiopia's eminent historians, the underlying principle and the inspiration for the preparation of the first edition of his book (1991), a History of Modern Ethiopia (1855-1974) was to provide solution for the jarring scarcity of general history of Ethiopia that could serve specialists and educators alike. Thus, he responded to quench the quest of historians and educators for comprehensive and preeminent history. Besides, the author claims that the urgency was spared by the hurdle prompted by the great take off in Ethiopian historiography.

The original edition of this book was covering the period from 1855-1974 but in the second edition he extended the time line to 1991. Thus, this edition which is the focus of the review, encompasses 74 illustration recollected from 33 diverse sources basically from the works of travelers, missionaries and individual researchers. The tenets of these illustrations meander on depicting battle fields, military leaders, war weapons, politicians and few urban centers.

These illustrations are supplemented with 8 economic, topographic and political maps. The book covers 6 chapters with a temporal span extending from 1855 to 1991. It begins with an introduction that elucidates about the geographical location (absolute and relative), the topographic setting, the genesis of the name Ethiopia, the dynastic pedigree, linguistic, ethnic and religious make up and administrative history of the pre 1855 Ethiopia and culminated with a brief description about the triumph of the ethnic insurgence launched against the regime of Menigstu in May 1991.

The first chapter describes two tenets: the internal structural chaos fashioned by polticus egoism of the princes and the process of inner 'north-south' link through the long distance trade which was further challenged by external menace. The second chapter narrates about the reaction given by Tewodros II to the internal chaos triggered by the squabbling nobles and the foreign threat. It elucidates about the resurgence of centralization process and commencement of the creation of modern state of Ethiopia as it was envisioned before the onset of the 'era of princes' with wider territorial extensions through Tewdros II first, continued with a new approach of Yohanis IV and finalized with the ultimate seal of the aggrandizement made by Menilik II.

In chapter three, Bahru mentioned about colonialist menace and its tragedian culmination at the Battle of Adwa. He also went on elucidating the post Adwa power equilibrium of the absolutist state and the institutionalization efforts in reaction to the rushing colonialist conspirator treaty.

Having this, Bahru tried to describe about the 'second Ethio-Italian war' whose concomitant effect made Ethiopia easy prey to the domination of Britain and latter the US. The post restoration reconstruction effort coupled with popular resentments against the absolutist state and its legal and military measures to consolidate power and cripple the opposing is vividly expounded as prelude to forthcoming trendy upsurge.

Finally, his attention is preoccupied by a very analytical description about the popular upsurge of the 1974 and the rise of the military junta which had lost its power to the ethnic insurgent groups in May 1991. The last portion of the book is backed with brief conclusion, pp(270-274), glossary and transliteration key, pp(275-280) and as well 10 pages index, pp(281-300), which depicts places, institutions and series of historical phenomena.

Basically, it is difficult to point out technical and methodological boo-boos from this eminent historian yet engulfing oneself in deeper intellectual scrutiny enables to have an academic revelation on some errors. In this regard, the reviewer argues against Bahru's periodization which took 1855 as a land mark for the inauguration of the modern history of Ethiopia. In reviewer's point of view, the designation is anachronistic for a history of archaic feudal society couldn't be branded as modern merely because of the rise of a leader of that society with conception of modernizing or westernizing its people. In fact, the mismatch between the society and the leader can be inferred from the failure of the modernization programs and as well from the final words of Tewdros II himself. Modern history has to do with the emergence of capitalist society yet Ethiopia was a feudal state which was later transformed in to 'soldiers' socialism' after the popular upsurge of the 1974.

In spite of the fact that boundaries demonstrate fluidity and dynamic nature, in all his maps Bahru illustrates Ethiopia and Eritrea as a single political unit even after the secession of the latter. This has to do with his firm stand of neglecting Eritrea as a separate sovereign entity. The Amharic The amharic sources are written in accordance to the transliteration key given at pp.278-279. However, viewed from this reference point some local linguistic tones and naming systems show inconsistencies in some cases. Besides, the approach he pursues in narrating the historical developments of the country is loaded with much of the roads travelled by state nationalists, which is most often obsessed with political history. This approach is believed to be didactic and less objective. Its marked with the blending of history and politics, glorification of war and cult of state power. Due to this fact, nationalist historians commonly branded as mere press agents for the politicians, and recruiting officers for the army(Durant, Pleasure of Philosophy:206).

Bahru has hardly escaped the latter three criticism viz. blend of history and politics, glorification of war and cult of state power. In fact, he had made a profound leap towards synthesizing the *Enset* culture and *Teff* culture as single historical platform. He also accredited the existence of different peoples with multitude of linguistic and cultural manifestation (p. 6). Contrary to this, in his book the lion's share is dedicated in the veneration of kings whom he believed as protagonists of the history of the country. Thus, he gave little attention to the hitherto neglected issue of ethno nationalism by regarding it as a deification of ethnicity. Indeed he wrote around six pages (pp.16-21) description about the "peripheral" states of *Kaffa*, *Janjaro*, *Jimma*, *Welayta*, *Wellega*, *Konso* and *Gurage*. Thus,

tensions between those who are condemning state nationalism as years of local historical injustice and the hegemonic-nationalist's perspective of state building is not yet resolved in his historical platform. This pitfall calls for the re-writing of a comprehensive history of the country by decoding the sacred seals and the sacro sanct assumptions for transcending conventional history.