

Review of: "GERD: A Catalyst for the Nation-Building Process in Ethiopia"

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GERD: A catalyst for the nation-building process in Ethiopia

The paper starts with a brief description of the concepts nationalism, national identity, state nation and nation-state. It follows a section which explains the terms of state building, nation building, and nation branding. The theory section (no. 3) focusses on structural explanations and briefly touches state-planned policies, third-party nation building, and few bottom-up processes which might have an effect on nation building. In the next section the reader learns more about the situation in Ethiopia i.e. the formation of state and nation. Finally, the author tries to explain the dam project GERD as catalyst for nation building in Ethiopia.

Tu put it kindly, this paper must be completely rewritten and restructured. Following the title the reader expects a treatise on a governmental action which might forge a nation. In my view it is a clear top-down perspective. And it is worth to do research on this example because, here, we can observe a nation-building process in the making here.

Nevertheless, why does the author talk about “a sense of personal affiliation with a particular political entity” (p.2)? He does neither present any survey data nor is GERD an example for a bottom-up process. And the referenced literature in section 1 does not correspond to the state-of-the-art. In the social sciences is a very broad discussion about the terms of nationalism and patriotism as individual attitudes (see as a brief review Mußotter 2022 in Quality&Quantity). Here, both concepts are confounded and not clearly separated from each other apart from the fact that the concept of patriotism encompasses more than one dimension (see Ariely 2020 in National Identities). Finally, in this paper it is not necessary to talk about individuals’ attitudes. This is even more important when I do not know anything about these attitudes.

Instead of getting lost in such considerations, the author should go into more detail on the differentiation between state-building and nation-building because these theoretical concepts are relevant with regard to his question of research. And I would recommend to omit the sub-section on nation-branding (sect. 2c) because the author needs state documents to be able to prove such processes. Regarding section 2a I doubt that “the aim of state building is not to use physical force”

(p.3). The author should have in mind that “nation-building aims to diminish or eradicate pre-existing [...] identities that are seen as contradictory to the national” one (p.3 bottom). The reader would like to know what is meant by “physical force”? And is it possible to “eradicate” identities without force? Only one example: How is the ban of traditional music to be understood? Since I know only little about Ethiopia, here, I think of the consequences of the battle of Culloden for the Scots. Furthermore: What is about the suppression of local dialects or languages in school? Here, I would argue against Canovan who is given as a reference. These aspects should be discussed in more detail in the paper. Finally, I would recommend to omit the short paragraph on national failure on p.4. I do not see that this would be a part of the author’s question of research.

I would further recommend that the author cuts out section 3d. I do not see that there are any bottom-up initiatives in the case of GERD. Instead I would expect a much broader theoretical explanation about state-planned policies (sect. 3b) because these are relevant for this research. Regarding the structural explanations (sect. 3a) I am confused when reading about successful nation-building as “a result of these two elements”. What are these two elements? In my view they are not mentioned in the text. And the author should realise that he is referencing Posen who “claims that the mechanism behind the rise of nationalism is the replication of successful military strategies”. Isn’t that a contradiction to the remark that “the aim of state building is not to use physical force” (p.3)? Or is this the difference between state-building and nation-building? This should be clarified.

Regarding section 5, in my view, the empirical basis of the research is poor. The author should decide whether he will rely on the public discourse or on official state documents. In sub-sections 5a and 5b he mentions interviews. Therefore, I would propose that he presents a broader and more systematic analysis of the public discourse supported with official statements of the government. So I doubt an assumption that the people “stood united for the successful completion of the GERD” (p.9). I would be that this is not the case. When a dam is built, some people have usually to leave their homes. Will they be excited? And what I further know about the situation in Ethiopia is that the Sudan sees the dam as a threat. Is it possible that some Ethiopians are worried about an impending war? These questions should be discussed here. And he should reflect the governmental measures with their consequences on the people who should be forged into a nation. And I am doubtful regarding a category like “social harmony”. I do not believe that there is harmony neither in a state nor in a nation. There are lots of opposing interests opposed to each other. The best a government can do is to find a compromise that satisfies not group completely.