

Review of Prof Iqbal Jhazbhay's book¹ by Chris Landsberg (prof.), Head of the Department of Politics at University of Johannesburg.

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Prof Iqbal Jhazbhay's book goes beyond Afro-pessimistic accounts of state collapse and state failure and the typical example of the stateless Somalia, and actually focuses on the question of state-formation and state building and looks at this emerging success story in Africa of state formation. We South Africans know the challenges pertaining to state building, from the need to undo old laws and replacing them with more progressive laws, to integrated governance and intergovernmental relations straddling the spheres of the national, the provincial and the local, and more recently the challenges of co-ordinated governance, strategic planning and monitoring and evaluation. While Iqbal Jhazbhay talks of nation-building, I am fascinated by his focus on state building, the process of how a nation creates and constructs its own state, through a people-centered "bottom-up" approach.

Because of decades of apartheid and isolation, South Africans have become very parochial and do not focus much on challenges in Africa and African issues more broadly to the extent that they do, there is a focus primarily on Zimbabwe, on SADC and on AU matters. Iqbal takes a seemingly unimportant issue of Somaliland and engages with it. He draws important lessons from this issue on the important and strategic quest for statehood.

Without stating it, Iqbal makes the case for Area Studies, and shows scholars first of all the importance of specializing on an area, and more significantly that it is important to focus on areas beyond the usual suspects of Europe, the Americas and even the more neglected Asia. Indeed, it is important to focus on the macro region and area of Africa, and in particular on areas such as the sub-regions of southern Africa, Central Africa, West Africa, North Africa, and the Horn of east Africa. Iqbal's work zeros in on the Horn, and the interconnectedness of the conflicts of that part of the world, and in particular on the Horn of Africa.

Another important idea in the narrative of Iqbal is that of identity and its importance to state-building and development. The case of Somaliland highlights this nexus state-building-development-identity nexus. On the identity question, a valuable lesson emerging out of Somaliland, namely how they used their traditional culture, and fused it with modernity as they sought to build a modern nation-state.

¹ Iqbal Jhazbhay. *Somaliland: An African Struggle for Nationhood and International Recognition*. Johannesburg: Institute for Global Dialogue & South African Institute of International Relations. 2009.

One of the more disturbing questions raised by Jhazbhay is how the international community has shown more interest in the issue of state-collapse and decay in Somalia and little interest in the issue of state-making in Somaliland, which by all accounts stands a greater chance of becoming a success story than the depressing story of its erstwhile and depressing neighbor. One of the reasons for this is of course the elevation of the “war on terror” to the top of the list of global concerns, certainly on the part of the US and its allies. The problem for Somaliland is that, without the necessary international interest in this quest for self-determination and nation hood, little will come of its ambition. So this book goes beyond guns, bombs, anarchy and piracy.

For Jhazbhay, the Somaliland question is one of building a social-contract in a society encircled by violence and conflict, through the processes of reconciliation, reconstruction, identity and religion.

The Somalilanders openly espouse a democratic order, and they do this through this “bottom-up” model of stabilization.

A key message for South Africa emanating from the book is the importance of domestic indigenous culture, and the argument that without such, you cannot hope to affect people-driven democratization.

As mentioned earlier, the tension between modernity and tradition is not ducked and dived in the book, and Somalilanders have crafted a key role for its clan leaders and elders, who have been instrumental in the state-construction and reconciliation processes. In fact, without these structures, there would be no “bottom-up” reconstruction process.

There is of course a vexed question that remains unanswered fully by Somalilanders: *What about the aspects of international recognition of Somaliland?* We have made the point that the supreme irony about treatise of Somalia and Somaliland – the two Somali’s question if you like – is that the bad governance one receives more international alleviation than the good governance one. While the prospect for full-fledged statehood and recognition appears remote, the Somalilanders have viewed this as a challenge and an inspiration to eventually make it difficult for the UN and international community to ignore their quest. Somalilanders in particular seem to be determined to ensure that there is international legitimation of their quest for statehood.

Indeed, in spite of the lack of formal recognition, the UN and its agencies are fully engaged in Somaliland, desperate to help secure a success story in a desperate sub-region. Somaliland will have to continue to engage the international conflict and make their case. They have to continuously engage South Africa, the AU, the UN, and other powers.