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# Contents



|  |      |
|--|------|
| <i>List of Maps, Tables &amp; Charts</i>   | vii  |
| <i>Preface by Günther Schlee</i>   | viii |
| <i>Editors' Preface</i>  | x    |
| <i>Notes on Contributors</i>   | xii  |
| <i>List of Acronyms</i>  | xv   |
| 1  |      |
| <i>State Borders &amp; Borderlands as Resources</i>                                | 1    |
| An Analytical Framework  |      |
| DEREJE FEYISSA & MARKUS VIRGIL HOEHNE  |      |
| 2  |      |
| <i>More State than the State?</i>  | 27   |
| The Anywaa's Call for the Rigidification<br>of the Ethio-Sudanese Border           |      |
| DEREJE FEYISSA   |      |
| 3  |      |
| <i>Making Use of Kin beyond the International Border</i>                           | 45   |
| Inter-ethnic Relations along the Ethio-Kenyan Border                               |      |
| FEKADU ADUGNA  |      |
| 4  |      |
| <i>The Tigrinya-speakers across the Borders</i>                                    | 61   |
| Discourses of Unity & Separation in Ethnohistorical Context                        |      |
| WOLBERT G.C. SMIDT   |      |
| 5  |      |
| <i>Trans-Border Political Alliance in the Horn of Africa</i>                       | 85   |
| The Case of the Afar-Issa Conflict   |      |
| YASIN MOHAMMED YASIN   |      |
| 6  |      |
| <i>People &amp; Politics along &amp; across<br/>the Somaliland-Puntland Border</i> | 97   |
| MARKUS VIRGIL HOEHNE   |      |
| 7  |      |
| <i>The Ethiopian-British Somaliland Boundary</i>                                   | 122  |
| CEDRIC BARNES  |      |

*Contents*

|    |   |     |
|----|---|-----|
| 8  |   |     |
|    | <i>The Opportunistic Economies of the Kenya-Somali<br/>Borderland in Historical Perspective</i> | 133 |
|    | LEE CASSANELLI  |     |
| 9  |   |     |
|    | <i>Magendo &amp; Survivalism</i>  | 151 |
|    | Babukusu-Bagisu Relations & Economic Ingenuity<br>on the Kenya-Uganda Border 1962-80            |     |
|    | PETER WAFULA WEKESA   |     |
| 10 |   |     |
|    | <i>Can Boundaries not Border on One Another?</i>  | 169 |
|    | The Zigula (Somali Bantu) between Somalia & Tanzania  |     |
|    | FRANCESCA DECLICH   |     |
| 11 |   |     |
|    | <i>Conclusion</i>   | 187 |
|    | Putting back the Bigger Picture   |     |
|    | CHRISTOPHER CLAPHAM   |     |
|    | <i>Index</i>  | 197 |



## *Preface*

Anthropology, contemporary history, political science, and related disciplines are close to politics and, therefore, close to morality. This is not to imply that much of politics is shaped by morals. Such an assumption would surely lead us astray if we tried to use it to explain what actually happens. What I mean is that moral and normative appeals abound in political discourse, where morals are used as a discursive resource. This discourse is about ‘legitimacy’, ‘corruption’, ‘failed’ states, etc., and it judges states and other forms of organization by comparing their actual forms and outputs with a normative idea about what states or other organizations and institutions should be good for: the common good, justice, security, and so on. Functional thinking persists here. States and organizations are assumed to fulfil a function for the benefit of all of their citizens or members; and if these functionalist assumptions are contradicted by actual observation, they become subject to the two dominant forms of framing or reframing that are applied to social phenomena in our times, namely, juridification and medicalization. Issues such as oppression and poverty – until recently treated in terms of politics – become juridified as human rights issues or they become medicalized as social pathologies. Things are measured against standards of law or standards of health or other such standards. The Weberian ideal-type of statehood also comes into play here. A normative element clearly shines through in all variants of these discourses. And it is good that this is so. It is good that there are people who think about how the world ought to be.

The explanatory power of the many moralizing variants of social science, however, is low. Often moral assumptions and empirical observations are woven into a dense web, and that is not helpful for analytical purposes. Analysis is about taking things apart, not about combining them. In addition to engaging in politics – and that is what social scientists do when they become public intellectuals and give TV interviews – we should care about keeping alive a perspective in social science that abstains from

## *Preface*

value judgements and tries to describe the forces on the ground in their actual interplay. The realities described are not always beautiful, and that is why social scientists who abstain from such judgments and try to model the decisions of all actors, including both those we like and those we dislike, are often branded as cynics by others.

The contributors to this book examine the effects that borders have on real people on the ground, and the ways in which these people use borders in pursuing their own interests. Like cell membranes, state borders are semi-permeable. Cells are selective in what they let in and what they keep out. And some micro-organisms overcome these mechanisms of selectivity and succeed in intruding. Even at this cellular level, different 'actors' have different 'interests', although these terms sound a bit metaphorical, as we are dealing with entities that are not assumed to have consciousness.

The focus of this book is on local people in the borderlands, and even among these there are many differences. Some use state borders as resources; they instrumentalize them in developing political or economic strategies. State boundaries can only become a resource for some people at the exclusion of others. Obviously there would be no price differences for goods on each side of a border, and therefore no gain for smugglers, if everyone found it easy to smuggle. If that were the case, price differences would even out and smuggling would disappear. And there are many other examples of ways in which different people are affected by and use borders differently. Local herdsmen may be able to cross the border, while soldiers in uniform cannot do so – and so on. Different skills, interests, opportunities, rules, expectations, and bodies of knowledge allow things (including social constructs such as borders) to be or to become resources for some and not for others.

This differentiating perspective on various categories of people reflects the research interests (identity and difference) of the 'Integration and Conflict' programme of the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, which I have the privilege to direct. It is in the framework of this programme that both editors of this volume have carried out their doctoral studies and postdoctoral projects. It was also the venue for the colloquium in which most of the other contributions to this volume originated.

To train young scholars is a by-product of a research institute. The main institutional aim is to gain knowledge. Sometimes, fortune lets the two combine. Then one learns from one's juniors. Another reward is to be able, from time to time, to be proud of one's products. Few people can boast of a Markus and a Dereje.

Günther Schlee  
Halle/Saale



## *Editors' Preface*

It all began back in 2005, when we shared an office at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle/Saale, Germany, and occasionally chatted about current affairs in the Horn of Africa. We both had done research in border areas and among borderlanders, and were astonished by the high degree of resonance between our field materials. Together with our common friend, Tobias Hagmann, we contemplated the idea of holding a conference on borders in the Horn of Africa. Regrettably, Hagmann's participation came to an abrupt end due to other academic obligations. We would like to thank him for his fruitful engagement with our ideas as well as the continued moral support we received from him throughout the production process. Günther Schlee, the Director of the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology and Head of the Department I (Integration and Conflict), generously approved our plans.

Despite the fact that we circulated a call for papers expressing an explicit interest in state borders as *resources*, many of the abstracts we received approached borders as constraints rather than resources. Nevertheless, we received enough relevant responses to put together a conference in Halle/Saale from 6 to 8 September 2006 under the title, 'Divided They Stand: The Affordances of State Borders in the Horn of Africa'. It featured a good mixture of younger scholars, many of them from the region, and senior figures such as John Markakis and our most vivid and resourceful discussant, Christopher Clapham. Despite strong empirical case studies and the determined interventions of the organizers, a skeptical and normative undertone remained with regard to viewing borders as resources. Not all participants followed us in the 'post-conference' phase of further developing our approach on how borderlanders make the best of being divided. For this reason, we have included some new contributions that were not originally part of the conference, but that better fit the theme of the volume.

## *Editors' Preface*

During the process of putting together this volume, a number of friends and colleagues were helpful. We wish to thank all the conference participants for lively discussions. John Markakis in particular helped us to sharpen our argumentation through his well-founded critical remarks. Günther Schlee, Luca Ciabbari, Markus Schlecker, Hussein A. Mahmoud, and Christopher Clapham commented on our conceptual framework at various stages in the development of the manuscript. The editors presented earlier versions of their introductory chapter at two conferences of the African Borderlands Research Network (ABORNE), in Edinburgh and Bayreuth, respectively. We profited from comments of the wider 'border and borderlands community' there. John Galaty and Michael Bollig engaged with all contributions as external reviewers and provided constructive criticism. Douglas Johnson and Lynn Taylor of James Currey Publishers offered the necessary guidance and advice for completing the work. Last but certainly not least, we wish to thank our families for patiently putting up with all the overtime hours we had to invest in the preparation of this volume.

Dereje Feyissa & Markus Virgil Hoehne  
Halle/Saale



## Index

- Aaden 114  
Aalen, L. 47  
Abaluyia 151  
ABAO 86, 91  
Abbink, J. 17  
Abdallah A Adou 85  
Abdi Hassan Jimale 101-2  
Abdullahi Yusuf, President 6  
Abula Obang 35-6, 38  
Abyan, I.M. 177  
Abyssinia 16, 66, 129, 130  
Ackello-Ogotu, C. 163  
Adama 52  
Addis Ababa Intelligence Report 130  
Aden, Gulf of Aden 6, 99  
Adetula, A. 158  
Aditu 88  
Adongo, *nyija* 41  
Adwa 67, 74; battle 99, 122  
Adyabo 70  
Afar 2, 15, 18-19, 85-94 *passim*, 189, 191-3  
*passim*; National Regional State 90-1;  
Triangle 85  
Afinadow 143  
Afqurac, Vice-President Xassan Dahir 111  
African Union 115  
Agame 67, 74-6 *passim*, 78  
Age'azyan 76  
Agostinos-Tadla 67  
agreements, Anglo-French (1888) 99;  
Anglo-Italian (1894) 99; Anglo-  
Ethiopian (1897) 99, (1954) 124-6;  
commercial 134; peace 5, 6, 86; Sudan-  
Ethiopian (1902) 15  
agriculture 126-8 *passim*, 135, 136  
agro-pastoralists 125-6  
Agwame 74-6 *passim*  
aid 14, 88, 93, 137, 147; agencies 14, 17,  
18, 34, 42, 183  
Akedo 28  
Akkele Guzay 64, 75, 76, 78  
Aksum 63, 67, 68, 73  
Alemseged Abbay 73  
alliances 5, 19, 31-3, 49-51 *passim*, 54, 72,  
78, 86, 88-93 *passim*, 101, 102, 125, 133,  
143, 145, 147  
Ambuli 88, 90  
America, North 34, 42, 141  
Amhara/Amharic 16, 66-8 *passim*  
Amin, Idi 157, 159-60, 163  
Anderson, B. 153  
Anderson, J. 11, 13  
Anfillo 52  
animal trophies 14, 138, 143, 146  
anthropology 3, 8, 9  
Anywaa 12, 15-18 *passim*, 20, 27-44, 191-3  
*passim*; diaspora 34, 42, Association in  
North America 42; Jingmir 37-8; Justice  
Council 42  
Appadurai, A. 2, 7  
arbitrage economies 11, 13, 19, 187, 190;  
politics 187  
arbitration, court of 70, 71  
Archer, Governor 127, 129  
Arero, Abdi Jilo 55  
Arero, Hassano 51-2  
armpit traders 164-5  
arms 29, 30, 51, 88-93 *passim*, 100, 133,  
145, 165, 190  
Asante, S. 154  
Asians 138, 157  
Asiwaju, A.I. 1, 3, 4, 15, 154, 159

## Index

- Assab 85, 190  
assimilation 16, 27, 29, 31  
Astier Almedom 69  
Aulad Ali 14  
Auilhan sub-clan 143  
Australia 34  
Austria-Italy border 8  
Awash Arba 91; river/valley 85, 86, 88, 90  
Awdal region 85  
Axmed 111-13
- Babukusu 14, 151-5, 158-67 *passim*  
Bach, D. 155, 161  
Badime 69-71 *passim*, 79  
Bagisu 14, 151-5, 158-67 *passim*  
Baharasame sub-clan 110-11  
Bahrü Zewde 29, 30  
Bale 87  
*banda* 50  
bandits 10, 56, 72, 133, 145, 146, 172, 175, 182  
Bantu 17-18, 151; Somali *see* Zigula  
Barnes, Chris 14-15, 88, 122-31, 187  
Barre, Mohamed (Maxamed) Siyad 5, 16, 87, 88, 101-2, 111, 136-7, 142, 147, 194  
Barth, Fredrick 10, 11, 56  
Bassi, M. 46  
Battera, F. 102  
Baubock, R. 159  
Baud, M. 1, 9, 12  
Baydan, Bashiir Jaamac 113-14  
belongingness 62, 66, 68, 70, 76-7, 79  
Berbera 15, 100, 107, 134  
Bereket Sim'on 77  
Berhe Kahsay 72  
Berlin (Congo) Conference 21  
Besteman, C. 177  
Bevin, Ernest 136  
Bihidarays sub-clan 109  
Bilen 64  
Bo'ame declaration 112  
Bonaya, Dr Godana 54, 55  
Borama 128-30 *passim*  
Borana 16, 45, 46, 48-56 *passim*; -Garri conflict 48; militia 54  
borderlands/borderlanders 1, 2, 9-59, 97-9 *passim*, 103, 105, 112-17, 124-6, 133-67, 187-95 *passim*; *see also* opportunities  
borderlessness 7-8, 188  
borders 1-44, 68-79, 103-21, 133-55 *passim*, 160, 161, 166, 187-95 *see also individual entries*; 'bush' 115; colonial *see* colonialism; as constraints 1-8, 10, 11, 21, 22, 27; crossing 2, 8, 11, 12, 104-21, 133-55 *passim*, 159, 188; definition 1, 2; irrelevant 2, 4, 7-8, 189; strategic significance 19, 22  
boundaries, internal 37, 38, 68-79 *passim*, 137, 192, 194; international 8-11 *passim*, 17, 61-4, 116, 122, 133, 135, 152, 153, 155, 159, 166, 169-86 *passim*, 188  
Britain 4-6 *passim*, 15, 27, 29-30, 37, 45, 53, 68, 99-101 *passim*, 106, 109, 115, 116, 122-31 *passim* 136, 138, 140, 156, 178, 194; Military Administration 123, 127, 130, 136, 140  
British Somaliland 5, 14, 15, 87, 97-101 *passim*, 107, 122-31 *passim*, 191, 192; -Ethiopia border 14, 15, 122-31 *passim*; Monthly Intelligence Report 128; Protectorate Intelligence Report 130  
brotherhood 75-7 *passim*  
Burco 103-5 *passim*, 107  
Buuhoodle 106, 113-15 *passim*, 117
- Cabdi 105-9, 112, 113  
Cabdillahi 113  
Cabdiqani, Garaad 111, 112  
Cabdiraxmaan, J. 102  
calendars 46, 52n16, 55  
Cali, Garaad 100, 119  
Cali, Suldaan Yusuf 100  
Cali Keenadiid, Suldaan Yusuf 100  
camels 46, 50, 55, 137  
Cassanelli, Lee 14, 99, 101, 133-50, 178, 188, 190  
cattle 13, 31, 45, 139, 141-6 *passim*  
Cayn region 113  
Ceerigaabo 110  
Chabal, P. 32  
Chepkube 14, 163, 165  
Christianity 65, 66  
Cigaal, President Maxamed Ibraahim 108, 111, 112  
*Ciidanka Darawiishta* 105, 108  
Ciisa clan (*see also* Issa) 15, 19, 20, 85-94 *passim*, 102, 191  
citizenship 9, 13, 15, 17, 33, 35, 39-40, 42, 50, 159, 183, 187  
clans 50, 51, 98-9, 127, 130, 139, 141, 147, 191, 194 *see also individual entries*; conferences 102  
Clapham, Christopher *ix*, *x*, 2, 12, 19, 156, 187-95  
cleavage 19, 22, 78, 190  
closure, border 8, 45, 53-4, 160  
coffee 30, 164  
cognitive differences 4, 20, 22  
Collins, R. 27, 29, 38-9  
colonialism 2-4 *passim*, 7, 16, 17, 19, 21, 29, 45, 70, 78, 97, 99-101, 106, 122-31, 134, 135, 137-41, 144-7, 151-6 *passim*, 166,

## Index

- 169, 171, 191, 192; anti- 179; pre-17, 78, 137, 145, 146, 151, 193; post- 2, 6, 7, 14, 19, 45, 109
- commission workers 164-5
- conflicts 2, 4-7, 12, 21, 41-2, 46-56 *passim*, 70, 86-96, 103, 133-6 *passim*, 144, 146, 153, 166, 187-90 *passim* *see also* war; resolution 47, 86, 191
- Congo-Uganda border 20
- constraints 1-8, 10, 11, 21, 22, 27
- cotton 164
- Crauford, C.H. 170
- Craven, K. 177
- crime 133, 165
- Cuba 87
- culture 2, 16-18 *passim*, 20, 22, 35-9, 43, 46, 55, 56, 85-6, 151, 152, 159, 161, 162, 169, 175, 181, 193
- currency 13, 70, 103, 104
- Cushitic people 151
- Cusman, *Boqor* 100
- Dadaab refugee camps 174-5, 176-7
- Dahilon, Y. 90
- Dalleo, T. 138, 146
- Daloz, J.-P. 32
- Danakil Depression 90, 91
- Dankalia 90, 93
- Dansha 72
- Darood 98, 100, 107, 125
- Declich, Francesca 17-18, 169-86
- de facto* state 14, 18, 20, 88, 99, 102
- demography 18, 22, 31
- deportation 77
- Dereje Feyissa *ix-x*, 1-25, 27-45, 74, 191, 192
- Dervishes (*Darawiish*) 100-2, 105, 109, 113, 114, 117
- descent 75-7, 101, 112 *see also* genealogy
- De Waal, A. 102
- Dhulbahante 98-103, 105-15 *passim*, 117, 140, 187, 191
- Dinka 28
- Dir 85, 98
- Dire Dawa 89
- Djibouti 1, 4, 6, 14, 15, 18-20 *passim*, 85, 86, 88-93 *passim*, 123, 191, 193; civil war 89, 92-3 *passim*; and Eritrea 6; -Ethiopia border 15, 85-96, 190; FRUD 92, 93
- Donnan, H. 9
- Doornbos, M. 101, 102
- Dorman, S.R. 70
- drought 124, 137
- Drysdale, J. 4, 123, 125, 136
- Dundas, F.G. 170
- East African Community 155-8 *passim*
- East Africa Medical Journal* 140
- economy 2, 13-14, 19-20, 22, 104, 133-50, 155-66 *passim*, 190, 193; informal 10, 160-6
- education 13, 17, 33, 179, 183
- Egypt-Libya border 10, 14
- elections 15, 34, 46, 53-4, 110, 172, 187
- elites 3, 6, 20, 33, 39, 41, 55, 105, 112, 117, 158
- Elkere region 87
- El-Waq 46, 50
- Elwert, G. 62
- Entebbe, Israeli raid on 160
- entitlement 33, 35-6, 41
- Epstein, A.L. 169
- Eritrea 1, 5, 6, 15, 17, 19, 20, 60-83 *passim*, 86, 90, 93, 123, 187-94 *passim*; ELF 5, 72; EPLF 5, 17, 72, 77, 92; -Ethiopia border 16-17, 19, 69-70, 187, 190, 191, 193; -Ethiopia war 5-6, 17, 19, 21, 69, 77, 190, 194; Greater 68, 69; liberation movement 5, 6, 72, war 72
- Ethiopia 1, 2, 4-6, 14-20 *passim*, 27-52 *passim*, 56, 62, 68-74 *passim*, 77, 78, 86-8, 91-3 *passim*, 99, 115, 123-6, 134, 136, 139, 187-94 *passim*; -British Somaliland border 14-15, 122-31, 190; Constitution 5, 32, 47, 192; Derg 5, 31-3 *passim*, 47, 51, 87; -Djibouti border 15, 85-96, 190; EPRDF 5, 16, 32, 33, 39-41 *passim*, 47, 51, 52, 54, 92, 189; -Eritrea border 16-17, 19, 69-70, 187, 190, 191, 193; Greater 77; -Kenya border 15, 16, 45, 48-59 *passim*, 190, 192; Millennium 52-3; National Electoral Board 48, 49; -Sudanese border 12, 15, 19, 20, 27, 29-44 *passim*, 187, 192; TFG 6, 16, 47; war with Eritrea 5-6, 17, 19, 21, 69, 77, 190, 194, with Somalia 2, 5, 47
- ethnic groups/factors 12, 15, 17-18, 31-3 *passim*, 47, 53, 55, 62-83, 151-67 *passim*, 188, 192; confederacy 68, 78; extinction 28, 29, 31, 40, 42, 43; federalism 5, 15, 20, 27, 32, 34, 46, 189, 192, 194
- Europe/Europeans 7, 8, 12n7, 35-6, 135-7 *passim*, 141, 192
- Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 29, 36, 38
- exchange rates 11
- exclusion 8, 15, 21, 34, 41, 43
- Faarax Garaad sub-clan 111, 113
- Farah, A.Y. 102
- Favali, L. 75
- Fekadu Adugna 15, 45-59, 190
- Ferguson, J. 2, 7

## Index

- Fischer, E. 7-9 *passim*, 11  
France/French 4, 6, 35-6, 92, 99, 115  
free groups 170-4 *passim*  
FRUD 92, 93
- Gabra 46, 49-51, 53-6 *passim*; Malba 46;  
  Miigo 46, 53-5 *passim*  
*gada* system 45, 46  
Gadabuursi 14-15, 102, 127-30  
Gadamaitu 86, 88-90 *passim*  
Gadla-Giyorgis, *Qagnazmach* 127-9 *passim*  
Galafi 89  
Gala'lu 91, 93  
Galgalo, Dr Guracha 53  
Galgalo, Wario 53, 54  
Gambella 15-17 *passim*, 19, 27-44, 191-3  
  *passim*; People's Democratic Unity Party  
  34-5; Liberation Movement 32-4 *passim*;  
  National Regional State 32-4 *passim*, 38;  
  Relief Organization 42  
Garissa 144  
Garoowe 97, 99, 102-10 *passim*, 112, 115,  
  116  
Garri 46, 48-56 *passim*; -Borana conflict 48  
Gebru, T. 51  
genealogy (see also descent) 74, 77, 106,  
  152, 170, 172-4  
Georgia-Turkey border 11  
Gerlasé 71  
Germany 35-6; GTZ 107  
Geshekte, C.L. 4  
Ghana-Togo border 10  
Global Security Military Report 87  
globalization 2, 7-8, 21  
Godano, Shano 54  
Goldsmith, P. 135, 139, 141, 142  
Gosha 170, 1710  
Guji 45  
Gumuz 65
- H  
Habesha 63, 65-7 *passim*, 74  
Hagmann, Tobias *ix*, 47, 134  
Haile Selassie, Emperor 5, 51, 68, 87, 129  
Haji Hassan Qalla 55  
Hamasén/Hamasénay 64, 75  
Hammond, J. 72  
Handeni 172, 175-9 *passim*, 181, 183  
Harar 126; conferences 124-6 *passim*, 130  
Hargeysa 98, 99, 102, 103, 105, 107-16  
  *passim*  
Harti 98, 102, 105, 106, 112, 113, 116,  
  117, 136, 138, 143, 144, 190  
Hashi, A.A. 107  
Hassan Gababa 50  
Hassan, Mohamed 'Abdille ('Mad Mullah')  
  (see also Xassan, Maxamed Cabdille)
- 126, 127  
Hassen Gouled, President 92  
Haud 123-4  
Hawa Chikula 174  
Hawiye 102  
Herbst, J. 7, 12, 115  
herders 20, 30, 127 *see also* pastoralism  
Highlanders 33, 34, 39-42 *passim*, 63, 66, 69  
Hirt, N. 70  
Hoehne, Markus Virgil *ix-x*, 1-25, 42, 74,  
  87, 97-121, 187, 190  
Horn of Africa 1-9, 11-13 *passim*, 20, 21,  
  62, 85-131, 134, 135, 147, 187, 190,  
  192-4 *passim*; Volunteer Youth  
  Organization 114, 115  
Horstmann, A. 11, 12, 98, 117  
Hudet 46  
Human Rights Watch 41, 42  
Hüsken, T. 10, 14  
Hutchinson, S. 17  
Hyndman, J. 137
- identity, national/ethnic 9, 10, 13, 16-17,  
  31, 33, 34, 40-3, 46-8 *passim*, 54-5, 67-8,  
  71-2, 74, 75, 78, 79, 98, 169, 182, 192,  
  193; formation 2, 9, 16, 17, 69, 79  
ideology 28, 33, 43, 51, 56, 73, 85, 101,  
  154  
IGAD 108  
Igembe 140-2 *passim*  
immigration 11, 31, 35-6 *see also* migration  
inclusion 8, 15, 34, 36, 43, 65, 75, 76, 182  
infrastructure 14, 135, 137, 165  
insecurity 12, 145, 163  
integration, cross-border 3, 21, 155-8  
  *passim*, 170, 181, 182, 188, 189  
investment 134, 135; foreign 116  
IPAL 137n8  
Iraq 92  
Irob 63, 191  
irredentism 5, 20, 51, 192  
Isaaq 98, 100-2, 104-8 *passim*, 111, 112,  
  114, 117, 125, 138, 140, 142, 147, 191  
Isayas Afeworqi, President 76-7  
Isiolo 45, 140, 141  
Islam 5-6, 39, 53, 85, 100, 194  
Ismaaciil 113-15 *passim*  
Issa 15, 19, 20, 85-94 *passim*, 191  
Italy/Italians 4, 5, 8, 17, 45, 50, 68, 99-101  
  *passim*, 106, 115, 123, 130, 135-9  
  *passim*, 144, 191; -Austrian border 8;  
  Trusteeship Administration (AFIS) 136,  
  140  
Italian Somaliland 50, 87, 97, 101, 123,  
  135-6, 139  
Itang 41

## Index

- Ityop'ya 66, 78  
ivory 14, 29, 137, 138, 146  
Iyob, Ruth 70
- Jackson, R.H. 9  
Jacquin-Berdal, D. 71  
Jal, G. 28  
James, Pastor 37  
James, W. 47  
*javeer* 17  
Jeberti 65, 66  
Jigjiga 127-30 *passim*  
Jikaw 33  
*jobur* 36  
Johnson, D. 17, 29, 31  
Juba river/valley 135-7 *passim*, 145, 169-70, 176-9 *passim*, 181  
Jubaland 146; British 136, 138, 146
- Kaahin, President Dahir Rayaale 103, 105, 109, 115, 116  
Kakuma refugee camp 183  
Kakwenzire, P. 126  
Kapenguria 160  
Kassam, A. 46, 55  
Katzellenbogen, Simon 21  
Kayier, Peter 40  
Kearney, M. 2  
Kelly, R. 29  
Kemink, F. 75  
Kenya 1, 2, 4, 6, 14, 16, 20, 42, 45, 46, 49, 51-4 *passim*, 56, 87-8, 93, 132-67 *passim*, 174, 176, 177, 182, 183, 188, 190; -Ethiopia border 15, 16, 48-59, 190, 192; Mau Mau rebellion 136; National Rainbow Coalition (NARCK) 54; Northern Frontier District 14, 135-8 *passim*, 140, 143, 144, 146, 147; Northern Peoples' United Association 51; -Somali border 14, 132-50, 187-90 *passim*; -Uganda border 14, 151-67 *passim*, 190; war with Somalia 2, 56, 87, with Uganda 6  
Kenyatta, Jomo 155-7 *passim*, 160  
*kew* 37, 38  
kin/kinship 3, 31, 45-59, 76-7, 86, 92, 93, 145, 147, 159, 164, 169, 173-5 *passim*, 182, 187, 192  
Kinissa 54  
*Kipande* (Identity Card) 159  
Kiro, Sulemani 178  
Kismaayo 136-8 *passim*, 143, 144, 175; Port Project 137  
Kiswahili 14, 18, 159, 166, 176, 179  
Kizigula 170-2, 176, 181-3  
Kittermaster, Harold 129-30  
Kolia, S. 161, 164  
Kolmodin, J.A. 73  
Kolossoy, V. 3, 7, 9, 16  
*kolwa* 173-5 *passim*  
Komo 32, 34  
Krug, S. 72  
Kunama 64, 191  
Kurimoto, E. 31  
Kymlicka, W. 39
- Laasaanood 97, 103-15 *passim*  
La Fontaine, J. 151  
Laisamis 53  
land 126-7, 160, 176-7, 183; grazing 86, 123, 126, 144  
language 17-18, 46, 55, 65-7 *passim*, 69, 75-6, 151, 159, 169-76 *passim*, 181, 182, 188, 191  
Lascelles 124  
law 75; game/trophy 138; international 1, 21, 70; land 177  
Legesse, A. 46  
Lennon, John 60  
Lewis, I.M. 4, 15, 85, 99, 101, 102, 126, 136  
Liban, Ahmad 111  
liberation movements/fronts 5, 6, 31, 50-3, 179  
Libya-Egypt border 10, 14  
licensing 138, 140; import 163  
Lienhardt, G. 38  
lineage system 29, 38, 76 *see also* descent  
Little, P. 13-14, 134-5, 137, 144, 145, 147  
livestock 13, 14, 50, 100, 133, 137-40, 142-7 *passim*, 188; Trans-JubaProject 137  
Lwakhakha 14, 161, 163, 165
- Mabuloko, chief 170-1  
Machar, Riek 39  
*Magendo* 14, 152, 161-7  
Mahmoud, H.A. 2  
Majangir 32, 34  
Majeerteen 98, 100-2, 106-10 *passim*, 112, 114  
Makila, F. 151  
Makua 170-1, 176  
Malaba 163, 165  
*Mambo Leo* 178  
Mamdani, M. 157  
Mandera 46  
Marcus, H.G. 122  
Markakis, John *ix*, *x*, 2, 9, 15, 51, 89  
markets 13, 144-8 *passim*  
marginalization 2-3, 9, 14, 15, 17, 18, 21, 34, 40, 42, 99, 170, 190, 193  
marriage 106, 114, 151, 171, 175; inter-ethnic 30-1

## Index

- Marsabit 45, 46, 52, 53  
Mascarene Islands 143  
Masunya 178  
Matthies, V. 2, 5, 101  
Maxamuud Garaad sub-clan 111  
Mazrui, A.A. 156  
Mburu, N. 136  
McGrew, A. 8  
Mdoe, Bakari Bin 178  
Medhane, T. 31, 39  
Meles Zenawi, President 77  
Menelik II 99  
Mengistu Haile-Maryam 191  
Menkhaus, K. 17, 133, 137, 146, 177  
Mereb, River 73, 75  
Merera, G. 16  
Meroni, *negus* 76  
Meru 139-42 *passim*  
Midgaan 172  
migration/migrants 14, 27, 32-6 *passim*, 41, 65, 69, 86, 134, 143, 187  
minorities 15, 18, 32, 34, 39, 43, 54  
*miraa* (khat) 14, 133, 139-42, 145, 147, 187, 188  
Mkuiu refugee camp 175  
mobilization, kin 49, 50; political 13, 15, 19, 41, 43  
Mogadishu 139, 142, 144, 145; University 180, 181  
Mohamed Zubeir clan 143  
Moofi 178, 180, 181  
morality issues 162-3  
Moyale 15, 45-53 *passim*  
*Moyo Wazigula na Ngulu* 179, 180  
Msami, Mze Awes Jama 180  
Mugambo 171, 172, 181  
multinational corporations 7, 158, 164  
Munyanda, S. 164  
Murunga, G.R. 134  
Musse, Fowzia 175  
Muuse, President Maxamuud Cadde 111  
Mwaleni, Mze Juma Mganga 172  
Mwaligo, Mkomwa 174, 178
- 9/11 6, 8  
Nairobi 6, 140, 141; Eastleigh 142, 147  
naming system/names 17-18, 63-7, 173-4; self-designation 63-7, 78  
nation-building 153-4  
nationalism 2, 4, 16, 19, 45, 51-3 *passim*, 87, 101, 114, 117, 154, 166  
networks, credit 145; cross-border 14, 15, 41, 46, 49, 74, 162, 164; financial 133, 134; kin/friendship 30-1, 76-7, 92-4 *passim*, 145, 178; political 50; trade/economic 14, 141, 142, 146, 162, 165, 166; social 15, 139  
Newman, D. 7, 8  
Ngindo 176, 177  
NGOs 33, 99, 103, 114-15, 137  
Ngulu 179  
Nilotic groups 151  
Nkondokaya, V.G. 180  
nomads 2, 46, 104, 125, 182  
North Horr 53  
Nuer 15-17 *passim*, 19, 20, 27-44 *passim*, 191, 193; Jikany 27  
Nugent, P. 1, 10-13 *passim*, 28, 43, 53, 154, 161, 162, 164  
Nuur Axmed sub-clan 105, 109  
Nyasa 176  
Nyerere, Julius 156, 180  
*nyieya* 38
- OAU 115, 154-5, 160, 166  
Oba, Gufu 45, 50, 51  
Obote, Milton 155-7 *passim*  
Ochwada, H. 156, 158, 165  
O'Dowd, L. 11, 13  
Ogadeen clan 100, 102, 191  
Ogaden 5, 87, 101, 143, 144, 191; Ogaden war (1978-79) 5, 87, 101, 149  
Ojo Olatunde, J.C.B. 153  
Okoth, G.P. 153, 154, 160  
'Oltre-Gruba' 135  
Omot Agwa 38  
Opamo Uchok 35  
Opo 32, 34  
opportunities 1, 9-13 *passim*, 20, 21, 27, 33-4, 69-70, 99, 133, 144, 146, 187-9 *passim*, 191, 192, 194-5  
Oromia National Regional State 45-9 *passim*, 52-3, 55; -Somali conflict 47  
Oromo 2, 16, 45-7 *passim*, 51, 52, 55, 56, 62, 65, 68, 135, 143; Liberation Front 16, 51-4 *passim*, 56; People's Democratic Organization 52  
Oromo-ness 55  
'outsiders' 33, 153  
ownership 40, 48, 172-3
- pan-Africanism 157; -East Africanism 158, 165; -Somalism 6, 87, 101; -Zigula 178-81  
pastoralism 2, 4, 20, 38, 45, 48, 50, 86, 104, 125-7 *passim*, 135-6, 140, 143, 145, 191  
pasture 86, 92, 100, 126  
Pateman, R. 75  
peace negotiations 102, 105; Somali Peace and Reconciliation Conference, 108  
Pelkmans, M. 11

## Index

- Perducchi, E. 170  
Perini, R. 74, 75  
permeability, border 12, 13, 41, 116  
Perner, C. 28, 36, 37  
Plant, M. 71  
Plowman, C.H.F. 127, 129  
Pochalla County 42  
police/policing 7, 12, 38-40 *passim*, 49, 129, 133, 146, 159, 165, 176, 188, 189  
politics 2, 4-6 *passim*, 8, 13-16, 18-20, 27-9, 31-41 *passim*, 47, 49-50, 52, 54-5, 68-74, 76-7, 86-121 *passim*, 142, 151, 157, 159, 161, 165, 190, 191, 194  
power-sharing 108, 147  
prices 11, 13, 144-5, 163, 164, 188  
Prunier, G. 101  
Puntland 1, 5, 12, 20, 97, 102-5, 107-18  
*passim*, 187, 190; -Somaliland border 12, 14, 20, 97, 102-21 *passim*
- Qarshe, Maxamuud Xaaji 114-15  
quarantines 144, 146
- racism 39  
Raeymaekers, T. 9. 13, 20  
Rahanweyn Resistance Army 50  
raiding 30, 50, 133, 135-6, 182  
Rayya 65, 67, 79  
rebellion/rebels 13, 16, 31, 46, 51, 52, 56, 126, 127; Dervish 100-2, 113, 114, 117; Mau Mau 136  
recognition 16, 72-4 *passim*, 79, 102, 115, 116, 182  
Reer Hagar sub-clan 114  
referenda 6, 47-9 *passim*, 89, 102, 115, 136  
refugees 6, 13, 14, 17-19 *passim*, 31, 33-5 *passim*, 39, 41, 42, 137, 142, 147, 165, 169, 174-7, 181-3 *passim*, 187, 190, 194  
regionalism 61, 155-61 *passim*, 165, 166  
rehabilitation 14, 137  
re-import business 13  
religion 6, 53, 109, 151, 161, 188, 191  
remoteness 18, 22  
Renders, M. 102  
resettlement 17, 18, 33, 34, 42, 137  
resources 13-23, 30-6 *passim*, 48, 50-3; economic 13-14, 19-20; political 14-16; identity 16-17; status and rights 17-18  
reunification 17, 90 *see also* unity  
rights 13, 17-18, 32, 33, 183; grazing 123, 125-7 *passim*; human 2, 42  
rituals 175-6; buinda 170; circumcision 151, 161  
Roble, F. 99  
Robleh, Daudi 128, 129  
Robleh, Ugaas 128-9  
Rösler, M. 9  
rubber 30  
Rundell, J. 159
- Sabawiyaa 76  
Sahlins, M. 29  
Saku 52, 53  
Samatar, S.S. 101, 114, 126  
Sanaag 98, 105, 110, 115, 116  
sanctuary 13, 16  
Saudi Arabia 143  
Save the Children/USA 114, 115  
Schlee, Günther *vii-viii*, *ix*, *x*, 2, 4, 20, 46, 47, 50, 53, 55, 133  
Scott, J. 10, 162  
Searing, J. 92  
secession 5, 23, 97, 99, 102, 103, 114, 116, 117  
securitization 8, 21, 39  
security 8, 13, 16, 28, 39, 41, 42, 50-1, 76, 133, 162, 165  
separation 12, 61-3 *passim*, 69-70, 73, 75-7 *passim*, 169, 192-4 *passim*  
settlement 13-14, 18, 22, 30-2 *passim*, 43, 72, 125, 127  
Shabelle (river) 135  
Shamir, Roxen 8  
Shehim, K. 92  
Sheikh-Abdi, Abdi 101  
Shermaarke, Abdirashid Ali 4, 15  
*shifla* 182; wars 6, 136  
Shinili Zone 85, 89-90  
Shire, *Suldaan* Maxamuud Cali 100  
Silberman, L. 123  
bin Simba, Abdalla 178, 179  
skins 137, 138, 143, 146, 188  
slavery 17, 170-2, 182  
Smidt, Wolbert G.C. 16, 17, 61-83, 191, 193  
Smith, A. 139  
smuggling 3, 10-14 *passim*, 20, 93, 104, 128, 129, 133, 139, 162-5, 187-90 *passim*, 193  
social relations 1, 48-9, 93, 94, 151-67 *passim*  
social services 13, 17, 21, 33, 135 *see also individual entries*
- Sololo 52  
Somali 4, 6, 13-15, 18-20, 85-130; Marrehaan (Marrexaan) 56, 107; pan-Somalism 6, 87, 101; Somali-ness 55, 173, 182  
Somali-Galla line 135n4  
Somali National Regional State 46-9 *passim*, 55, 85-93 *passim*, 189; -Oromia conflict 47

## Index

- Somali Republic 4, 6, 51, 56, 86-8 *passim*, 97, 101, 136, 192; Constitution 87
- Somalia 1, 4-6 *passim*, 14-15, 17-18, 20, 46, 47, 51, 55, 56, 84, 86-8 *passim*, 93, 97, 100-3 *passim*, 111, 112, 117, 125-6, 132-50, 169-77, 180-3 *passim*, 187, 189, 191, 192, 194; Abo Liberation Front (SALF) 51, 56; African Muki Organization (SAMO) 181; civil war 6, 100-3, 105, 112, 145, 174-5, 181; collapse 5, 88, 101-3, 111, 112, 137, 143-5 *passim*, 194; Greater 5, 85, 87-8, 101, 134, 136; Information Service 4, 51, 99, 101; -Kenya border 14, 132-50, 187-90 *passim*; National Movement (SNM) 101, 102, 107, 111; Revolutionary Council 101; Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF) 101, 102; Transitional National Government 116; United Somali Congress (USC) 102; war with Ethiopia 2, 5, 87, with Kenya 2, 5, 6, 87; Youth League 140, 172, 194
- Somaliland 1, 5, 12, 15, 16, 18, 20, 85, 86, 88, 97, 102-21 *passim*, 134, 187, 190-2 *passim*, 194 *see also* British; Italian; Ministry of Foreign Affairs 115; National Army 113; -Puntland border 12, 14, 20, 97, 103-21 *passim*
- Somaliland Times* 110
- Soofe, Garaad Cabdullahi 113
- Sool 98, 103, 105, 106, 110-13 *passim*, 115, 116
- South Yemen 87
- sovereignty 7, 28, 43, 152-4 *passim*, 158, 166
- Soviet Union 11, 87, 192
- stabilization 78, 152
- state collapse 5, 88, 101-3, 111, 112, 137, 143-5 *passim*, 194
- state formation 5, 10, 28, 43, 152-4 *passim*
- statehood 12, 13, 16, 101, 102, 115-17 *passim*
- status 13, 17-18
- Stebbing, J.R. 124, 125, 127
- stratification, social 172, 182
- Suam 14, 163, 165
- Subagadish 75
- Sudan 1, 6, 15, 17-20, 27-44 *passim*, 187, 194; civil war 6, 17, 19, 31; -Ethiopia border 12, 15, 19, 20, 27-44 *passim*, 187, 192; southern 6, 17, 40, 42, 43, 194, People's Liberation Army 6, 31-3 *passim*
- Swahilization 179
- Taani, Nuux Ismaciil 113-14
- Tablino, P. 46, 55
- Taffassa, *Fitawari* 130
- Takla-Hawaryat, Governor 127
- Tanga 178, 179
- Tanzania/Tanganyika 1, 17, 18, 140, 172-83 *passim*, 187; TANU 180
- taxation 104, 126-30 *passim*, 138, 146, 162, 171, 177; poll tax 130
- Tegaru/Tigreans 16, 17, 19, 63, 65, 73, 78, 191-3 *passim*, 195
- Tekeste Negash 71
- Tembén 64, 67, 75, 77
- Tembénay 64
- territoriality 20, 27, 28, 36, 37, 43, 47
- Tewodros I 74
- Tigray 5, 60-83 *passim*, 191-2; Greater 19, 71-2; TPLF 7, 17, 47, 72, 74, 77, 91
- Tigrinnya people 16-17, 64
- Tigrinnya-speakers 16-17, 19, 60-83, 191-3 *passim*, 195
- Togdheer 98, 105, 106, 113, 114, 116
- Togo-Ghana border 10
- Touval, S. 3, 7, 15
- trade 10, 11, 13-14, 19-20, 29, 30, 70, 89, 93, 104, 128, 129, 133-48, 162-6 *passim*, 171, 188-90 *passim*, 193; armpit traders 164-5; ban/embargo 140-2 *passim*, 160; restrictions 70, 143, 163, 164, 166; routes 11, 15, 65, 91, 146, 189, 190
- traditional authorities 3, 66, 76, 100, 110, 112-17 *passim*, 128, 171
- training, military 89, 91, 93-4
- transnationalism 2, 7-8
- treaties, Anglo-Ethiopian (1897) 99, (1902) 27, 30, 99, 115; Anglo-Italian Protocol (1894) 99
- tribalism 10, 108, 124, 125, 129
- Tronvoll, K. 69, 71, 75
- Tsellim Bet 65, 66
- Tsen'adegele 64, 76
- Tsing, A.L. 2-3
- Turkey-Georgia border 11
- Turton, D. 47
- Uganda 1, 6, 20, 151-67 *passim*; -Congo border 20; -Kenya border 14, 151-67 *passim*, 190
- Ugugumo 90, 91, 93
- Ullendorf, E. 27, 68
- UN 5, 160; Four-Power Commission 136; Mission to Eritrea and Ethiopia 189; peacekeepers 187
- Undufu 89, 90
- UNHCR 14, 17, 18, 33, 34, 42, 137, 175, 176
- Union of Islamic Courts 54, 194

## Index

- unity 5, 62, 63, 65, 68-73 *passim*, 77, 78, 99,  
112, 115, 193, 194  
US 194; USAID 137  
Uweys, Shaykh 100
- Van Schendel, W. 1, 9, 12  
Vaughan, S. 47
- Wachu, Adan 53-4  
Wadley, R.L. 11, 12, 98, 117  
Wafula, Peter Wekesa 14, 151-67, 190  
Wakiro, C. 161, 162, 164  
Wal-Wal incident 136n6  
Walsh, D.C. 128, 130
- wars 2, 5-7 *passim*, 190, 194; Afar-Issa 86-96  
*passim*; civil 5-6, 19, 31, 89, 92-3, 103;  
Cold 19, 20, 31; Dervish 100, 109;  
Ethiopia-Eritrea 5-6, 17, 19-21 *passim*,  
69, 77, 190, 194, -Kenya 2, 5, 6, 87;  
-Somalia 1, 2, 5, 10, 87; First Gulf 92;  
liberation 5, 72; Kenya-Somalia 2, 5,  
56, 87; Ogaden 5, 87, 101; Oromo-  
Ethiopia 56; *shifla* 6, 136; World War I  
7, 136, 140; II 7, 123, 140, 178
- warlords/warlordism 6, 20, 102  
Warsangeeli 98-103 *passim*, 112, 115, 117,  
187, 191  
water/wells 45, 48, 50, 86, 92, 100, 115,  
126  
*wat-ngomi* 36  
Welde Selassie, *re'esi* 75
- weledo* 76  
*welo* 36  
Wendl, T. 9  
Were, G.S. 151  
'Westphalian order' 7  
Wilson, T. 9  
Woldeab Woldemariam 68, 69  
women 141, 165, 171-2, 177  
World Bank 137
- Xassan 109-13 *passim*  
Xassan, Maxamed Cabdille 100, 105, 109,  
110, 112-13, 114
- Yao 176  
Yasin, Yasin Mohammed 15, 85-69, 189,  
192  
Ybir 172  
Yerow, Mze Mkomwa Mwechiwa 180  
Yohannes IV (Kasa Mercha) 74, 75  
Yocada 97, 104, 105, 116-18 *passim*  
Young, C. 16  
Young, J. 73  
Yugoslavia 192  
Yusuf, President Cabdullahi 107, 108, 111,  
113
- Zaire 140  
Zalamo 176  
Zigula 17-18, 169-87 *passim*; pan- 178-81  
Zitelmann, T. 62