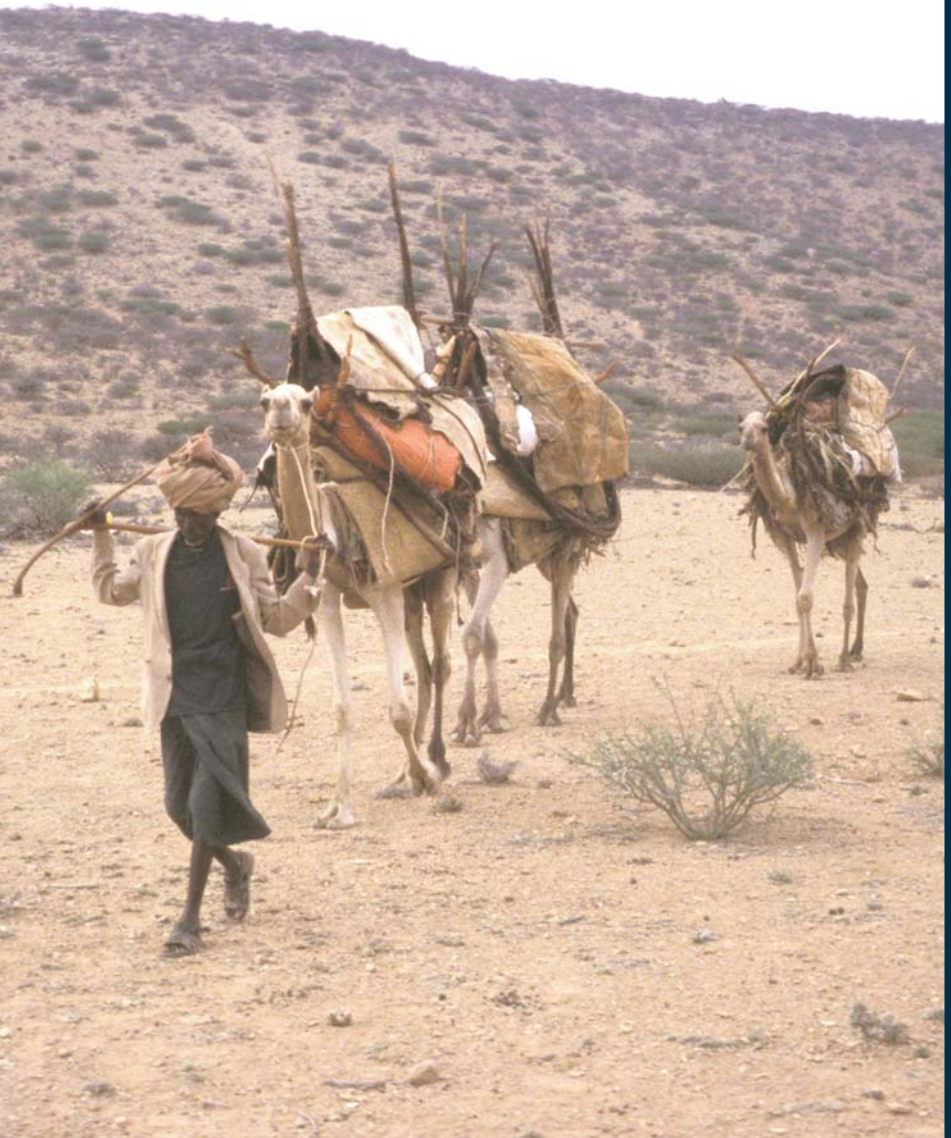


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Borders & Borderlands as Resources in the Horn of Africa



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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 herdsman 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
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List of Acronyms



ACANA	Anywaa Community Association in North America
AFIS	Italian Trusteeship Administration
AJC	Anywaa Justice Council
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BMA	British Military Administration
EAC	East African Community
ELF	Eritrean Liberation Front
EPLF	Eritrean People's Liberation Front
EPRDF	Eritrean People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
EU	European Union
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
FRUD	Front pour le Restauration de l'Unité et la Démocratie
GPDUP	Gambella People's Democratic Unity Party
GPLM	Gambella People's Liberation Movement
GPNRS	Gambella People's National Regional State
GRO	Gambella Relief Organization
GTZ	Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
HAVOYOCO	Horn of Africa Volunteer Youth Organization
MP	Member of Parliament
NARCK	National Rainbow Coalition Kenya
NFD	Northern Frontier District of Kenya
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPUA	Northern Peoples' United Association
NRS	National Regional State
OAU	Organization of African Unity
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
OPDO	Oromo People's Democratic Organization
SALF	Somali Abo Liberation Front
SAMO	Somali African Muki Organization
SNM	Somali National Movement
SPLA	Sudan People's Liberation Army
SSDF	Somali Salvation Democratic Front
TFG	Transitional Federal Government
TGE	Transitional Government of Ethiopia
TNG	Transitional National Government
TPLF	Tigrean People's Liberation Front
UN	United Nations
USC	United Somali Congress
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

One



State Borders & Borderlands as Resources

An Analytical Framework

DEREJE FEYISSA & MARKUS VIRGIL HOEHNE

Introduction

In this introductory chapter we offer an analytical framework for researching the resourcefulness of state borders as institutions and borderlands as territories, which is substantiated by the case studies in this volume. The case studies are drawn from the Horn of Africa and eastern Africa, and involve the borders of Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia, Somaliland, Puntland, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. The object of the research is how people who live along and are divided by state borders have adjusted to the borderland situation, and what strategies they use in order to extract different types of resources from borders and borderlands. By resources we refer to immaterial resources such as social relations (across the border), the placement within the territorial, political, or social landscape, or any kind of claim that can be made with regard to state borders and/or borderlands in order to attain social, economic, or political benefits. We also distinguish between borders and borderlands on the following grounds. By borders we mean the institution of inter-state division according to international law; borderlands, on the other hand, are territorially defined as the physical space along the border – on both sides of it (Baud and Van Schendel 1997: 216). Borders and borderlands mutually define one another; the existence of the border constitutes the borderland. We specifically engage with borders as institutions that can be made use of, and borderlands as fields of opportunity for the people inhabiting them.

Borders in Africa have generally been conceived as barriers, whereas they also provide what Asiwaju and Nugent (1996) call ‘conduits and opportunities’. As elsewhere in the continent, the academic discourse on state borders in the Horn of Africa is largely focused on the constraints side. Frequently, the Horn is associated with natural and man-made

catastrophes, which often have a cross-border dimension, and with violent border conflicts. Many local people as well as external observers perceive the arbitrary colonial borders as one of the causes for these conflicts. In his in-depth study on the early post-colonial border wars of Somalia with Ethiopia and Kenya, Matthies (1977: 6) observed that Africa is the continent of border wars 'par excellence', due to its artificial borders that served colonial interests and disregarded local ethnic and economic conditions. Christopher Clapham (1996a: 237–241) identified three forms of competing conceptions of boundary and territory in the Horn: the territorial (state) nationalism of highland Ethiopia,¹ the expansive pastoral system of the Somali and the Afar, and the ethno-nationalist system of the Oromo. As Clapham noted, these clashing concepts of boundary have contributed to the appalling conflicts in the region (ibid.: 237).² Schlee (2003) stressed that the map of the Horn was constantly redrawn over the past decades according to (identity) political considerations, which resulted in the escalation of (partly violent) conflicts on the international, national and sub-national levels. The focus on border conflicts is supplemented by the perception of borderlands as marginal spaces inhabited by underprivileged people who suffer from lack of infrastructure and political participation, from repression, and from inter-state conflict (Markakis 2006). Similarly, Mahmoud (2008: 2) observed that '[b]order politics and the dilemma of divided communities have been a source of strained society-state relations'. Based on observations from northern and north-eastern Kenya, which is largely inhabited by pastoral nomads who are perceived as antagonistic by the state, he concluded that this negative relation between political centre and borderland communities manifested itself in human rights violations, political tensions and economic losses (through not realizing the potential of the pastoral-nomadic economy for the Kenyan state).

A second body of (not necessarily Africa-related) literature perceives borders either as limiting economic and other global exchanges, or, on the contrary, argues that borders are frequently irrelevant when looking at transnational and global processes of exchange and identity formation (Appadurai 2003; Ferguson 2006). Studies of transnationalism and globalization emphasized the de-territorialization (and consequently, the detachment from any fixed borders) of culture, politics and economy (Kearney 1995).

While we recognize these multiple constraints, our interest is not to confirm existing explanations for border-related conflicts, or to offer alternative explanations. We also do not advocate a liberal economy or a transnational agenda. Instead, we examine the (sometimes conflicting) (re)bordering and border-crossing processes within which the agency of the borderlanders is situated. Following Tsing, we emphasize the multiple possibilities engendered by marginal spaces and being marginal. Tsing (1993: 21) argues that 'the image of the border [as a margin] turns attention to the creative projects of self-definition of those at the margins.

By shifting the perspective to that of actors who imagine multiple possibilities, the image raises issues of agency without neglecting the constraints of power and knowledge.' Where Tsing refers to the constraints of power and knowledge, we refer to the constraining powers of the national centres or states.

In the following, we engage with state borders as constraints literature. Subsequently, we briefly touch on important insights of the anthropology of borders and borderlands. From there we develop our analytical framework for studying the opportunities that state borders and borderlands provide, and elaborate on the conditions of resourcing them.

State borders as constraints

ARBITRARY BORDERS

About 42 per cent of the total length of land boundaries in Africa is drawn by 'parallels, meridians and equidistant lines without any consideration of social realities' (Kolossoff 2005: 628–9).³ In his book *The Boundary Politics of Independent Africa*, Touval (1972) asserted that there is something particularly problematic about the manner in which the colonial borders in Africa were drawn. He was referring to the usual perception that borders were demarcated in disregard of the wishes of the local population. Touval, however, did not accept the perspective of the Africans as pure victims. He emphasized that, in a number of cases, African rulers actively engaged with European colonizers. Local chiefs, kings, or sultans profited from these external contacts, through which they were able to stabilize their local authority and gain access to firearms, prestige, education, and so forth. In this way, Touval highlighted African involvement in the colonial project. However, it was mostly the involvement of the ruling elite. A prolific writer on state borders as barriers is the historian A.I. Asiwaju. In his introduction to the volume *Partitioned Africans*, he argued that

the boundaries have been drawn across well-established lines of communication including, in every case, a dormant or active sense of community based on traditions concerning common ancestry, usually very strong kinship ties, shared socio-political institutions and economic resources, common customs and practices, and sometimes acceptance of a common political control. (Asiwaju 1985: 2)

Asiwaju continued that, although imposed, the borders separating African states were not absolute. Cross-border integration took place every day. Moreover, many clandestine activities across borders, such as smuggling, on occasions posed serious threats to state security and a more or less permanent challenge to the economy (ibid.: v). This micro-sociological approach led him to the position that 'from the viewpoint of border society life in many parts of Africa, the partition can hardly be said to have taken place' (ibid.: 4).

Borders were therefore understood as essentially legal limits, which distinguish the jurisdiction of different political regimes and their respective administrations. In the same vein, Schlee (1998: 232) argued with regard to district boundaries in Kenya that 'those boundaries were drawn along the distinctions made by those who drew them'. He identified the dividing lines as 'colonial constructs' that did not recognize African social, political, and economic systems beyond the immediate interests of the colonizers. In addition, he pointed to cognitive differences that play a role in understanding the meaning of a boundary in its local context. 'The result is that people inhabiting the same country have quite different views of the legitimacy and usefulness or even the existence of boundaries' (ibid.: 229). Consequently, border regions in Africa are zones of socio-political ambivalence, 'where the loyalty of the local peoples to either of the states sharing the particular cultural areas has not been, and never could have been, very strong' (Asiwaju 1985: 12). In this perspective, state borders appear to be irrelevant at the micro level, and/or a problem at the political and inter-state level.

CONFLICT-PRONE BORDERS
IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

From a contemporary (2010) perspective, it is bitterly ironical that Asiwaju twenty-five years ago advised the 'politicians' in post-colonial Africa to follow the Somali lead. He referred to the Somali (back then) as the 'only partitioned groups in Africa among whom reactions have taken the form of an active nationalist movement' (1985: 14).⁴ Somali nationalism is indeed intimately related to the problem of the arbitrary colonial borders in the Horn (Drysedale 1964; Geshekte 1985). In colonial times, as is well known, the Somali peninsula was divided between France, Italy, Great Britain, and Ethiopia. After the independence of the Somali Republic in 1960, Somalis lived in Somalia, Ethiopia, and colonies that later on became Kenya (1963) and Djibouti (1977). This was seen as a serious problem by Somali nationalists who claimed self-determination for the parts of the Somali nation that remained outside the Somali state (Lewis 1983: 13). Abdirashid Ali Shermaarke, the first Prime Minister of the Somali Republic, outlined his government's position, and the position of many Somalis, when he wrote in the preface to a book on *The Somali Peninsula*,

Our misfortune is that our neighbouring countries, with whom, like the rest of Africa, we seek to promote constructive and harmonious relations, are not our neighbours. Our neighbours are our Somali kinsmen whose citizenship has been falsified by indiscriminate boundary 'arrangements'. They have to move across artificial frontiers to their pasture lands. They occupy the same terrain and pursue the same pastoral economy as ourselves. We speak the same language. We share the same creed, the same culture, and the same traditions. How *can* we regard our brothers as foreigners? (Information Service of the Somali Government 1962: vi; italics in the original)

Already in the 1960s the so-called 'Greater Somalia' policy of the government in Mogadishu, which aimed at uniting all Somalis in one state, led to major conflicts with Kenya and Ethiopia (Matthies 1977). The weakness of Ethiopia after the fall of Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974 prompted Somalia's attack on its neighbour in pursuit of its irredentist dream. This resulted in one of the bloodiest inter-state wars in Africa, popularly known as the Ogaden war (1977–78). The devastating defeat of the Somali national army weakened the regime of Siyad Barre. Mounting militant opposition during the 1980s climaxed in the fall of the government and state collapse, which was followed by internal territorial reorganization. Somaliland seceded in 1991 unilaterally from the rest of Somalia. Puntland was declared an autonomous region in 1998. Most recently, Islamists in the south started fighting for power and Somali unity. This constellation of events as well as external interferences make the Somali-inhabited Horn a 'prime theatre' for ongoing violent conflicts related to, among other issues, state borders.

Another prominent series of border conflicts in the region started with the Eritrean liberation movement. Carved out of northern Ethiopia as an Italian colony in 1890, Eritrea came under British control for a decade (1942–52). Under a UN-mandated referendum Eritrea was federated with Ethiopia in 1952. However, Emperor Haile Selassie annexed Eritrea a decade later, which generated the armed resistance of the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF). The change of regime in Ethiopia in 1974 and the military rule of the Derg coincided with the rise of a more militant liberation movement called the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) that finally liberated Eritrea in May 1991.

The Eritrean wars of liberation have ensconced the establishment of ethno-liberation movements against the centralist state in Ethiopia. The strongest among these was the Tigrean People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which was supported by its ethnic comrades in Eritrea across the border. It also formed an alliance with other ethno-liberation movements and established the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in the late 1980s, which seized power in Ethiopia at the same time as the EPLF took over Eritrea. The EPRDF restructured the Ethiopian state into an ethnic federation. The new political order has its own detractors. Centrists oppose it for 'endangering' the very survival of the country, since the constitution theoretically grants the federal states the right to leave the federation. Others complain about the continued centralizing tendencies and the new form of ethnocracy, namely, Tigrean hegemony.

The good relations between the EPRDF and the EPLF benefitted the independence of Eritrea in 1993. Soon, however, conflicting projects of state-building, failure to come up with a mutually acceptable economic arrangement, and a quarrel over the border brought Ethiopia and Eritrea to the devastating 1998–2000 war. Despite the peace agreement the conflict continued, albeit in the form of a proxy war in collapsed Somalia, where the Asmara government supported various Islamist groups whereas

Addis Ababa aided and used different warlords and the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) under President Abdullahi Yusuf (2004–8).

Post-colonial Sudan also plunged into civil wars with regional and border dimensions. At independence from the British in 1957 political elites from northern Sudan sought to monopolize power, mostly through the exclusion of others, particularly Southerners. These politics that reflected regional disparity and differential incorporation into the Sudanese state system were framed in religious terms by the predominantly Muslim Northerners who gave their political aspirations a divine mandate. On that basis they set out to Islamize the whole country, which bred discontent, particularly in the largely Christian south. Post-colonial Sudan has seen two civil wars (1961–72 and 1983–2005) both of which involved external actors and trans-border relations. In answer to Sudan's support for the Eritrean liberation movements, successive Ethiopian governments actively supported southern Sudanese liberation fronts, such as the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) that was established in 1983. The Sudanese civil wars came to an end after a negotiated peace agreement between the SPLA and the government of the Sudan in 2005. Uncertainties still abound, however; the political future of southern Sudan is to be decided by a referendum in 2011.

Kenya appears to be relatively calm. Except for a brief confrontation with Somalia in 1963 and clashes with Uganda over the area around Mount Elgon in 1976 and as recently as 2006, no hostilities occurred between Kenya and its neighbours. Domestically, the long-standing tensions between the state and part of the Somali population that escalated into the so-called *Shifita* war in the 1960s constituted a prominent and until today smouldering conflict related to the border. Comparatively, however, Kenya is internally and externally more at peace than its neighbours. The 2008 post-election violence was the exception rather than the rule. Nonetheless, the country is deeply involved in the regional conflicts as host to hundreds of thousands of refugees from neighbouring countries. In addition, Nairobi is an important centre for international negotiations that influence dynamics of conflict and peace in the region.

Similarly, Djibouti, apart from recent skirmishes along the border with Eritrea, was not involved in any inter-state war. It had been a French colony until 1977. Its independence dealt a blow to pan-Somalism, since the Republic of Somalia had long sought to drag the Somali part of the Djiboutian population into its 'camp'. Post-colonial Djibouti stayed a close ally of its former colonial 'motherland', hosting French and, after the 9/11 attacks, also US-American and allied troops. Djibouti's economic and political importance regionally and internationally derives from its strategic location on the straits between the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. The country is involved in regional conflicts as its harbour is an important life-line for land-locked Ethiopia. It is also involved in Somali civil war politics, but, mostly 'behind the arras', apart from the peace initiative in Arta in 2000 and the January 2009 Somalia-related conference (Djibouti city).