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# Resourcing State Borders and Borderlands in the Horn of Africa<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

This article offers an analytical framework for researching the resourcefulness of state borders as institutions and borderlands as territories. It focuses on the Horn of Africa and investigates how the people living there exploit state borders and borderlands through various strategies. Drawing on summaries of case studies from Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia, Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania we identify four different types of resources that collective as well as individual actors can extract from state borders and borderlands. These are: first, economic resources (cross-border trade and smuggling); second, political resources (access to alternative centres of political power, trans-border political mobilisation, sanctuary for rebels, and strategic cooption of the borderlanders by competing states); third, identity resources (state border as a security device in an inter-ethnic competition, legitimation of the claim for statehood); and fourth, status and rights resources (citizenship and refugee status, including access to social services). Resourcing state borders and borderlands, however, refers to a potential, not to a ready-made good. In fact, people have to strive to realise the opportunities entailed by borders and borderlands. Furthermore, who extracts what kind of resources from them is determined not only by individual or collective efforts, but also by variables such as the demographic size of the borderland community, the cross-border settlement pattern, the political distance of the borderlanders from the national centre, the significance a specific border possesses for the state actors, the depth of the cleavage caused by the border, the degree of inter-state economic differentiation, the entrepreneurial skills of the borderlanders, their cultural schemes or cognitive differences, and changes over time.

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## Introduction

“The longer a boundary functions, especially an international boundary, the harder it becomes to alter it. The transportation net gets adjusted to the boundary, market towns take their specific importance from it, habits of the local population are shaped by it, ideas are moulded under the impact of different educational systems. Once established, boundaries tend to persist through their impact upon the human landscape.” (Fisher 1949: 197–198)

Borders have generally been conceived as barriers, whereas they also provide what Nugent and Asiwaju (1996) call “conduits and opportunities”. In this article we discuss the conduits and opportunities of state borders and borderlands on the basis of case studies presented at the conference we organised under the heading *Divided They Stand: the affordances of state borders in the Horn of Africa* at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle/Saale, 7–8 September 2006. We also relate to the existing literature on state borders and borderlands to situate the perspective we adopt. The object of explanation 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 it.<sup>3</sup> We distinguish between borders and borderlands on the following grounds: by borders we refer to 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. 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 opportunities for the people inhabiting them.

Like elsewhere in Africa, the academic discourse on state borders in the Horn of Africa is largely focussed 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. Consequently, borderlands are predominantly perceived as marginal spaces inhabited by underprivileged people who suffer from lack of infrastructure and political participation, from repression, and from inter-state conflict (see e.g. Markakis 2006). While we recognise these multiple constraints, in this paper we develop our focus on resourcing state borders and borderlands in order to provide a counter-argument to most of the existing literature. Following Tsing, we emphasise 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. Based on the findings of case studies from Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia, Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, we propose an analytical framework for studying the opportunities that state borders and borderlands provide and subsequently offer some thoughts on the conditions of resourcing them.

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<sup>3</sup> By resource we refer to immaterial resources such as social relations (across the border), the placement within the territorial, political, or social landscape (e.g. influenced by center-periphery relations), or any kind of claim that can be made – all in reference to state borders and/or borderlands – in order to attain social, economic, or political benefits.

## State Borders as Constraints

Over the last decades, the inhabitants of the Horn have been haunted by several long political and military conflicts over state borders, such as the Somali-Ethiopian and the Somali-Kenyan skirmishes and wars, or the Eritrean war of liberation from Ethiopia, and following that, the recent Eritrean-Ethiopian war. Many local people as well as external observers perceive the arbitrary colonial borders as one of the causes for these conflicts (Matthies 1977, 2005). Yet, the argument that the artificiality of the colonial border would explain their problematic nature in post-colonial time is not well founded. Rather, as Touval (1972) and Herbst (2000) remind us, all state borders are artificial in the sense that they are the products of human action. Moreover, they are often drawn in the context of wars and conflicts. In Europe, many of the current state borders were demarcated only in the 20th century, often after large scale wars (Fischer 1949).

In his book *The Boundary Politics of Independent Africa*, Touval (1972) asserts that there is something particularly problematic about the manner in which the colonial borders in Africa were drawn. He refers to the usual perception that borders were demarcated in disregard of the wishes of the local population, of social relations on the ground, and of the economic needs of the population (access to waterholes and pasture, for instance). Touval, however, does not accept the perspective of the Africans as pure victims. He emphasises that in a number of cases African rulers actively engaged with European colonisers. Local chiefs, kings, or sultans profited from these external contacts, through which they could stabilise their local authority and gain access to firearms, prestige, education, and so forth. In this way, Touval highlights 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* (1985), he set out to put the focus on the border populations and the social, cultural, and economic relations they generate across the dividing lines. Asiwaju (1985: 2) built on the position Touval had established a decade earlier emphasising that in the divided African cultural areas

“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 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 the author 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 recognise African social,

political, and economic systems beyond the immediate interests of the colonisers (ibid.). Additionally, Schlee highlighted the cognitive differences that play a role for 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 have always evolved as special areas 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 the introduction to *Partitioned Africans*, state borders were discussed as irrelevant on the micro level, and/or a problem on the political and inter-state level. Asiwaju further advised the ‘politicians’ 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” (ibid.: 14).

Somali nationalism is indeed intimately related to the problem of the arbitrary colonial borders in the Horn (Drysdale 1964). In colonial time, as is well known, the Somali peninsula was divided between France, Italy, Great Britain, and Ethiopia. According to Lewis (1983: 9), this division collided with “Somali cultural nationalism [which] is a centuries old phenomenon and not something which has recently been drummed up to give credence to political claims.” After the independence of the Somali Republic, Somalis lived in Somalia, Ethiopia, and what later on became Kenya and Djibouti. This was seen as a serious problem by Somali nationalists who claimed self-determination for the parts of the Somali nation that remained outside of the Somali state (Lewis 1983: 13). Cabdirashid Cali Shermarke, the first Prime Minister of the Somali Republic, for instance, outlined his government’s position, and the position of many Somalis on this partition, 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)

Matthies (1997: 101), among many others, described the Somali as the main victims of the colonial partition of the Horn. In the first postcolonial decades, this partition and the so called ‘Greater Somali’ policy of the Somali government, which aimed at uniting all Somalis in one state, led to major conflicts between Somalia and Kenya and, most prominently, between Somalia and Ethiopia (Matthies 1977).<sup>4</sup> The arbitrariness of the state borders in the Horn was also highlighted by Christopher Clapham (1996a: 237–241), who identified three forms of competing conceptions of boundary and territory in the Horn. These are the territorial (state) nationalism of highland

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<sup>4</sup> This irredentist project is still alive. The Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) that briefly took over power in Moqadishu in 2006 invoked the idea of Greater Somalia. This, together with geo-political considerations in the context of the ‘global war on terrorism’ as well as the proxy war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, precipitated the military intervention of the Ethiopian government in Somalia since December 2006.

Ethiopia;<sup>5</sup> 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).<sup>6</sup>

### **Anthropology of Borders and Borderlands<sup>7</sup>**

Anthropological research was up until recently predominantly concerned with borders of social groups, which were defined by cultural features. In the first half of the 20th century, ‘tribes’, ‘clans’, ‘peoples’, or ‘ethnic groups’ were frequently perceived as static and fixed entities, defined by common descent, common language, common religion, and so forth (Vermeulen and Govers 2000, Lentz 1995, Rösler and Wendl 1999).<sup>8</sup> Subsequently, the way in which groups were socially constructed attracted attention. Barth (1969) established the focus on ethnic identities as depending on self-ascription and ascription by others.<sup>9</sup> He was interested in how identities were maintained in inter-group contact. Barth argued, that, depending on the situation and the interests of the actors involved, “some cultural features are used by the actors as signals and emblems of differences, others are ignored, and in some relationships radical differences are played down and denied” (Barth 1969: 14). Consequently, the subject matter should be “the ethnic boundary that defines a group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses” (ibid.: 15). According to this line of reasoning, social borders are quite flexible, and cultural features enclosed by them can be handled creatively. From this perspective, the permanence of a ‘cultural core’ is of secondary importance for group stability.

Twenty-five years later, and also in reaction to criticism of his disregard for the ‘cultural stuff’, Barth (2000 [1994]: 18) reviewed his position and pointed out that “central and culturally valued institutions and activities in an ethnic group may be deeply involved in its boundary maintenance by setting internal processes of convergence into motion.” He also acknowledged the fact that the state is an important actor influencing the construction of identities (ibid.: 21). But only in another and later text, which we will introduce in more detail below, did Barth explicitly engage with modern state borders, and with the affordances/advantages as well as the limitations they create for people (Barth 2000: 27).

This relation between state borders and social borders is one focal point of the current anthropology of borderlands. Wilson and Donnan (1998: 2) stressed in their seminal introduction to anthropological studies on border identities the importance of the state for “new politics of representation, redefinition and resistance.” Following this approach, Rösler and Wendl (1999: 8) argued that “located at the fringes of nation-states, borderlands usually lack precise boundaries and are more exposed to foreign, trans-border influences and cross-border movements than are the heartlands.” In our perspective, it is exactly this lack of precise boundaries that could create

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<sup>5</sup> This territorial state nationalism, of course, has had its expansive phase, but it got consolidated through colonial and post-colonial arrangements in the late 19th and mid 20th century.

<sup>6</sup> The political organisations, which claim to represent these divergent conceptions of the border, thus, play different ‘language games’ to the extent that they mean different things when they refer to the border.

<sup>7</sup> Here we concentrate only on a small part of the large body of literature on the topic that we considered most relevant for our further discussions.

<sup>8</sup> The approach of the ‘Manchester School’ in the 1940s and 1950s was exceptional in this regard. Social anthropologists around Max Gluckman did research on group formation and social and cultural change in cities and in contexts of rural-urban migration. Ethnic identity was found to be flexible and to serve as an instrument of social relations rather than as ‘primordial’ condition.

<sup>9</sup> Since the 1970s, a ‘flood’ of publications has been produced on constructivism/constructionism in social sciences and in the social world. Fenton (2003: 2–12, 73–80) and Lentz (1995) provide useful introductions to this sometimes seriously confused debate on identity by taking up the problem of ‘ethnicity’.

opportunities for the ‘borderlanders’. The latter might be physically detached from the centres, but they are partly in control of what happens at the borders, which is again vital for the centres. State borders are similar to social borders in the sense that both mark off collective identities. Where they differ is in the degree of rigidity. In state borders national identities are fortified by citizenship, economic regimes, and international legal agreements (the postcolonial sanctification of state borders), whereas in social borders collective identities exhibit more fluidity. Still, at a more theoretical level, anthropologists and political scientists concur in the idea that state borders, despite their ‘natural appearance’ on maps and the international system supporting them, are socially constructed (Jackson 1990: 7). This, however, does not mean that state borders are inconsequential. Related to the just mentioned state regimes and legal arrangements – that admittedly may differ in their rigidity – borders set in new economic and socio-political processes are as much enabling as they are constraining. Furthermore, state borders have intended as well as unintended consequences. They demarcate and separate but also encourage people to explore new connections as well as cross-border opportunities and incentives provided by residing in borderlands. These are sometimes in line with and sometimes ‘against’ state policies.

### **Resourcing State Borders and Borderlands**

Except for some allusions and implicit recognition of the potentiality of state borders and borderlands as resources, the aforementioned literature has largely dealt with what the arbitrary border has done to the people, i.e. the political, cultural, and economic fragmentation of ethnic groups. This focus is normative and is located largely at the macro level. Its argumentation circulates around the ‘bad’ state borders. In contrast, we propose a non-judgemental perspective. We are interested in peoples’ actions and creativity with regard to state borders and borderlands, turning what appears to be a liability into an asset. The earliest non-normative work on modern state borders that we found is Eric Fischer’s *On Boundaries* (1949). Based on his study of southern Tyrol, Fischer developed a human geographic perspective on the imprint of boundaries upon social life. He posed the pertinent question why the international border should matter, for which he answered that:

“The longer a boundary functions, especially an international boundary, the harder it becomes to alter it. The transportation net gets adjusted to the boundary, market towns take their specific importance from it, habits of the local population are shaped by it, ideas are moulded under the impact of different educational systems. Once established, boundaries tend to persist through their impact upon the human landscape.” (Fischer 1949: 197–198)

Fischer’s description of the state border between Austria and Italy aptly captures the political developments in Europe in the 20th century, where, particularly after the World Wars, governments embarked on intensive projects of nationalising their borders. The borderlanders in the Horn of Africa, however, seem to have gone through different trajectories. Border regions were often neglected by their respective political centres. As a result, the people residing in these areas are economically and culturally marginalised (Markakis 2006). Yet, as the case studies from the Horn show, marginalisation is only one side of the ‘border coin’. The other is a huge potential for local actions as we outline below. In contrast to Fischer’s study, in which the centre developed an

interest in the border, in our cases it is the borderlanders who are becoming active, sometimes up to the level of ‘going national’. Nonetheless, we keep Fischer’s position in mind, particularly when it comes to the issue of borders gaining social and economic validity over time.

Our perspective is also inspired by the works of Fredrick Barth and Paul Nugent. In his article *Boundaries and Connections*, Barth (2000: 17) argued that:

“Throughout history political boundaries have been rich in affordances, offering opportunities for army careers, customs-duty collecting agencies, defence construction contracts and all manners of work and enterprise. They have provided a facility of retreat and escape for bandits and freedom fighters eluding the control of states on both sides; and they are a constant field of opportunities for mediators, traders and middlepersons of all kinds.”

According to Barth, the affordances – or, to put it simply, the opportunities – of boundaries derive from their setting the scene for social activities as well as their establishing connections through separating political and economic spaces. In order to profit from borders people have to ‘work’ and spin connections. Thereby, the boundary becomes shaped by social and material processes “not by cognitive fiat as the drawing of the boundary was” (Barth 2000: 18). The opportunities that borders provide are not ready made. Their realisation requires effort and varies depending on the particular border site the people occupy.

Also, Paul Nugent (2002) explored the Ghana–Togo border as what we call a resource. Interestingly enough, in his perspective the border as barrier provides opportunities. This is particularly true regarding the formation of national as well as ‘informal’ economies in which the opportunities are embedded. Nugent criticised the sole focus on the constraints side of the state border as the conventional wisdom about African boundaries (Nugent 2002: 5–8). Once in place, he maintained, the state border creates strong local interests whose proponents seek to preserve the status quo. Nugent also noted that for the most part, at least in western Africa, national identification proved far more valuable than cross-border ethnic identifications. Rather than disengaging from the state, as many would have predicted, border communities such as those along the Ghana-Togo border have actively sought to shape and utilise the state and its borders. In this context, Nugent also showed the relevance and limits of Scott’s (1990) model of the hidden transcript of power relations. Many scholars working on the constraints side of the border use this model implicitly or explicitly as an analytical frame in which contraband trade, for instance, is viewed as an act of resistance. Instead, Nugent set out to comprehend the dynamic interplay among various actors in the construction, maintenance, and consolidation of borders. Smuggling, in his perspective, is not an act of resistance to state borders, nor is it just the continuation of older trade relations ‘by other means’. Nugent (2002: 12) argued that:

“The very creation of the boundary was bound to have an impact on the local economic geography, opening up avenues of profitable commerce where they had not previously existed. Apart from opening up new trade routes, the smuggling complex also summon forth a new breed of entrepreneurs whose very livelihoods depended upon the perpetuation of the international boundary.”



Nugent's focus on the changes that borders introduce, and from which certain opportunities for borderlanders possibly arise, resonates very well with Fischer's observation (above) about the impact of boundaries on the human geography. A concept that is very close to Nugent's argument is that of "arbitrage economies" (Anderson and O'Dowd 1999).<sup>10</sup> Anderson and O'Dowd (1999: 681) defined arbitrage economies as "economic activities for which the border is the *raison d'être* (...) The co-existence of different regulatory regimes on either side of the border generates a form of opportunity structure which invites smuggling, unofficial exchange rates and illegal immigration." In their perspective, border dependent activities "may be seen in terms of 'arbitrage' or the exploitation of differentials in prices, interest rates, exchange rates and share prices over time and space" (ibid.).

If we are inspired by Barth's and Nugent's works, we are encouraged, along the way, by the recent publication of an edited volume by Horstmann and Wadley (2006) entitled *Centring the Margins in Southeast Asia*, with a similar focus on borders as opportunity structures. The contributors to this volume "capture the narratives of minorities, migrants, and refugees, who inhabit and cross borders as part of their everyday lives" (Horstmann and Wadley 2006: i). The editors showed how people are not merely constrained by borders but that border-crossing also opens up new options for action. While elaborating on these borderlander activities, Horstmann and Wadley noted that "borderlands are unique forms of peripheries as zones between often competing or unequal states. This inter-national character increases the peripherality and ambiguity of the borderlands as inhabitants seek benefits from both sides of the border, and as the states try to control their activities" (Horstmann and Wadley 2006: 2).

Drawing on these works on the opportunities provided by state borders and the human actions across them and within the borderlands, we continue to challenge the conventional focus on state borders as constraints. Without denying that borders, particularly in the Horn of Africa, also put limitations on people's lives, and that borderlands are peripheral or marginal zones, we reiterate that we are interested here not in what the borders have done to the people, but in what the people have done to the borders, and in what they have made out of living in the borderlands as fields of opportunities. In conjunction with the perspectives of Barth, Nugent, and others outlined above, we stress that *borders and borderlands provide different types of resources for local action*. This is the most important assumption, on which the ethnographic material presented in this paper is based.

The border as an opportunity structure emanates from the effectiveness of the border in the inter-state system. Weak and strong states alike are protected by the international legal regime, which defines the inter-state border sacrosanct (Clapham 1996b, Herbst 1989). This has brought about the stabilisation of the state system with different political regimes, national economies, educational systems, and currency regimes (Herbst 2000). The effectiveness of the inter-state system, however, is not translated into a 'spatial hegemony' in the borderlands (Horstmann and Wadley 2006: 3). The states in the Horn of Africa lack the administrative resources, the monopoly of legitimate violence, and, in some cases, the political will to police their borders. This is intimately implicated in the permeability of the borders. Additionally, and due to the already mentioned artificial colonial nature of the borders, the Horn 'borderlanders' often do not enter into new cultural spaces, to which they would need to adjust, when crossing state borders. Across the borders they are readily embraced by the kin and kith who are nevertheless positioned in different political, legal, and economic spaces with their respective opportunity structures. Thus, ordinary people have no

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<sup>10</sup> Little (2006) has recently applied this concept to the Horn of Africa as we will outline below.

difficulties with border-crossing, yet, the states do. This becomes clear when imagining a state agent, e.g. an Eritrean soldier or politician, crossing to Ethiopia, or vice versa. Such a move could promptly precipitate an inter-state conflict in the volatile situation of the Horn, where most states are enemies.

The borders we are dealing with are permeable for many people; but permeability, for instance of the thin ‘bush-border’ between Somaliland and Puntland discussed by Hoehne (2006), does not mean inconsequentiality. The issue of permeability is largely understood in the literature in terms of the ‘irrelevance’ of the borders in the everyday lives of the borderlanders, who often disregard these “red lines on the map” with relative ease (Schlee 2003: 343). Where we differ from this perspective is in our simultaneous engagement of the permeability of the borders at the local level with rigidity at the inter-state level. The inter-state rigidity of the borders creates different and fluctuating opportunity structures, and the permeability makes access to these opportunity structures possible. In this sense, the state borders are simultaneously permeable and consequential. The relational mode could be reversed, though. There are cases when permeability is tolerated by the state, whereas a local population might prefer a more rigid form of state border. This is certainly the case regarding the Anywaa’s call for the rigidification of the Ethio-Sudanese border (Dereje 2006a).

### **Analytical Framework and Application**

We recognise the borderlanders as actors by their own right, whereas the view of the borders as constraints perceives them as victims and highlights the agency of the states. Our focus is on the micro level; it stresses the opportunities and the actions of the borderlanders; it acknowledges the permeable but consequential nature of borders; and finally, it is empirically oriented. We are investigating how state borders are made relevant in the everyday lives of the borderlanders. Studying contestation or resistance against state borders is a legitimate and fascinating topic. Yet, we feel that there is a research gap in the understanding of how people adapt to state borders and make use of them. On the basis of the case studies from the Horn, we identify four different types of resources that collective as well as individual actors can extract from state borders and borderlands. These are, first, economic resources (cross-border trade and smuggling); second, political resources (access to alternative centres of political power; trans-border political mobilisation; sanctuary for rebels who strive to alter national structures of power; and strategic cooption of borderlanders by competing states); third, identity resources (state border as security device in an inter-ethnic competition; legitimation of the claim for statehood); and fourth, status and rights resources (citizenship and refugee status, including access to social services such as education).

#### *Extracting Economic Resources from State Borders and Borderlands*

Extracting economic resources from borders and borderlands is a cross-cutting theme of the case studies from the Horn of Africa. State borders are often markers of different national economies and the price differentials derived from that (Nugent 2002, Little 2006, Wafula 2006, Cassanelli 2006). Echoing Anderson and O’Dowd’s (1999) notion of arbitrage economies, Little (2006: 177), on the basis of his extensive research on livestock marketing in eastern Africa, noted that “the very existence of an international border creates economic opportunities that go well beyond cattle

transactions, and distinguish cross-border trade from other types of livestock commerce.” Two of these opportunities, as described by Little (2006: 178), are currency arbitrage, which at times could enable borderlanders to earn more profits than the sale of cattle itself, as it was the case for the Somali traders in the 1980s, and re-import business, especially in manufactured goods and second hand clothes. Economic possibilities vary across different border sites depending on the nature of currency exchanges in the area, the volatility of the situation along the border, and local market conditions in the area. In this regard, Little highlighted cross-border settlement patterns as economic capital and outlined that various social and cultural ties shape cross-border trade. He continued that “these non-economic factors are present in other types of trade but take on added significance in cross-border research due to its risks, complexity, geographic expanse, and informal nature” (ibid.).

As was mentioned above, borders separate states also according to national economies. The differences between national economies create incentives for smuggling, which is the ‘bread and butter’ of many borderlanders. Through his case study of the cross-border economy of the Babukusu and the Bagisu peoples along the Kenyan-Ugandan border, Wafula (2006) introduces us to the world of *magendo*, which is the Kiswahili word for smuggling. *Magendo* is discussed by Wafula in the context of national boundary-making processes. Before the imposition of the state border, the Babukusu of present-day western Kenya and the Bagisu of present-day eastern Uganda enjoyed a ‘corporate past’. According to Wafula, *magendo* is not a mere continuation of the pre-colonial exchanges but directly results from the imposition of the international border between Kenya and Uganda. Culturally related borderlanders created cross-border social and economic networks. In this context, the different national economies of Kenya and Uganda, involving relative price differences and shortages in one of the countries during colonial as well as post-colonial times, have created the incentives for the rise of *magendo* and other informal cross-border economic activities. Prominent trading centres in East Africa such as Lwakhakha, Suam, and Chepkube owe their very existence to the *magendo*. In fact, Chepkube is popularly known as *soko yamagendo* (‘the smuggling market’). Apart from the local Babukusu and Bagisu peoples, numerous other traders from all over eastern Africa have turned Chepkube into an active regional economic hub (Wafula 2006: 24). Similarly, Cassanelli (2006) shows in a historical perspective how, over the last century, Somalis managed to dominate the cross-border trade in ivory, *miraa* (a plant and mild stimulant), animal trophies, and livestock through the networks they have spun in the four countries in which they live, i.e. Somalia, Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Kenya.

Settlement along the *de facto* state border between Somaliland and Puntland also provides borderlanders with economic gains. They profit from political ambiguity and conflicting claims to statehood and national identity (Hoehne 2006). The border between Somaliland and Puntland in northern Somalia is contested. The weakness of the centres to enforce their respective claims creates room for manoeuvre for the otherwise marginalised borderlanders. By carefully balancing political loyalties they manage to accommodate political and military infrastructure from both sides, staffing them with locals. The enlisted soldiers and civil administrators earn some basic salaries paid by the respective centres. These resources contribute to the well-being of the local communities closely related through kinship ties. There are, of course, risks involved when local politicians overplay their hands, frequently in pursuing narrow personal aims, and finally loose out in their opportunistic cross-border ‘game’. In the worst case, the unclear political loyalties of the northern Somali borderlanders can lead to conflict and military intervention of the centres.

A different form of economic opportunity associated with state borders and borderlands are the resources delivered to the refugee camps by the aid agencies. The economic transformation of northern Kenya is a case in point. According to Cassanelli (2006: 7–8), the Somali who live in the northern periphery along the Kenyan-Somali border have paradoxically benefited from the neglect by the national government in Nairobi. Their marginality triggered the injection of vast amounts of aid money into the region. The Kenya borderlands have received “greater global exposure with the influx of refugees from Ethiopia and Somalia beginning in the 1970s and reaching massive proportions following the collapse of the Somali state in 1991” (ibid.). The UNHCR and countless NGOs poured money and manpower into refugee camps and rehabilitation projects. The globalisation of the borderland economy in northern Kenya is reflected in the appearance of new shops, the construction of small airstrips, and the introduction of a regular bus service between the Northern Frontier District (now renamed as North Eastern Province) and Nairobi. Access to the refugee industry has thus the effect of centring a margin in north-western Kenya.

#### *Extracting Political Resources from State Borders and Borderlands*

State borders and borderlands also provide resources, discursive as well as actual ones, which help to build political power. According to Barnes (2006: 8–10), the Somali clan of the Gadabuursi extracted political power/autonomy from the colonial border between the Ethiopian empire and the British Protectorate of Somaliland in the context of inter-state competition over the taxation of the borderlanders. The Gadabuursi would have fared less successful had they been wholly and exclusively under either British or Ethiopian rule. Historical records on this border demonstrate that Somalis, far from rejecting borders, actively used them and their position in the borderlands to their advantage against rival Somali groups. This discloses an interesting tension with regard to the Somali claim of resistance against the partition, as outlined in the beginning of our article with reference to Asiwaju and Lewis, and the first Somali Prime Minister after independence. According to Barnes, the choice of the Gadabuursi as actors between territorial administrations was a complex calculation of short term ‘household’ interests including rational economic decisions, wider questions of the relative strengths of other Somali clans, past experience, and future ambitions. Barnes’s example of the divide in the Gadabuursi ruling family of the Ugaas reveals a wider Gadabuursi involvement in the exploitation of opportunities generated by the border. Situated between two competing states, the traditional leaders of the clan managed to construct political power by actively making use of being in-between. One branch of the Ugaas’ family held the traditional leadership in the Protectorate, while another member of the family rose to the post of *Dejazmach* (‘Commander of the Gate’), the district administrator on the Ethiopian side of the border.

The competition for political power between the Anywaa and the Nuer in the Gambella region of western Ethiopia also provides an example of how a state border as an institution as well as living in borderlands can be used as a political resource. According to Dereje (2003, 2006a), the main political debate in the Gambella region is about who is and who is not a ‘real’ citizen. This political debate is organised in reference to the Ethio-Sudanese border and the settlement pattern related to that. According to the 1902 boundary agreement between colonial Sudan and imperial Ethiopia, the majority of the Anywaa became subjects of the Ethiopian state, although a tiny minority was placed within the British colonial administration of the Sudan. The opposite is true for the Nuer. In the context of decentralisation in post-1991 Ethiopia and the new regional trickling down effect

associated with that, the debate on citizenship has in some sense become a new mode of inclusion or exclusion from resources and political power. In the regional power game, the Anywaa have managed, for most of the 1990s, to construct the Nuer as ‘outsiders’. Formulated this way, Nuer migration to the Gambella region since 1902 becomes, in retrospect, ‘illegal’. Thus, the age old pastoral expansion is now re-evaluated with new schemes of interpretation that refer to the international border. Accordingly, the Nuer emerge as ‘foreigners’ who trouble the Anywaa as Ethiopian ‘citizens’. Despite their current demographic size, it took the Nuer political actors in Gambella nearly a decade to renegotiate their subordinate political status through other narratives of entitlement.

Along Ethiopia’s eastern border with Djibouti, similar dynamics seem to be at work (Markakis 2003, Yasin 2006). The Issa Somali have become stronger and more powerful by making use of cross-border political networks *vis-a-vis* their neighbours, the Afar. This is evident in the link between cross-border alliances and local expansion. Both the Issa and the Afar live in more than one state. The Issa live in Ethiopia, Somalia, and Djibouti, whereas the Afar reside in Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Djibouti. Comparatively, however, it is the Issa who have managed to effectively instrumentalise the state borders to be dominant locally. Despite their settlements in three states, the Afar are politically marginal in all of them, whereas the Issa occupy the national centre in the state of Djibouti and are represented in Somalia/Somaliland. Much to the Afar’s detriment, the Issa are also more attractive to the Ethiopian state because of the Issa’s settlements around the strategic route from Addis Ababa to the port of Djibouti, which is, besides Berbera in Somaliland, Ethiopia’s main outlet to the sea after the relationship to Eritrea deteriorated in 1998. The net result of this differential access to some of the states in the region is the deep incursion of the Issa into traditional Afar territories (Yasin 2006: 13). Embittered by the rise of the political and military power of their foe, the Afar have at least once mobilised the Eritrean-based Afar liberation front, the Ugugumo, to mount a high profile counter-offence against the Issa in Ethiopia. The rebels offered the local Afar military training and equipped them with modern arms. Similarly, the Djiboutian Afar mobilised their relatives in Ethiopia during the violent contestation of Issa political dominance in Djibouti in the 1990s (Yasin 2006: 16–17). Although the Afar are not as successful as the Issa in building political power in the three states, their cross-border mobilisation has at least been a deterring factor to the continuous incursion of the Issa into their territories.

Along the Ethio-Kenyan border we also find various Somali and Oromo communities as well as rebel groups extracting political resources from state borders and borderlands (Fekadu 2006). Electoral politics that are largely related to questions of demography have created a new field of opportunities for the borderlanders. Fekadu focuses on the town of Moyale that is divided by the Ethio-Kenyan border, and on the Moyale district of Kenya. Voting-politics in this setting have a strong cross-border dimension. Political power on both sides of the Ethio-Kenyan border is contested between various ethnic groups that partly also inhabit both of the two states. The ethnic diversity of Ethiopian and Kenyan Moyale defies any exclusive ownership claim although some groups constitute a clear majority, whereas others are minorities. A coalition among the minorities, however, could undermine majority rule. In this unstable power structure, cross-border social networks are used for political mobilisation in order to enlarge one’s constituency particularly during elections.

According to Fekadu (*ibid.*), many inhabitants of Ethiopian Moyale possess Kenyan ID cards. This enables them to vote in local elections in Kenya. This became relevant in the political

competition between Mr Adan Waachu and Mr Wario Galgalo on the Kenyan side in the 2006 by-election. The Kenyan district of Moyale is largely inhabited by the Boran but there are also sizeable Garri and Gabra minorities. The two candidates campaigned on different political platforms. Mr Adan appealed to the common religious identity (Islamic) of the three groups in Kenya. This also appealed to the Gabra and the Garri on the Ethiopian side of the border who are largely Muslims. Mr Wario, on the other hand, played the ethnic card in his campaign. He invoked Oromo nationalism of the Boran on both sides of the border. This attracted the attention of the Ethiopian government that feared a possible connection with the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) guerrillas. Consequently, the Ethiopian government contained the Boran trans-border voting. At the same time, it facilitated the border-crossing of the Ethiopian Gabra and Garri who supported the Muslim candidate in the Kenyan district of Moyale.

Fekadu (ibid.) also discusses cross-border voting in the territorial competition between the Somali and Oromia regional states in Ethiopia. More than 430 *kebeles* (smallest administrative unit) are contested between the regional states. The federal government in Addis Ababa resorted to holding a referendum as a conflict resolution mechanism in these contested areas. Accordingly, a 50 per cent plus 1 formula was employed to resolve the issue of belonging. The Somali regional state was represented by the Garri, whereas the Oromia regional state was represented by the Boran along the Ethio-Kenyan border. Both regional states mobilised their respective constituencies across the border to tip the outcome of the referendum in their favour.

Finally, the Ethio-Kenyan borderlands also serve as a sanctuary for rebels. Contemporary Oromo political actors are fiercely contesting what they regard as the Abyssinian political hegemony over the Ethiopian state, first represented by the Amhara and since 1991 by the Tigreans (Merera 2006). After a brief participation in the Tigrean-led transitional government, Oromo political parties, particularly the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), left the government and resumed the rebellion. The OLF could sustain the resistance against the ruling party, the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), thanks to the settlement of the Boran Oromo across the Ethio-Kenyan border. From the Boran-inhabited parts of northern Kenya, the OLF has mounted a series of military attacks on the Ethiopian government establishments. More significantly, the continuation of the cross-border armed resistance has nurtured Oromo nationalism, which competes with and seriously undermines Ethiopian nationalism.

Remarkably, nearly all ongoing rebellions in Ethiopia occur in the border areas. It seems as if popular discontent needs a cross-border constituency to put up a rebellion and militarily negotiate its interest *vis-à-vis* the government. Apart from the OLF, some of the prominent armed groups in contemporary Ethiopia are the Anywaa-based Gambella People's Liberation Front (GPLF) along the western side of the Ethio-Sudanese border, the Benishangul People Liberation Movement (BPLM) along the North-western side of the Ethio-Sudanese border, the Ethiopian People's Patriotic Front (EPPF) along the northern side of the Ethio-Sudanese border, and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) along the Ethio-Somali border.

#### *Extracting Identity Resources from State Borders and Borderlands*

Relating to and living along state borders also provides identity resources. Dereje (2006a) shows that the debate between the Anywaa and the Nuer in the Gambella region is not only about construction of political power. It is also about building an ethnic security device and preserving one's cultural identity. In 1984, the time of the first national census, the Anywaa were not only

senior residents but also constituted a numerical majority in this region. By the mid 1990s, however, they were overtaken by the Nuer. According to the 1994 census, the Anywaa and the Nuer, respectively, constituted 27 and 40 per cent of Gambella's population. The Anywaa are concerned not only about the demographic expansion and territorial encroachments of the Nuer but they also feel threatened by the Nuer's successful assimilationist system. This has also resulted in cultural encroachment. The Anywaa and the Nuer are radically different in their modes of identity formation. For the Anywaa, ethnic identity is something that one is born into. It is also closely tied to specific territories. Their sense of who they are is largely defined by a sense of historical rootedness in a place. The Nuer identity discourse is mobile. Identity is something that can be acquired through different types of relatedness. Biological descent or being born in a particular location is not the criteria for ethnic membership (Dereje 2003). These contrasting identity formations contain within themselves a potential for conflict. The more the Nuer successfully assimilate the Anywaa, the greater the Anywaa irritation and fear become. In the context of the stark disparity in demography in a cross-border ethno-space and the asymmetry in local forms of power, the Anywaa have looked to the international border for their survival.<sup>11</sup> Insisting that the international border should be an ethnic border, the Anywaa sought to mobilise the Ethiopian state in the struggle for cultural identity with various degrees of success. It is for this reason that the Anywaa call for the rigidification of the border, which gives the impression that they are more state-like than the Ethiopian state. In fact, the Anywaa rebuke the Ethiopian state for failing to observe the foundational premise for modern states, i.e. that political sovereignty is identified with bounded territories.

State borders may also be used to consolidate collective identities as the identity politics of Somaliland and Eritrea show (Hoehne 2006, Smidt 2006). In both cases, political actors refer to the international border in order to legitimate their aspiration of statehood. Somaliland strives to validate its claim for international recognition on the basis of its colonial history. It was a British Protectorate before the British and the Italian administered Somali territories became independent and united as the Republic of Somalia in July 1960. Three decades later, however, and after a long and bloody guerrilla struggle against the regime of Siyad Barre, the northwest seceded from the collapsing Somalia as the Republic of Somaliland in May 1991. The government of Somaliland refers to the resolution of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) dating from 1964 that confirms the respect for the borders existing upon the achievement of independence.<sup>12</sup> The Foreign Ministry in the capital city Hargeysa produced a briefing paper on *The Case for Somaliland's International Recognition as an Independent State* in 2002. It sketches the 'ill-fated' history of Somali unity and refers to the colonial treaties between Great Britain, France, Italy, and Ethiopia as markers of Somaliland's borders. Moreover, the booklet addresses the conformity of Somaliland's claim to statehood with the Charter of the African Union, the public support for independence inside the country, and the economic viability of Somaliland. In the appendices, international documents referring to the five days of independence of Somaliland before the unification with the Italian

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<sup>11</sup> The Nuer population in Southern Sudan is much larger than the Anywaa. The overall Nuer population in Ethiopia and Sudan is estimated around a million whereas the population of the Anywaa in both countries does not exceed one hundred thousand (Kurimoto 1997, Hutchinson 1996).

<sup>12</sup> Interestingly enough, it was exactly this resolution of the OAU that Somali nationalists, including political actors from the former British Protectorate, challenged when claiming the right for self-determination of all Somalis, driven by the above mentioned 'cultural nationalism' (Lewis 1983, Reisman 1983). In this sense, contemporary Somaliland nationalists turned Somali nationalism upside down – from being against the colonial border (in the 1960s) to being in favor of it (since 1991).

colony/trusteeship territory as well as a report on and the results of the constitutional referendum held in May 2001 are attached (Hoehne 2006).<sup>13</sup> In this case, statehood clearly serves not only political or economic ends.<sup>14</sup> It is also related to questions of collective identity. Young (1994: 33) stressed that the state is an “ensemble of affective orientations, images, and expectations imprinted in the minds of the subjects.” For people in Somaliland, particularly those who fought actively against the previous Somali regime during the 1980s or who grew up after the collapse and secession, recognition is not merely a political or legal problem; it is existential: they are Somalilanders. The former colonial border is an integral part of their identity (Hoehne forthcoming).

Along the Ethiopian-Eritrean border, the international territorial regulations and a long history of guerrilla and inter-state war served the role of sedimenting a rather fluid ‘we-grouping’ among the Tigrinnya speakers (Alemseged 1997, Abbink 2001, Smidt 2006). The situation of the Tigrinnya speakers has always been what Smidt (2006: 14) calls pluralist. The creation of the Ethio-Eritrean border in 1890, however, has its own share of reduction of complexity by setting off the process of bifurcation between the so-called Tegar people (the Ethiopian Tigrinnya speakers) and the Tigrinnya people (the Eritrean Tigrinnya speakers). As Abbink (2001: 456) noted, “while political realities since the Italian colonial venture have indeed produced this [division] the ideological effort to consciously buttress the division is still going on, some times in bizarre and historically dubious forms.” Smidt’s (2006) careful socio-linguistic analysis shows that on the Ethiopian side of the border the Tigrinnya speakers refer to themselves as ‘Tegar’, whereas on the Eritrean side the new ethnonym ‘Tigrinnya’ was adopted. The Tegar and the Tigrinnya perceive the Ethio-Eritrean border differently. The former regard the border as artificial and seek reunification within existing or new political structures whereas the latter affirm the validity of the international boundary to the extent that it also coincides with a pre-colonial political boundary.

There is an underlying ambivalence in the political relationship between the Tegar and the Tigrinnya as it is amply evidenced in their recent love-hate relationship (Alemseged 1997). This ranges from the secession of Eritrea under the auspices of the Tegar based Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in 1991 to a bloody border conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia in 1998–2000. On the basis of the international border, the Tigrinnya have managed to attain the status of a state, which greatly affects the local power relations. Already during the Italian colonial period, Eritrea witnessed an economic boom as part of the fascist war machinery. This attracted a wave of labour migration from the province of Tigray in Ethiopia to Eritrea. As most of the labour migrants took up menial jobs, this produced a new status system in which the Tigrinnya claimed superiority over their southern neighbours (Tekeste 1987). This self image and the new ethnic other have been further reinforced in post-independence Eritrea, which was *de facto* ‘captured’ by the Tigrinnya people. Although there are more than nine ethnic groups in the country, it is the Tigrinnya who have been the dominant force in post-independent Eritrea. Occupying the strategic area of the Red Sea, the Tigrinnya have aspired to become the power brokers and economic power house in the

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<sup>13</sup> British Somaliland became independent on 26 June 1960. Italian Somaliland followed on 1 July 1960, on which date both former colonial territories united. Italian Somaliland had been a colony until 1941; afterwards it had been under British military rule until it was returned to Italy at the decision of the United Nations as a trusteeship territory in 1950.

<sup>14</sup> The status of statehood matters in Africa, where the state still functions as the main provider and mediator of critical resources. It is for this reason that the state itself is an object of struggle in Africa (Markakis 1998). This was most recently highlighted by Hagmann and Mulugeta (2008). They analysed pastoral conflicts in the semi-arid peripheries of Ethiopia and showed that these were shaped by ongoing processes of state-building in the context of administrative decentralisation.



wider Horn, a project which ultimately collided with the emergence of their one time ‘junior’ neighbours, the Tegar, as a dominant force in the sub-region by controlling the Ethiopian state machinery.

*Extracting Status and Rights Resources from State Borders and Borderlands*

A different kind of resource extracted from state borders and borderlands is related to the refugee establishment in terms of access to social services in the refugee camps and the resettlement programme as well as renegotiation of an ethnic stigma. The different opportunity structures provided by borders have enabled some borderlanders to compensate for neglect from the national centres through access to social services in the refugee camps. Some even managed to renegotiate their marginality through getting into UNHCR resettlement programmes (Declich 2006, Dereje 2006b). The alternative citizenship of the Nuer who move between Ethiopia and Sudan is a very good case in point. Inhabiting Gambella’s outlying districts, the Ethiopian Nuer were by far more marginalised than any other group in the region in terms of access to social services. The second civil war broke out in Southern Sudan in 1983. It brought hundreds of thousands of refugees to the Gambella region (Hutchinson 1996, Johnson 2003). In this context, the Ethiopian Nuer joined refugee camps in the region that were built for the southern Sudanese Nuer. Being a southern Sudanese refugee in the Gambella region of the 1980s was much more rewarding than being an Ethiopian citizen. A particular attraction to the refugee camps was access to education. The quality of the education in the camps was a lot better than that in the villages, if there was any offered at all. Although the Anywaa also have cross-border settlements, there are not as many Anywaa in Sudan. This makes it difficult for the Ethiopian Anywaa to pass as refugees. They are, in fact, largely perceived by the aid agencies as Ethiopian citizens. The Nuer effectively used the education provided in the refugee camps in order to strengthen their political standing in the region. By the 1980s, there were only a handful of educated Nuer in the regional administration. One decade later, a new generation of refugee-camp educated Nuer emerged and contested power and resources against their Anywaa counterparts in the new regional state of Gambella. Nearly all of the current Nuer government officials and the civil servants in the Gambella regional state are ‘ex-refugees’.

Attached to the refugee camps is also an opportunity structure called the refugee resettlement programme. UNHCR has identified three ‘durable solutions’ to refugee concerns: voluntary return to the country of origin, local integration in the host community, or resettlement to a third country. Resettlement is most often promoted by UNHCR “when individual refugees are at risk, or when there are other reasons to help them leave the region” (Patrick 2004: 1). Making use of this opportunity structure within the aid agencies, a significant number of Nuer have been resettled in North America and Australia. The Nuer diaspora is estimated at 10,000 (Holtzman 2000, Falge 2006), a significant number of whom are from the Gambella region. The Nuer from the Gambella region first have to claim southern Sudanese national identity and then a most favoured refugee status through “the framing of asylum claims in the language of religious persecution that allows southern Sudanese to make their experience meaningful to representatives of the international refugee regime”, as Shandy (2002: 214) described it. In this regard, Shandy further noted that “persecution of Christians, oil, and allegations of slavery in Sudan are all issues that generate broad based domestic constituencies in the US” (ibid.). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, southern Sudanese were one of the favoured categories of refugees most eligible for the resettlement programme thanks to the rise of the religious right in the US, which basically defines the war in

southern Sudan in religious terms, the Arab/Muslim persecution of the African Christians (Johnson 2003, Young 2007).<sup>15</sup> Neither the Anywaa nor any other group in Gambella has managed to make use of the international border as much as the Nuer could.

Similarly, Declich (2006) outlines how the Ziguala succeeded in negotiating their ethnic stigma within the wider Somali society through, ironically, the empowering effect of the refugee experience. The Ziguala, as outlined by Declich, originally came from Tanzania to Somalia as slaves in the 19th century. In their new homeland in southern Somalia they were referred to as 'jareer' and recently as 'Bantu'. As descendants of former slaves they were looked down upon by the so-called 'pure' Somali. Despite social marginalisation, the Ziguala kept their cultural repertoire such as the Ziguala language (a Bantu language) and their matri-kin ritual naming system. The civil war in Somalia and the refugee phenomenon that followed had a levelling effect on the local social hierarchy. After the fall of the government in 1991, the Ziguala, together with many other Somalis, were all reduced to the status of refugees. In this context and particularly in the refugee camps across the border in Kenya, the Ziguala fared better than their former Somali oppressors. In the camps they could draw on their language skills as Bantu speakers. This helped to establish some cultural familiarity and even solidarity with the Kenyan aid workers and officials conversing usually in Kiswahili (also a Bantu language). Moreover, the Ziguala language became what Declich calls an 'emergency passport' to enter Tanzania. The Ziguala crossed the Kenya-Tanzania border without being stopped at the frontier. Those who proceeded from Somalia directly to Tanzania did it in the hope that they could find better conditions in a country their ancestors came from. Upon arrival, they requested the Tanzanian border authorities to recognise them as Tanzanian citizens arguing that the Somali Ziguala were descendants of the inhabitants of the region. The Tanzanian government responded positively by setting up a refugee settlement area. In 2005, the Tanzanian government offered citizenship to this group of people (Declich 2006: 12–14).

### **Some Thoughts on Conditions of Resourcing State Borders and Borderlands**

In the section above we established and exemplified our analytical framework. In this section we reflect on the conditions of resourcing state borders and borderlands. We have already emphasised that resources offered by state borders and borderlands are a potential, not a ready-made 'good' waiting for delivery. In fact, people have to strive to realise the opportunities borders and borderlands offer. Who extracts what kind of resource is not, however, determined by sheer effort. There seem to be other intervening variables at work.

The first issue to explore is the *demographic size and the cross-border settlement pattern*. From this it appears that the more state borders a group straddles, the greater are its prospects of extracting resources from state borders and borderlands. This causal link is supported by the ethnographic examples we have provided. In this regard, the Somali and the Anywaa cases represent two extreme ends along a wider spectrum. The Somali seem to be the main beneficiary extracting various types of resources from three state borders and one *de facto* state border. The Anywaa, on the other hand, could not make use of their cross-border settlements in Ethiopia and Sudan as much as their neighbours did partly because their settlement sizes in the two countries are

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<sup>15</sup> As peace in Sudan has become desirable in US foreign policy since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in January 2005, other groups of people, such as the Somali Bantu, have now become the new 'darling' of the global refugee establishment.

not proportional. When they sought to make use of the opportunity structure laid by the refugee industry in southern Sudan in the 1980s, for instance, they were excluded, unlike the Nuer, because they were viewed by the aid agencies as ‘too Ethiopian’ to pass as Sudanese.

A second variable to look at is the *political distance of the people from the centre* in the states where they live. Here again the Somali seem to be better positioned than their neighbours. The Somali do not just reside in four established states and two emerging states. More critically, with Somalia/Somaliland and, partly, Djibouti, they also politically dominate some of these states.<sup>16</sup> This gives them a competitive edge in making use of state borders and of their inhabiting the borderlands. Had the demographic size and the cross-border settlement pattern been the sole factor for resourcing state borders and borderlands, the Afar would have been in a par with the Somali because they too live in three national states. Except for the regional state of Afar in Ethiopia, however, the Afar occupy a very marginal position in the political affairs at the national level. This is so even in Djibouti where they are a political minority despite their demographic preponderance. The Afar do not ‘own’ a state that they could mobilise in local struggles as much as the Somali do. This suggests that particularly the successful extraction of political resources from borders depends on the relevance of the borderlanders to the centres and on how much a group is considered as a security threat by the state actors.

A third variable is *the significance a specific border possesses for the state actors*. In the volatile inter-state relations in the Horn of Africa, it is self-evident that some borders are more equal than others in the sense that they attain more strategic significance. The Nuer could make use of the Ethio-Sudanese border in the 1980s not just because of their sheer effort or significant representation in both states, but also because the inter-state relational dynamics between Ethiopia and Sudan itself were part of broader political processes. The civil war in Sudan has as much local roots as it has been entangled with international politics. The Horn of Africa was one of the hottest scenes of the Cold War. Ethiopia and Sudan were clients of the East and West respectively. The escalation of the civil war and the massive presence of the refugees in the Gambella region were intimately related to these geopolitics. The refugee camps in the borderlands were after all recruiting grounds for the Ethiopian-allied Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA). The then Ethiopian government also used the ‘Nuer card’ to influence the political process in southern Sudan. The passivity of the current Ethiopian government towards the Issa Somali’s cross-border political mobilisation is also intelligible if it is viewed in the context of the new strategic significance with which the eastern border is imbued (Markakis 2003). Upon Eritrea’s independence in 1993, Ethiopia became a landlocked country. Although it retained access to the Eritrean ports up until 1998, the port of Djibouti has assumed a greater share of handling Ethiopia’s international trade. Ethiopia’s dependence on the Djibouti port has become almost total after the outbreak of the border conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea in 1998. This strategic route is largely inhabited by the Issa Somali. Minding its vital interests, it is no wonder that the Ethiopian

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<sup>16</sup> On a more general level, it can be argued that Somali clan politics have been reinforced by the political cleavages induced by the state borders. Which clan is empowered where is partly related to which clan falls in which side of the state borders. In the Horn of Africa, there are four states and two emerging states where the Somali live: Somalia, Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Kenya as well as Somaliland and Puntland. Inter-state relations are heavily informed by the changing inter-clan relations. This is so because, underneath the state structure, we find one or the other clan as a dominant force. At the risk of simplification, one can say that Somaliland is largely, but not exclusively, an Isaaq affair, political power in Djibouti is in the hands of the Issa, Puntland is dominated by the Harti, Somalia – which means here southern Somalia – is contested between Hawiye and Darood, whereas the Somali regional state of Ethiopia is politically controlled by the Ogaadeen. Here, what we find are old neighbours with new powers at their disposal. Many clans aspire to the status of statehood but its realisation hinges on the legitimating effect of the international border.

government is currently insensitive to the plight of the Afar. Thus, the opportunities of borders and borderlands also depend on the nature of the inter-state relations and the stakes that states have in a particular border.

The *depth of the cleavage caused by the border* is another variable to look at. In most cases, the state border is artificial in the way described by Asiwaju. People cross the border with relative ease because socio-cultural ties are still strong. Yet, in the case of the Ethio-Eritrean border, for instance, the social cleavage seems to be stronger. Where the border-induced national identity is ‘thick’, the state border becomes more of a barrier than a conduit. Sixty years of colonial experience in Eritrea, together with decades of postcolonial civil war, have greatly ruptured existing socio-economic ties between the Tigrinnya speakers who live on both side of this border. Despite intermittent strategic alliances, political organisations that claim to represent both peoples have found it difficult to sustain the partnership because of divergent and competing political visions. Echoing Clapham’s (1996a) notion of competing conceptions of boundaries, the Ethio-Eritrean border has induced a new differentiation within the highlanders’ boundary imaginary. The Eritreans (Tigrinnya) replicate the territorial state nationalism, while the Tigreans/Tegararu invoke an ethno-political boundary system, which resembles more closely the Oromo boundary conception than that of highland Ethiopia, of which they have hitherto been an integral part.

Another variable that determines particularly the nature and scale of economic resources extractable from borders and borderlands is the *degree of inter-state economic differentiation*. The ‘informal’ economy is positively correlated with the existence of national economies. The greater the difference between national economies, the more flourishing the cross-border trade is, and the more pervasive the arbitrage economy becomes. It is for this reason that most of the vibrant cross-border trade in the Horn of Africa concentrates along Kenya’s borders. Kenya’s national economy is not only more developed but it is also distinctively organised. Whereas Kenya has for long followed a neo-liberal economic policy, its neighbours such as Ethiopia and Uganda followed a command economy. The Kenyan national economy has also responded to the political developments among its neighbours, particularly the military dictatorship of Uganda in the 1980s and the warlordism and continued ‘anarchy’ of Somalia since 1991. These political differences led to further economic differentiation across the concerned borders.

Furthermore, *entrepreneurial skills* are involved in resourcing state borders and borderlands. People differ in the degree of entrepreneurial skill that they muster. Entrepreneurship entails the existence of more or less entrepreneurial cultures. This point was made also by Schlee (1998: 255) who emphasises the ingenuity of herders and traders in the northern Kenyan borderlands. Pastoralists in multiethnic settings marked by stiff competition over scarce resources might be particularly prone to creative uses of even minimal chances. Moreover, it can be observed that it is often the migrants who make the best out of state borders. Although the Anywaa and the Nuer, who are indigenous in the Gambella region, have actively profited from the Ethio-Sudanese border in terms of constructing political power and tapping into fluctuating opportunity structures respectively, none of them are currently active in the emerging cross-border trade because they lack the business skills. It is rather migrants, locally referred to as highlanders, who are quickly seizing business opportunities in the border region of Gambella, including the cross-border contraband trade.

*Cultural schemes*, or what Schlee (1998) calls “cognitive differences”, are also conditions of the resourcing of state borders and borderlands. The strong notion of territoriality among the Anywaa

influences the way in which they relate to the Ethio-Sudanese border. In their cultural scheme of interpretation, the national state is represented as an Anywaa village writ large. If the Anywaa expect the Ethiopian state to get involved in their political struggle against the Nuer, the Anywaa are also projecting their conception of the border onto the state order. This led to their disappointment with the national government in Addis Ababa when the latter seemed to be less concerned about the Nuer influx from Sudan than the Anywaa hoped. Underlying what appears a relentless Nuer instrumentalism, we also find a cultural framing of the state border. The Nuer project their inclusive idea of a political community and flexible notion of localisation onto the national state. This cultural flexibility, coupled with the permeability of the international border, has enabled the Nuer to renegotiate their marginality through alternative citizenship.

Finally, of course, *changes over time* have a bearing on the role of state borders in political, social, and economic contexts, and on the opportunities provided by state borders and borderlands. The Ethio-Sudanese border was of different significance during the Cold War, on the one hand, and during the time of Ethiopian ethnic-federalism after 1991, on the other. The Ethiopian Nuer profited from refugee camp-education in the 1980s in Ethiopia. International NGOs and socialist governments supporting the SPLA and southern Sudanese refugees built schools in refugee camps for southern Sudanese refugees in the Gambella region of Ethiopia under the Derg, the country's military socialist government (1975–1987). As outlined above, the Ethiopian Nuer managed to profit from these initiatives. Later on, the Anywaa had chances to access power within the Gambella regional state after the new Ethiopian government adopted ethnic federalism in 1991 and divided regional power among the dominant resident communities within its state borders. In the case of the Somaliland-Puntland border, it is clear that this *de facto* state border did not even exist before the Republic of Somaliland was founded in 1991 and Puntland in 1998. The borderlanders in this region can therefore exploit opportunities that, in fact, were only created by the turning upside-down of Somali nationalism (on the side of the government of Somaliland in Hargeysa) that informed decades of Somalis' colonial and post-colonial politics. Similarly, the importance of the Issa borderlanders for the Ethiopian government increased after the secession of Eritrea and the recent Ethio-Eritrean war that led to the dependence of Ethiopia on goods imported via the port of Djibouti.

## **Conclusion**

The dominant focus on state borders in Africa in general and the Horn of Africa in particular was on borders as constraints. Many writers perceived the artificial colonial borders in the continent as barriers responsible for social, political, and economic crises. Borderlands were understood as peripheral spaces inhabited by marginalised people excluded from state social and other services and suffering from inter-state conflict. We of course do not deny that particularly the history of the Horn of Africa in the 20th and early 21st century provides ample examples for conflicts, marginalisation, and suffering along state borders. However, and here we want to make a strong point, careful analysis of cross-border dynamics involving the people being divided by state borders in the Horn of Africa shows that borders and borderlands are more than barriers and marginal spaces.

In this paper we drew on academic sources, from human geography to history, political science, and social anthropology, as well as on extensive case studies from the Horn of Africa, in order to

outline the sometimes counter-intuitive complexities brought about by dividing ethnically related people through state borders. Since state borders structure social, economic, and political spaces, they provide opportunities as well as obstacles for the communities divided by them. Global, national, and local dynamics and regimes of power converge at the borders and charge them with a potentiality that can be grasped in the borderlands, and which borderland entrepreneurs can use. Individuals and groups can extract economic, political, identity, status, and rights resources from state borders, and from the fact that they reside in borderlands. Yet, resourcing state borders and borderlands is not a straight-forward process. The opportunities of state borders and borderlands have to be actively seized. Different variables are involved in the process of extracting the resources from them, such as the demographic size and the cross-border settlement pattern, the political distance of the borderlanders from the political centre, the significance of a specific border possesses for the state actors, the depth of the cleavage caused by the border, the degree of inter-state economic differentiation, the entrepreneurial skills of the borderlanders, their cultural schemes or cognitive differences, and changes over time. The highlighting of these variables that shape the conditions of resourcing state borders and borderlands should suffice to defend us against the anticipated criticism that we would ‘turn a blind eye’ to the constraints of the borders.

In this paper we tried to be pragmatic for heuristic purposes. We soberly took borders as facts and accepted that they divide as much as they connect. Both division and connection through borders require programmatic action. Borders as dividing lines need powerful state actors to implement their regimes also at the margins. Turning state borders and borderlands into resources for the divided people requires a combination of skills and also involves political, cultural, economic, and other variables. Analysing these internal and external factors and determinants for resourcing state borders and borderlands helps to understand how people can make the best out of being divided by state borders in the Horn of Africa, and elsewhere.

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