

We Do Not Have Borders: Greater Somalia and the Predicaments of Belonging in Kenya by KEREN WEITZBERG.

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This book is an indispensable contribution to the literature on citizenship, nationalism and especially, Kenyan Somali identity in the contemporary period. Reading it one could not help but hope that Kenyan political elites will read it but also average citizens, especially high-school and university students. It is a challenge to notions of how hyphenated and ‘marginalised’ Kenyan communities such as Kenyan Somalis, have come to be part of the country and how they envision their place in the nation.

This book is part of the New African Histories series of Ohio University Press and has nine chapters, including the introduction and conclusion. It is a wonderful combination of careful archival details and rich oral history, collections of poem and literature and use of extensive secondary literatures and political and social theory. Weitzberg takes seriously the memories of her interlocutors, producing fruitful histories of the region, but also revealing contradictions and discrepancies in the historical record. These complex and overlapping historical sources are essential for telling the tale of the Somali people precisely because of the fractured political and geographic space in which Kenyan Somalis have lived for at least the last century.

The introduction considers the anxieties that Somalis as a people produce in the global imaginary, and the unique specificity of the Kenyan Somali-ness, the questions of indigeneity raised by Somalis who lived in the region of north-east Kenya prior to the colonial period. Weitzberg rightly asks why, if many of East Africa’s groups straddle international borders, are certain groups like Somalis treated as alien and their lifestyles pathologised (p. 9)? Pastoralists and Somalis in particular have faced unique discrimination, even before the global ‘war on terror’, the attack on the Westgate Mall in Nairobi and other securitisation concerns came to distinctly impinge on Somali ways of life in Kenya.

Chapters 1 and 2 of the book outline the ways of being Somali in the pre-colonial and early colonial periods of the Northern Frontier District (NFD), when the worldview of the Somalis and Borana was focused on who was Muslim and who was not. In this, Weitzberg also complicates the notion of Somali-ness and adds to the growing literature on ‘clan’ by noting that ‘until the twentieth century, identification as Somali was likely neither as widespread nor particularly contentious’ (p. 28). New work in Ethiopia by Carruth complements this finding (Carruth 2018). In Kenya, colonial rule brought changes that Isaaq and Harti in the region exploited to their advantage to promote a legal position as sometimes ‘Asian/Asiatic’ racial groups, sometimes ‘Arab’, sometimes Somali. Weitzberg spends some time exploring colonial sources, oral histories and the literature on ‘invented tradition’ and its critique and makes a useful contribution to this debate through this new case.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 consider the post-Second World War reconfigurations of sovereignty for Kenyan Somalis, as first the colonial and later independent

Kenyan state attempted to contain and delineate the bounds of citizenship. Understandings of greater Somalia and the so-called Shifta War and its aftermath are particularly evocative and valuable contributions to understandings of Kenyan-ness. Each chapter is a detailed historical consideration of how the NFD, later the Northeast Province (NEP), and what is now several Counties in the newly devolved constitutional system configured Somali participation in the Kenya political order. In each period, different Somali political parties and alliances explored different possibilities aligned with different visions of territoriality and citizenship. This leads Weitzberg to note that one cannot then distinguish irredentist, secessionist and separatist movements in the region but they all imply a certain acceptance of a national lens that is of limited use. Because Kenyan Somalis tended to debate nationalism within a 'different set of idioms', Weitzberg asserts we must remember that a people cannot really be 'described as 'separating' from a country from which they were never truly integrated' (p. 97).

Across the globe today the questions of the relevance of the liberal state model of citizenship remain, even as populist and anti-immigrant sentiment experience a resurgence. Weitzberg's study of Somalis in Kenya therefore, is both timely and a model for its detailed use of multiple sources and asking difficult questions about the relevance of borders and a nation-state model of a citizen for all, not just the modern African state.

REFERENCE

- Carruth, L. 2018. 'Kingship, nomadism and humanitarian aid among Somalis in Ethiopia', *Disasters* 42, 1: 149–68.

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