alternative to standard exegesis, which they characterise as a dispassionate engagement with scripture. By contrast, these women read scripture through the prism of their own experience and with an eye toward interpretations of Islam that help them make sense of that.

A broad critique of some of the work in the volume is the tendency, at times, to take for granted the assumption that canonical texts like Qur'an and Hadith contain inherently libratory agendas for women that have simply been lost in centuries of male-dominated interpretation and subsequent historiography. I believe such charitable interpretations are better understood as a function of societal needs and women's approach to scripture – in other words, as an artifact of social history – rather than a reflection of the texts themselves. However, holding this caveat in mind does not detract from how highly useful and productive the dynamic convergence of ethnography and scripture is in this excellent volume.

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Consider Somaliland: State-Building with Traditional Leaders and Institutions
by M. RENDERS
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After 'minimal states' had been proposed by policy-makers throughout the 1980s and 1990s, state-building in Africa is back on the agenda. Defying Weberian conceptualisations of the state, approaches of 'twilight institutions' (Lund 2006), the 'negotiated state' (Menkhaus 2007) and 'hybrid political orders' (Böge *et al.* 2008) have emerged, partly revaluing earlier negative interpretations of non-state orders as autochthonous ways of state-building. It is with this scholarly canon that *Consider Somaliland* is conceptually aligned.

Renders' ambitious monograph investigates the involvement of 'traditional' leaders and institutions in Somaliland's state-building process. Being very well written and organised, the book features extensive empirical research that frequently transcends received wisdom. After briefly touching upon some theoretical considerations on state-building, the author takes the reader on a journey through Somaliland's history, largely focusing on the 1990s. Renders argues that Somaliland became a 'success story of political and state (re)construction' (p. 3) thanks to the involvement of traditional clan elders, whose involvement allowed for the evolution of a 'hybrid political order' (HPO), on which the polity's state-building endeavour ultimately hinged.

Drawing on an impressive wealth of interviews, Renders does a great job in providing a nuanced account of Somaliland's trajectory and the role of traditional authorities there within, setting her appraisal apart from other, frequently romanticised narratives. Yet, despite numerous virtues, the book does not escape some flaws. Apart from being slightly dated, with primary research stemming from 2001/02, the exclusive focus on the elders and proposition that 'without them, Somaliland would not have escaped

the dire fate of southern Somalia' (p. 3), disguises other actors and factors that significantly shaped Somaliland's divergent trajectory. Thereby, the supposition that '[t]he importance of clan elders and clan-based institutions [...] can hardly be overstated' (p. 115) sits uneasy with the observation that the elders were displaced very early on in the state-building process (p. 104).

More significantly, however, the book runs short of providing a satisfactory answer to the central question it aims to address, namely whether 'the involvement of traditional leaders, in state-building in Somaliland [should or can] become a model to be emulated in other failed states' (p. 225). First, the monograph remains restricted to a single-case study, hardly enabling it to authoritatively generalise its findings for other fragile states, particularly given the high degree of this issue's context specificity (p. 265). Second, it also remains inconclusive regarding the underlying question of how beneficial the elders were for Somaliland's own state trajectory. While Renders proposes that 'clan-related actors, institutions, strategies and discourses played a stabilizing role at first' (p. 225), she also points out that the resulting political hybridity 'complicated further development of equitable power-sharing on a national level' (p. 264) later on.

This analytical ambiguity probably constitutes the book's greatest challenge. Although Renders advocates the concept of HPOs to be a superior approach to understanding state-building, it remains unclear *under what conditions* and *what kinds of* HPOs were beneficial rather than detrimental for state-building projects. Ultimately, the reader is left with the arguments that state-building was a process of 'institutional *bricolage*' (p. 28) and that '[s]tatehood is negotiated' (p. 153). Although these insights correctly hint at the fact that state-building endeavours are incremental, contested and 'subject to the messy reality of politics', they are admittedly 'nothing new' (p. 266).

While the book would, thus, have benefited from a more rigorous analytical framework, it clearly sets a high bar with regards to its empirical findings and detailed portrayal of the polity's trajectory. Overall, *Consider Somaliland* is a carefully researched, insightful and welcome addition to the modest canon on Somaliland, constituting a valuable reading for both novel and established scholars working on the polity.

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