

## A Review of: “The Routledge Handbook of the Horn of Africa” by Jean-Nicolas Back with Jon Abbink, Stéphane Ancel, Azza Ahmed Abdel Aziz, Emanuele Fantini, Patrick Ferras, Hassan Mwakimako, Clélie Nallet, Aleksí Ylönen and Jan Záhorský (Eds.)<sup>12</sup>

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The “*Routledge Handbook of the Horn of Africa*”, edited by Jean-Nicolas Bach and a team of esteemed contributors, presents a comprehensive exploration of the complex political, social, and economic dynamics of a region often overlooked in broader geopolitical discussions. This gripping and informative handbook is an essential resource for scholars, policymakers and anyone seeking to deepen their understanding of the multifaceted issues facing this vital region. The editors of the book have certainly created a significant work that not only informs but also challenges readers to consider the intricate dynamics at play in the Horn of Africa.

The volume is organized into six distinct parts, each addressing different themes pertinent to the region. The first part (Liberation movements, separatism, and state formation) provides a historical overview, setting the stage for the contemporary challenges faced by the Horn. It discusses the rise and complexities of various liberation movements and separatist groups in the region, examining the trajectories of movements such as the Oromo Liberation Front and the Ogaden National Liberation Front, while highlighting their historical contexts, aims and challenges. The contributions also analyse the state formation processes in Eritrea, South Sudan, and Somaliland as well as the reactions of Sudan and Ethiopia to secession and autonomy movements. The dynamics of state legitimacy and the impact of historical grievances on modern politics are emphasized. Notably, the chapter by Tanja R. Müller on the militarization of higher education in Eritrea highlights how state control and militarized education systems have shaped national identity and governance (pp. 32-42). This historical context is crucial for understanding the ongoing conflicts and governance issues in the region.

Part 2 (Armed people, conflicts, and international interventions) focuses on the interplay between armed groups, state forces and international actors in the Horn of Africa. It addresses issues such as the role of the African Union’s Peace and Security

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Architecture and the complexities of military strategies in the region. Contributions provide insights into the ongoing conflicts in South Sudan, Somalia and the impact of militias on state stability. The section also discusses international dynamics, including foreign interventions and the influence of global powers on local conflicts (for instance, Turkey in Somalia and Uganda in South Sudan). The contributors also address the political economy of conflict, military livelihoods and recruitment strategies for groups like al-Shabaab in Kenya. The third part (Authoritarianism, innovative regimes, and forms of resistance) delves into the nature of authoritarian governance in the Horn of Africa, exploring how regimes maintain power through innovative approaches to political control. It examines the resilience of authoritarian practices despite popular resistance, highlighting the role of electoral processes, civil society and individual agency in challenging state authority. The authors argue for a reframing of narratives around state-society relations, highlighting examples of citizen engagement and resistance against oppressive governance. The chapters analyse specific cases in Ethiopia, Sudan, and Eritrea, discussing the dynamics of power, resistance, and the complexities of state-society relations. The contributions from Jon Abbink and his co-authors discuss the complexities of federalism and diversity in Ethiopia and Kenya, exploring how these nations navigate their ethnic compositions while maintaining central authority (pp. 255-268). This analysis is particularly relevant in the era of rising ethnic tensions and the quest for autonomy among various groups.

Part 4 (Religion and religious movements – strategies and adaptation to new landscape) investigates the impact of religious movements on politics and society in the Horn of Africa region. It covers the evolution of political Islam in Somalia, the role of Islamic movements in Sudan, and the complexities of religious interactions in Ethiopia. Contributions highlight how religious groups adapt to changing political landscapes and engage with state power, often acting as dynamic agents of change. The section underscores the diversity of religious experiences and their implications for social cohesion and conflict. In the fifth part (People's movements: migration) migration trends within the Horn of Africa are studied and the various factors that drive people to migrate – including economic, political and environmental influences – are examined. This section discusses the experiences of migrants and refugees, emphasizing the complexities of cross-border movements and the role of diasporas in shaping regional politics. The contributions also critique international migration policies and their impact on local communities, highlighting personal stories of resilience and adaptation. The chapter by Michaela Stahl-Göken on the sedentarization of cross-border tribes in Eastern Sudan illustrates how migration patterns influence local identities and socio-economic structures (pp. 605-617). This theme resonates with the current global discourse on migration, emphasizing the need to understand the human aspects of these movements beyond mere statistics.

Part 6 (Connecting the Horn: infrastructures, investments, and networks) explores the political and economic integration of the Horn of Africa region through infrastructure development and investment initiatives. It discusses the interplay of

regional projects like the Belt and Road Initiative and the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa. The contributions analyse how these developments affect state relations, local economies and the geopolitical landscape, drawing attention to the need for inclusive approaches to development that consider the interests of marginalized communities. The chapter written by Marina Bertoincin et al. on the implications of Arab investments in Sudan (p. 657-669) is especially important, since it emphasizes the intersection of global economic interests with local realities, shedding light on how external investments can both invigorate and destabilize regional economies. Besides, the contributions by Benedikt Kamski and Nizar Manek highlight the strategic implications of China's investments in transport links within the Horn (pp. 681-691). Such discussions are critical in framing the Horn of Africa within the broader narrative of international relations and development strategies.

Overall, the "*Routledge Handbook of the Horn of Africa*" is a well-structured and thoroughly researched volume that successfully captures the complexities of a region that is often simplified in global narratives. The diverse perspectives presented throughout the chapters not only enrich the academic discourse but also provide a platform for future research. This handbook is a vital addition to the literature on the Horn of Africa and will undoubtedly serve as a reference point for years to come.

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