The state, the crisis of state institutions and refugee migration in the Horn of Africa: the cases of Ethiopia, Sudan and Somalia
Degu, W.A.

Citation for published version (APA):
Degu, W. A. (2002). The state, the crisis of state institutions and refugee migration in the Horn of Africa: the cases of Ethiopia, Sudan and Somalia Amsterdam: Thela Thesis

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: http://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
INTRODUCTION

In the long history of pre-colonial Africa in general and the Horn of Africa in particular, contrary to the Eurocentric colonial historical discourse, political communities with which the society and individual used to identify themselves have been constituted and reconstituted. The political structures of those communities ranged from simple village communities to more complex centralized states (monarchies). Those political communities and political structures were not only diversified but also different from those of the European territorial nation states. They had their own unique characteristics. In short, the different African societies had been capable of (re)constituting their own political structures following their own gradual development and their own ideologies and philosophies up until the advent of the European colonial powers.

Though the influence of the European powers had started long before the establishment of colonialism, it was the formal establishment of colonial political entities that drastically changed the political, economic and social structures of the continent. Colonialism partitioned the Horn of Africa as it did the rest of the continent and created various colonial territories (which later became territorial sovereign states) with artificial but rigid boundaries, constituted new political identities (especially ethnic/regional identities) and created ethnic hierarchies. Those new creations did not correspond to the pre-colonial situation. In other words, colonialism reconstituted new political communities, new identities and new political structures.

At the end of colonial rule there was the need to reconstitute different political communities, national identities, political structures and economically viable states. However, Africa, especially its elites and political leaders, failed to do this. It seems, as a result, that Africa has not been successful in tackling the chronic political, economic and social problems it inherited from the colonial period. In other words, Africa is still living under the shadow of the colonial legacy. As Edward Said (quoted in Shrestha, 1995: 267) describes the lingering legacy of imperialism: ‘Westerners may have physically left their old colonies in Africa and Asia, but they retained them not only as markets but also as locales on the ideological map over which they continued to rule morally and intellectually’. In short, where colonialism left off, mainstream development paradigm as a means of dominating the former colonies took over (Kothari cited in Watts, 1995: 55). The domination of the hegemonic Eurocentric political and economic discourses (discourses on the territorial sovereign state, modernization and economic development) and ideologies (both Western and Eastern) disabled the past and the present African political elite from developing endogenous alternatives. They participated or they were made to participate actively by accepting what has been on offer from Europe and North America. Thus, they have been trying to copy the European political and economic models. They surely failed. In other words, the African political elites have not been able and/or willing to find solutions for the problems their respective societies encountered from within. The international system, which played a major role in creating Africa’s problems, has already turned its back. As a result, Africa, especially the Horn of Africa, is having more problems day after day. Examples of whatever problem or suffering you name can be found in this region.

Among other things, two fundamental problems can clearly be identified. First, the continent is notorious for poverty, famine, political suppression, violation of human rights, executions, internal conflict (ethnic/tribal, regional, religious conflicts), hostility between neighbouring countries and inter-state war, external intervention etc., and finally the complete collapse of the state. Second, many African countries have been producing and receiving a mass exodus of refugees. In this respect, the Horn of Africa (for this
project the countries included in this region will only be Ethiopia\(^1\), Sudan and Somalia) is an indisputable example where one can easily see these two fundamental problems for the last three or more decades. In general, as Woodward (1996: 1-2) put it, 'few other regions of the continent appear as devastated as the three adjacent countries of the Horn, and it appears to be more than a coincidence'.

A brief look at the individual countries will give a general picture. In Sudan there has been war, immediately before and after independence between religious/regional groups against the government. In addition, different ethnic groups within Southern Sudan have been fighting each other. As a result, the national-state building project (the construction of a multi-ethnic/religious state) has so far been unsuccessful, to say the least. The relation between Sudan and Ethiopia has been one of suspicion and intervention in each other’s conflicts in a variety of ways. In Ethiopia different regionally and ethnically organized forces have been fighting against the government. The conflict in Ethiopian has been mainly between the forces who have been aspiring to build one strong national-state and the forces fighting for autonomy and complete separation (the case of Eritrea). In this case the national-state building also failed. Moreover, the Ethiopian and Somalia government fought twice because of the Ogaden (where Ethiopian Somalis are living). The different conflicts and the war with Somalia together with the policies of the Ethiopian government (both pre and post 1974 revolution) devastated the economy and intensified the conflicts. As a result, among other things, Eritrea became an independent state and the rest of Ethiopia today is more fragmented and the society is poorer than ever before. Somalia, although it has only one ethnic group and the same religion, failed to build a viable national-state. Not only was the government policy of greater Somalia (borrowed from Britain colonial rulers), to bring all Somali-speaking people under one Somalia state a failure, but also the attempt to integrate the people within the republic. Rather, the Somalia people divided themselves into different tribes and fought each other, which resulted in a complete collapse of the state.

The three adjacent countries of the Horn today are thus more fragmented, weaker and poorer than ever before. In all cases the political leaders and the political system in general have not been able to accommodate the legitimate (seemingly legitimate) claims of the different forces and to build the state. Rather than make compromises to solve the problems peacefully, the authoritarian regimes preferred the use of force (political and economic militarization). For the same reason, they invited the super powers and other countries to assist in maintaining their power. Such external involvement helped neither to solve the problem of the region nor to maintain the rulers in power as long as they wanted. Rather, worsened the problems, destroyed the state, impoverished the society and produced a mass exodus of refugee migration. Finally, the political leaders, who pushed their people to flee, joined them as refugee themselves.

Mass exodus of refugee migration has also been the other major feature of the Horn of Africa. The three countries are well known both as refugee generating and receiving countries. Ever since the 1960s the region has been well known for its huge refugee migration, and the refugee problem has become a permanent political, and socio-economic factor in the region. Barely a month passes without yet another refugee flow clamouring for attention. Current concepts of refugee protection and assistance now face critical tests, as even long-term advocates of generous asylum and relief wonder whether the world will be able to care for all its refugees and their seemingly interminable needs. Moreover, as Smyser (1985: 155-159) has correctly put it: ‘What is most worrisome about the current refugee burden is not only the sheer number of refugees, however large it may be, but the long periods of time that they have spent in asylum. ... Most have little immediate prospect of going home or moving on. ... As crisis has followed crisis, and a new conflict obscured old ones, the world has been unable fully to absorb the consequences of one refugee flow.

\(^1\) Though Eritrea became an independent state in 1991, it is included within Ethiopia in this research because the research deals with both the pre- and post-1991 period.
before being faced with yet another’. As noted above, Smyser’s description is a very clear reflection of the problem encountered in Africa in general and the Horn of Africa in particular.

The fundamental question here would be **how we can explain the relationship between the constitution of the post-colonial state as a sovereign territorial entity, the crisis of the post-colonial state institutions and the ever increasing refugee migration in the Horn of Africa?** The starting hypothesis of this research is that it is by reconceptualizing the state, as it is a result of a process of social construction shaped by the dominant political discourses and practices, by demystifying the mainstream development paradigm and the Eurocentric economic development theories and models, by considering the complex and interrelated nature of the factors responsible for the crisis (failure/collapse) of the state, and by showing that the refugee crisis has been the outcome of these two interrelated factors and process that we can explain what has been going on for the last three or so decades. This entails a comprehensive (multi-variant) approach, which will bring both historical facts and current developments, economic and socio-political, domestic and external factors together. Moreover, it entails an interdisciplinary approach which will take into account findings of different disciplines.

In the light of these assumptions, the primary task is to identify a theory (or theories) which will help to provide an intellectual order to the subject matter of national and international politics, and in order to conceptualize and contextualize both the past and the present. Furthermore, it is to identify a theory that reflects upon the very process of theorizing and is concerned with the social and political purpose of knowledge, the cognitive interests and assumption of the observer and the way in which the principal actors construct their images of the political world. Therefore, the first chapter will analyze the various theories, notably liberalism, realism, rationalism, Marxism, critical and postmodern theories. The fundamental objective here is to look into the basic assumptions and concepts developed by the respective theories and find out how relevant they are in studying what is going on in Africa.

Based on the theory (theories) identified as useful for analyzing the state and refugee crisis in Africa, the second chapter will focus on the social construction of the state and the crisis of the real existing state in Africa. In this chapter the different perspectives (mainly modernization, neo-Marxist and the failure of the state) in the study of the state in Africa and their strength and weakness will be analyzed. Then a modest attempt will be made to further develop the failure of the state perspective, as a better theoretical tool in analyzing the state in Africa, with the help of the insights acquired from critical and postmodern theories. This will be followed by the discussion on the critical conceptualization of the idea of a ‘refugee’ and how it has been shaped by the dominant political discourses and practices which shaped our imaginations in chapter three. Chapter four will deal with the typology, general characteristics and magnitude of refugee migration in the Horn of Africa.

In chapter five, the various partial explanations given by different scholars for the refugee crisis and their critiques will be discussed. Then the major theoretical explanation for the refugee crisis in the Horn of Africa, which will be used in this research, will be outlined. Chapter six will focus on the conceptualization of and the major factors for the crisis (failure/collapse) of the real existing state, as the major explanation for the refugee crisis in the Horn Africa. This is mainly an elaboration of the points raised in the previous chapter and an introduction for the coming three chapters.

In the light of the assumptions and theoretical frameworks outlined in the previous chapters, the (re)constitution of the post-colonial state and the crisis of its institutions as the basic explanation of refugee migration in the three Horn of Africa countries will be discussed in detail in the remaining three chapters. To fruitfully grasp the complexity and the continuity and changes in this part of the continent, I preferred to employ a historical approach. To do so, I divided the historical development into pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods. Thus, chapter seven will deal with the pre-colonial development focusing on the different factors which influenced the (re)constitution of the political communities and structures and their basic features. This will help us to understand what was destroyed,
distorted and continued during the colonial period. The colonial reconstruction of Africa will be discussed in chapter eight. This chapter will attempt to answer the following questions: What legacy did colonialism leave to Africa in general and to the Horn of Africa in particular? Was it a major break with the past of the continent, or was it a mere passing event which did not constitute a break in the history of the continent? What is the place of the colonial era within the wider context of African history? Chapter nine will analyze what happened to the process of creating new political communities, national identities, political structures and an economically viable state during the post-colonial period. The focus will mainly be, first, on the role of the different ideologies (nationalism and ethnicity, socialism and liberalism) adopted, the mainstream development paradigm, and economic development theories, models and policy packages imposed from without. Second, the historical account of the political development in the three countries will be discussed separately to give a better understanding of the historical development in each case. Third, an attempt will be made to show the deterioration of the economy with the help of selected statistical indicators. This will be followed by general conclusion.