The state, the crisis of state institutions and refugee migration in the Horn of Africa: the cases of Ethiopia, Sudan and Somalia
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7. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE PRE-COLONIAL HORN OF AFRICA

‘In pre-colonial Africa, when Africans controlled their own affairs and administered justice among themselves, the system of government, defined as ordering of human relations, was characterized by structural diversity and pluralism in political thought, political habits and institutions. The diversity of the system was a reflection of the pluralism of political philosophy espoused by Africa’s diverse socio-cultural groups... The variation in political philosophy, especially, revealed the social groups’ views about the nature of political authority, the rights and obligations of political authority’ (Ohaegbulam, 1990: 97-98).

‘... the political structures were not rigid but adaptive to economic and environmental exigencies as well as responsive to local needs, circumstances and the wishes of the ruled. They were reformed when social condition required it. ... The principle of central government was combined with a greater degree of local autonomy....’ (Ayittey, 1991: 233).

‘Because they were the product of centuries of successful trial and error by which men had worked out ways of living in tropics and the forests, in the grasslands and the mountains of this often harsh continent. These systems were, ..., the outcome of a long period of natural selection of a social kind: they enclosed men within frameworks of spiritual and moral behavior, collective duty and individual responsibility, that rested on traditions of inherently sufficient power and persuasion... ... The systems were strong, in other words, because within the limits of the world they knew they worked manifestly better than anything that was offered them in exchange. They worked better not only at a material level but also in terms of spiritual, moral and socially constructive behaviour’ (Davidson, 1995: 313-314).

This chapter is mainly the elaboration of the points raised in the previous chapter with regard to the pre-colonial development of the Horn of Africa. It is a critical re-reading of the pre-colonial history of a region. By critically re-reading this long history of the region I will try, among other things, first, to show that this part of Africa had complex and diversified political structures (systems). This is an attempt to show that those societies were capable of establishing centralized political structures. Two examples will be used - the Nubia and the Axumite kingdoms - as illustration. Second, those societies were dynamic or there were changes and continuities. The centralized political entities were later weakened, disintegrated and reconstituted into many kingdoms and chiefdoms (sheikdoms in some cases). Why it was not possible to sustain such centralized structures is an important question that should be answered by historians. However, the internal and international environments, which affected the reconstitution of the pre-colonial political structures (political systems), especially after the 16th and/or 17th century, will be discussed briefly here. Third, by examining the nature and political history of the different political entities (pre-colonial states) which existed immediately before the establishment of colonial rule, I will try to prepare the ground for the next chapter which will deal with the continuity and change during the colonial rule. This will help us to understand what was destroyed and/or distorted during colonial rule, and how different the pre-colonial political entities were from those of the colonial ones. Finally, I will also attempt to show how multi-ethnic/tribal the political structures developed in the pre-colonial Horn of Africa were: the present day Sudan, Ethiopia (including Eritrea), and Somalia.
7.1 Pre-colonial Political Structures (Political Systems) in Africa: General Overview

It may be useful to start with the general characterization of the political structures (political systems) of the pre-colonial period. In general, the pre-colonial political organization of Africa can be characterized by, according to Ohaegbulam (1990: 97-98):¹

structural diversity and pluralism in political thought, political habits and institutions. The diversity of the system was a reflection of the pluralism of political philosophy espoused by Africa's diverse socio-cultural groups. Expressed differently, the political forms evolved by pre-colonial African societies varied according to their political thoughts, habits and institutions, the variation in political philosophy, especially, revealed the social groups' views about the nature of political authority, the rights and obligations of political authority.²

Different scholars, Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940), Potholm (1970 and 1979), Ohaegbulam (1990), and George B. N. Ayittey (1991 and 1992), have attempted to categorize these diverse political structures. Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940: 5) have identified two groups of political systems in Africa.³ The first group consists of 'those societies which have centralized authority, administrative machinery, and judicial institutions - in short, a government - and in which cleavages of wealth, privilege, and status correspond to the distribution of power and authority'. The second group consists of 'those societies which lack centralized authority, administrative machinery, and constituted judicial institution ... and in which there are no sharp divisions of rank, status, or wealth' (Ibid.).

More recently, Ohaegbulam (1990: 98) identified three types of political organizations that evolved in pre-colonial Africa. Distinctions among the three types are based on the degree of control exercised at the political centre, the extent of regulation of force within society and the nature of the relationship between kinship and political authority. In the first type African societies made kinship the basis of their membership as well as holding and exercising political power. Political authority segmented, as the kinship groups seldom interacted with each other and had no common leader. Political roles were allocated according to sex and age. Decisions were usually made through discussions and exchange of views on all major issues affecting the group by a meeting of all adult males. The aim of the system was to achieve a consensus and the common good of the group (Ibid.). The clan system of the Somali society in which the elders had a leading role can more or less be included in this category. The second types were larger and more extensive in their interaction than the first. Those societies preferred an egalitarian diffusion of political authority through different segments or units of their society. Within each segmented political system there was a cultural and linguistic nation performing all the functions of a political system and they were often in competition with one another and lacked a unified political authority for the entire nation (Ibid.: 98-99). The various political entities in pre-colonial Sudan and southern and southeastern Ethiopia before the emergence of a centralized Ethiopian state can best be placed in between the second and third type of political organization.

¹On the structural diversity of pre-colonial African political systems, see also Potholm, 1979: 4-24.
²For similar generalization, see also Potholm, 1979: 6.
³Unlike the modernization approach which looks at the various pre-colonial political systems as backward compared with those of the European type, these political systems should be taken as the result of the unique socio-economic and political development of the respective African societies. They should also be considered as the solution that those societies developed to solve the respective problems they encountered.
The third type can be described as centralized kingdoms or states. The great empires of Western Sudan - Ghana, Mali, Songhai - and the ancient civilization of the Nile valley _ Nubia, Axum and Egypt - can be taken as the best evidence (Ibid.). The centralized kingdoms have some institutional features, including administrative machinery and judicial structures. The assumption was that the concentration of political power served the good of society better than the fragmentation of the segmented systems and that the loss of subgroup autonomy was a worthwhile price to pay for the strength and co-ordination that often accompanied a more centralized form (Ibid.). The political structure of the centralized Ethiopian polity in which the king of kings had been the head of the state belongs to this category. Moreover, Potholm (1970: 86-89, See also Potholm, 1979: 19-24.) has identified three major variations within the centralized political system: centralized monarchies, federative monarchies and federative monarchies with associated bases.6

A far more elaborate work (with a more positive view) on the indigenous African social, economic and political institutions, is that of George B. N. Ayittey (See Ayittey, 1991 and 1992). Ayittey has distinguished two main distinct types of indigenous political organizations and further differentiation within each. In the first type, tribal groups existed as separate political entities and governed themselves independently (some were led by chiefs and others were not) (Ayittey, 1992: 37-38).7 In the second type, conquered tribes came under the hegemony of others, as in kingdoms or empires. There were two discernible political subcultures within it: the first was an imperial rule that afforded the vassal state extensive local independence or autonomy, while the second type of imperial rule required the vassal states to assimilate an allegedly superior foreign culture (Ibid.: 38). Let us look more closely into Ayittey’s two categories of African indigenous political systems.

Societies that Governed Themselves

There were two subtype structures among societies which governed themselves: stateless societies and societies with chiefs and kings (Chiefdoms and states). The first subtype of political organizations, the stateless societies, had two units of government: the council of elders and the village assembly. Although there were often leaders or headmen, around whom opinion coalesced, central authority was absent. There were no officeholders, only representatives of groups. Tribes men could shift their allegiance or support from one leader or decision-maker to another. To resolve conflicts, such societies reached compromises instead of making judgements or applying sanctions. Kinship governed their system of law and order (Ibid.). These societies included the Ibo of Nigeria, the Kru of Liberia, the Tallensi of Ghana, the Somali, the Jie of

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6'Centralized monarchies had ‘strong central political administration, heterogeneous membership, and territorial basis' (Potholm, 1970: 86). 'Membership in this type of community is not based solely upon kinship, but also upon direct allegiance to the central political authority, the king or paramount chief... (Ibid.).

7Federative monarchies, exhibit a strong central tendency at least in comparison to segmentary groups; extensive self-regulation is left to the subgroups. ‘Political participation is through the medium of one’s existing leaders. The king’s council is usually made up of the leaders of subgroups. Communal activities are determined and regulated by head of specific lineage groups’ (Potholm, 1970: 86).

7Federative monarchy with associated bases is a system where ‘there is a central political authority whose position is inherited, but there is a series of associational groups which cut across clan and kin lines. These are not simple age regiments, but are rather societies which form a link between the subgroups of clan or village and the central political authority' (Potholm, 1970: 86-87).

7Tribes with chiefs and their attendant administrative and judicial institutions were referred to as chiefdoms or states. Tribes that dispensed with chiefs but governed themselves peacefully were called stateless societies' (Ayittey, 1992: 37-38).
Uganda, and the Mbeere of Kenya (Ibid.: 39). The second subtype, societies that had states, had four units of government: a chief, inner council, a council of elders, and a village assembly. The chief, in most cases a male, was the political, social, judicial, and religious head of the tribe. As such, he had wide-ranging powers (Ayittey, 1992: 39). The Inner Council usually assisted the chief in governance and was the first line of defence against despotism. The duty of the Council was not only to keep the chief in touch with happenings in the tribe but also to keep a check on the chief’s behaviour. If the chief ruled incompetently, the tribe would reproach the Council for failing to act responsibly (Ibid.: 40). The functions of the elders’ council were also to advise and assist the chief in the administration of the tribe and to prevent the chief from abusing his power. Unanimity was the key feature of decision making. For instance, if the council could not reach unanimity on contested issues, the chief would call a village assembly to put the issue before the people for debate. This meant that the people were the ultimate judge or final authority on disputed issues (Ibid.: 41; and see pp. 41-42 on the procedures of the village assembly). Another important point to note is that, ‘although in theory the chief rule for life, in practice and under normal circumstances he ruled only as long as his people allowed it - a distinction many observers failed to note. He could be destooled (removed) at any time if he failed to perform his traditional duties or if his people so wished, irrespective of how long he had been in office’ (Ibid.: 47).

One can identify a number of major features of chiefdoms and kingdoms (See Ayittey 1991: 232-234). First, there was a possibility for the people to choose their own rulers, and there were alternatives to choose from. Second, the king’s role in the day-to-day administration of the kingdom was severely limited by tradition. Although he was vested with absolute authority and power, much of the power was delegated to the different lower levels of the system. Third, the political structures were adaptive to economic and environmental exigencies, responsive to local needs, circumstances. The principle of central government was combined with a greater degree of local autonomy (Ibid.: 233). Fourth, corruption was not a common feature of the indigenous system of government. Last but not least, the system was also very stable and fairly democratic in the sense that the people could participate in the decision-making process. This is attested to by the fact that many kingdoms lasted for centuries. There were few recorded episodes of violent revolutions in Africa’s history by exploited ‘serfs’ against paunchy ‘lords’ even though there were classes in Africa (Ibid.: 234).

Imperial Rule: Kingdoms and Empires

Imperial rule (empires and kingdoms) was of two subtypes. The differences in imperial rule generally lay in the degree of independence or autonomy conquerors granted to the subjugated tribes. ‘At one end of the spectrum were the Islamic empires such as the Mandinka which made conscious efforts to supplant existing cultures by forcing the subjugated tribes to assimilate an allegedly superior culture. At the other end were the Asante and the Zende, who adopted a policy...’

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1 ‘... the Somali possess no formal hierarchy of firm political offices... Occasionally, there may be a clan head (the suldaan or sultan). However, at every level of the segmentation, all adult men are classed as oday (elder) with the right to speak in the shir (ad hoc council), which deliberate matters of common concern and decide policy’ (Ayittey, 1991: 86). For a detailed account on the stateless societies see Ayittey, 1991: 78-93
2 Tribes that had chiefs included the Fanti of Ghana, the Yoruba of Nigeria, the Mossi of Burkina Faso, the Swazi, and the Zulu of South Africa.
3 For a detailed account on chiefdoms, the role of the different branches of government and some examples see Ayittey, 1991: 93-149).
4 See, Ayittey, 1991: 233-234, for the details.
of indirect rule by according the traditional rulers of the subjugated tribes extensive autonomy' (Ayittey, 1992: 48). In both cases there were different levels of government. The leaders of the kingdoms or the empires, in some cases, were elected. There were also cases where kings were hereditary. In many cases the political systems were complex and delicate with checks and counterchecks against concentration of power in one man's hands. The leaders were deposed (or killed) whenever they could no longer be regarded as fit to rule or when they broke any royal taboos on personal behaviour or whenever they misruled (Ibid.: 49-62 for the details).

The imperial cultures of Africa were, for Ayittey (1991: 245), 'suffused with a great sense of hierarchy which made decentralized decision-making possible.'\(^{12}\) According to the hierarchical structure at the highest level sat a supreme ruler (king) assisted in the administration of the empire by an Inner Council (cabinet) and the State Council (Ibid.: 245-246). The next lower level of government was provincial; the siblings or offspring (princes) of the king ruled. Each prince would have his own Inner Council and rule through the Provincial Assembly made up of representatives of the various chiefdoms that formed the province (Ibid.: 247). According to Ayittey (Ibid.), at village level, political structures of the vassal states were generally left undisturbed. Local rulers retained their authority but their duties expanded to include the payment of annual tributes and the provision of local levies for the imperial army. The imperial government in return fulfilled such obligations as defending the local communities against external aggression and keeping existing trade routes open for commerce.\(^{13}\)

In general those indigenous political systems had their own strengths and weaknesses. Their strengths lay, among other things, in their stability and consensual democracy enhanced by the tradition of participatory democracy and decentralized administration, which allowed the various political entities (ethnic, regional, religious) the autonomy to preserve their own culture and manage their own affairs (Ibid.: 271). Davidson (1995: 313-314) has also noted that the pre-colonial socio-economic and political systems were strong because they were the products of centuries of successful trial and error; and the outcome of a long period of natural selection of a social kind in which men were enclosed within frameworks of spiritual and moral behaviour, collective duty and individual responsibility, that rested on traditions of inherently sufficient power and persuasion. As a result, they worked better not only at a material level but also in terms of spiritual, moral and socially constructive behaviour.

Some of the weaknesses of the indigenous political systems were, first, the restriction of chieftaincy and kingship to certain lineage. Not everyone could become a king or a chief unless he had royal blood (Ayittey, 1991: 266). The second was the absence of a cohesive agent to hold the polity together. Though kinship was politically expedient, it was a rather poor cohesive force beyond the village or the town boundaries.\(^{14}\) Third, the importance attached to the

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\(^{12}\)See (Ayittey, 1991: 245), for an illustration of the hierarchical and decentralized nature of the African kingdoms or empires.

\(^{13}\)It is imperative to stress that there were of course numerous variations and modifications of this general paradigm. However, the building blocks or the structure remained fundamentally the same and the exceptions to the general norm were very few (Ayittey: 1991: 247).

\(^{14}\)This was perhaps one of the important factors to which can be attributed the disintegration of many states, mainly into smaller and decentralized political entities.
hereditary positions, e.g. elders on the ruler’s council, is often taken as anti-democratic. It is true that hereditary positions, combined with the principle of hierarchy, could cause some difficulties, however, this was not the norm in many African societies. The strength of the indigenous system lies in the fact that not all the officials of government came from the same family or lineage. That was important. The councillors were a potential source of opposition or checks on the power of the ruler. He had to deal with them whether he liked it or not. The king might not like the views of the councillors but he could not replace them with his own appointees (Ibid.: 268). Thus, contrary to what has been hastily dismissed as undemocratic, authoritarian, and primitive, the indigenous systems had political institutions with checks and balances to prevent the abuse of power. In pre-colonial Africa, among other things:

... a person was born politically free and equal and his voice and counsel were heard and respected regardless of the economic wealth he possessed. ... there were traditional checks and balances including sanctions against any possible abuse of power. In fact, traditional leaders were regarded as trustees whose influence was circumscribed both in customary law and religion. In traditional African society, an individual needed only to be a mature member of it to participate fully in political affairs. (Ayittey, 1992: 63).

By comparing those indigenous African political systems with that of the colonial, and more importantly with that of the post-colonial, one can understand what was distorted and/or destroyed.

It should be noted that for the sake of convenience it is possible to classify African societies into a number of general types (distinguishing those with much government from those with little, those with centralized forms of rule from those whose authority has been dispersed among heads of clans or extended families). Yet the distinction remains at best an artificial one. There is no true division to be made between African ‘states with kings or central governments’ and African ‘societies without kings or chiefs’ (Davidson, 1995: 65). Furthermore, it seems absurd to suppose that societies who have no constructed centralized state have been in some way less gifted or intelligent than their state-forming neighbors. Their modes of individual and collective social life, with its niceties of checks and balances, its strength and flexibility, its bare simplicities of form combined with tolerance for stress and error, allows no place for any such idea’ (Ibid.: 66). It should also be emphasized that "the mere size of any given polity, or its degree of political centralization, offers no reliable guide to effectiveness of development and control of environment. On the contrary, many of the 'small' polities, ... have shown quite outstanding capacity for political and economic adaptation, social coherence, and ideological self-assurance" (Ibid.; 70). But it is true that classifying the indigenous African political systems into different categories is helpful in understanding them. It also makes generalization possible. However, it should be well noted that the political systems were fluid and changing their structures through the years. One time centralized states became decentralized and vice versa. States with a strong centre disintegrated into many smaller and decentralized political entities. Decentralized political entities were incorporated into more centralized and hierarchical states. The political systems should, therefore, be understood as they were ever changing where political structures and political communities were constituted and reconstituted. The Ethiopian case can be one good example.

Finally, the diversified pre-colonial African system evolved to order the affairs of their communities ‘they all invariably share three major traditions’ (Ohaegbulam, 1990: 100-101). First, the political role of elders was considerable as their age and accumulated wisdom gave
them power to serve economic, social and political needs of their community. Second, religion played a significant role in politics. Third, the different pre-colonial political organizations included definite measures for limiting arbitrary use of political power, for the promotion of the common good, to punish law breakers, to arbitrate disputes and to ensure domestic peace and tranquility. Moreover, ‘popular sovereignty - the concept that the people, not the king or ruler, are sovereign - which western scholars regard as a product of European nationalism was a strong element of the political philosophy and practice of pre-colonial African societies’ (Ibid.). Thus, as Ohaegbulam (Ibid.: 103) correctly concluded, ‘by far, this political tradition served African societies much better than the present political systems derived from those imposed on the societies for a period of one hundred years or so by European colonial powers.’

7.2 Continuity and Change in the Pre-colonial Horn of Africa

The African society, like the rest of the world, went through continuous processes of creating and recreating political structures. These processes of political development were not linear and similar everywhere. Rather different parts of the continent followed a different type of political development and established diversified political communities and structures. Even the same society had different political structures at different historical periods. Thus, complex and diversified political structures were created and recreated throughout the long history of the continent. Such inherent capacity for self-development and self-administration was demonstrated in many parts of Africa including the Horn of Africa. The states of the middle and upper valley of the Nile: from Merotic Kush and Christian Nubia to Axum and the early states of Ethiopia can demonstrate that the societies in the Horn of Africa were capable of creating complex centralized state structures (Davidson, 1992: 51). The development of long-distance trade within the region and with the outside world (Europe, the Middle East and Far East) is another evidence for the complexity of the political systems, which developed in this part of Africa. However, these centralized states were later weakened, disintegrated and reconstituted into many political entities. On the other hand, societies such as the Somalis and the Oromos had more decentralized political structures, which are different from that of Ethiopia and Sudan. What are the possible factors that contributed to the emergence of these diversified political structures? Before attempting to answer these questions it is important to briefly look at the two centralized states: Nubia and Axum.

The kingdom of Nubia was a civilization that flourished along the Nile valley, in the area now known as the Republic of Sudan. It was probably a federation of Kush, Nepata and Meroe (Ohaegbulam, 1990: 64). There was a great deal of commercial, political and imperial interaction between Nubia and ancient Egypt. The Nile provided a means of communication, trade and cultural exchange between the two areas. Its capital was Nepata until it was moved to Meroe in 591 BC (Ibid.). Meroe, located about 200 kilometers northeast of the modern city of Khartoum, gradually became the centre of Sudanic civilization which lasted for over 800 years (Ibid.; Connah, 1987: 24). As Shinnie (quoted in Connah, 1987: 65) wrote, ‘Meroe was an African civilization, firmly based on African soil, and developed by an African population’. According to Davidson (1995: 40), ‘the history of Merotic Kush covers at least six centuries of

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15 On the intertwined nature of religion and politics in pre-colonial Africa, see also Potholm, 1979: 28-31.
16 On the limitation on the use of power in pre-colonial African political systems, see also Potholm, 1979: 24-28.
17 See Ohaegbulam, 1990: 102-103, for some examples.
energetic and often quite distinctive development in many fields, especially those of town and temple building, metal manufacture, and the elaboration of international trade with countries as far removed as India and even beyond. After several centuries as one of the most important cradles of innovation whose impact was felt across Africa, Nubia declined in power and influence. The decline of agriculture and animal husbandry was due to many related factors; and the decline of trade between Nubia and Egypt (when Egypt was under Roman rule) contributed to the decline of Nubia (Ohaegbulam, 1990: 66-67). According to Davidson (1995: 43), 'nomad incursion and the invasion from the Tigrean kingdom of Axum combined to bring the achievements of the Meroitic Kush to an end'. When Nubia was on the decline, Axum, the other African civilization which is located in the northern part of Ethiopia, began the entire process, enriching itself at the expense of Nubia. In the fourth century (350AD), Axum under king Ezana took over effective control of Nubia (Ohaegbulam, 1990: 66-67). The state of Axum boosted urban centres; its own form of writing; coinage in gold, silver and bronze; masonry buildings of a distinctive architectural style; unique monuments that indicate substantial engineering skills; extensive trading contacts both within and outside Africa; and a significant role in the international politics of its period (Connah, 1987: 67). Ohaegbulam (1990: 68) has also pointed out that trade and commerce advanced the fortunes of Axum (see also Zewde, 1991: 8). The Axumites maintained extensive trade relations with Egypt, Inner Africa, Arabia, India, the Mediterranean world, Greece and Rome. In addition, as Connah (1987: 88) puts it:

Ethiopian archaeological evidence suggests that at least by Axumite times a considerable degree of social complexity had been attained. The society which left so much material evidence in the northeastern corner of the Ethiopian highlands, and in some adjacent areas, must surely have been a stratified one. At the top was an absolute monarch, frequently depicted on Axumite coins wearing a crown and in one case shown seated on the throne.... Some of the inscriptions on the coins suggest that these rulers were, nevertheless, concerned about popular opinion: 'may the country be satisfied!'... and 'joy be to the peoples' .... lack something of the usual tone of true autocracy. However, monarchical government, whatever its exact character, is indicated also by other elements of the archaeological evidence.

Axum, according to Zewde (1991: 8), entered a process of decline from about the middle of the seventh century. The rise of Islam and the subsequent disruption of the Red Sea trade sapped Axum's sources of life. Moreover, Beja pressures from the north forced the Axumite state to recoil further inward. Later on, the Axumite ruling dynasty was replaced by the Zagwe dynasty, which lasted from about 1150-1270 (ibid.). The Zagwe dynasty was later replaced by the Solomonic dynasty. The political structure under both dynasties was more decentralized than in the Axumite period. This was later replaced by a far more decentralized structure where the centre was weaker while the regional leaders were stronger and autonomous. It was only after 1855 that the reconstitution of a more centralized political structure was started (this will be discussed in more details later).

The peoples of Africa, as Davidson (1994: 255-257) rightly put it, had organized themselves into a number of communities different in size and power. They each possessed a community consciousness, a sense of belonging and identity. This community consciousness, this sense of belonging, certainly took shape in a very wide range of forms and images. Culturally, all these

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18On the rise and fall of the Axumite kingdom, and its economic and political impact on the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea, see Rotberg, 1965: 30-33.
communities of pre-colonial Africa drew their potency from beliefs and intuitions - themselves the fruits of an experience which had solved the problems of survival, growth and development. These developments, when considered together in their often astonishing comparability, may be said to have embodied Africa's distinctive and original forms of civilization - civilization which promotes the humanization of man in society (Ibid.).

As it is briefly indicated above the one time strong political communities with centralized political structures, which had a civilization comparable to that of the rest of the world were later weakened, disintegrated and reconstituted into more decentralized political communities. The reason why those centralized political communities were reconstituted into more decentralized structures will be left to the historians. However, I will attempt to briefly consider the international and internal environment that affected the reconstitution of the political communities that existed from about $16^{th}$ and $17^{th}$ centuries up until the colonial period. The emergence of racism, the slave trade and the economic domination and exploitation of Africa by the European powers marked the international environment. The internal environment also consists of a number of factors: the absence of significant structural changes, huge human migration and the resulting instability, the weakness or absence of factors responsible for the emergence of centralized political structures.

### 7.2.1 The International Environment in Pre-colonial Africa

It is important to go back into history to understand the impact of the international environment on the pre-colonial development of Africa in general and the Horn of Africa in particular. If we look into history with regard to political development, we will find that the African system of government was not inferior to any system in the world. As Davidson (1995: 145) pointed out, 'if anything, the comparison between Africa and Europe is likely to be in Africa's favour. Throughout the medieval period most African forms of government were undoubtedly more representative than their European contemporaries ... And most African ruling groups were less predatory'. With regard to trade, technological development and relations with the rest of the world, Africa had been seen as an equal partner up until the development of racism. In other words, it is important to emphasize that up until 1650 the nature of European contacts with Africa was to encourage a mutually profitable partnership that rested, emphatically, on a mutually accepted equality of power (Davidson, 1994a: 56). Generally, as Davidson (Ibid.) explains, the Africans found by Europeans seemed to them to possess, along with much mystery and strangeness of behavior, a productive capacity that was in most ways not greatly different from their own, save notably in respect of firearms and long-distance shipping. For many years, as one example of this, Europeans continued to buy fast-dyed West African textiles, for sale in Europe, that were superior to anything Europe then produced. It was only after the middle of the seventeenth century, with a tremendous expansion in the purchase of African

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19 The distinction between the international and internal environments is not meant to create a rigid dichotomy as if the two have a separate existence. It is only meant to analyze each and bring them together to understand the whole.

20 For instance, by the thirteenth century the long-impoverished Europe, suffering from the collapse of the Western Roman Empire, 'was beginning to recover itself and emerge from its provincial obscurity. Europe could once again export manufactures, whereas for many earlier years it had exported little but European slaves. With this ability Europe's rulers began to buy gold so as to create a new monetary standard of exchange such as their rising enterprises now required. This imported gold has to come from Africa, for no other source existed' (Davidson, 1994a: 33-34). However, 'with expanding arteries of trade that were lubricated by the new gold coins, Europe could now lay the foundations of its future supremacy. So it may be said, without exaggeration, that this new prosperity of late-medieval Europe, with its first steps toward the development of capitalism, was a consequence, however indirect, of the achievement of Africa, and of Africa's mines, merchants, and entrepreneurs' (Ibid.: 34).
captive for enslavement in the Americas, that the old concept of equality began to vanish. Then after ‘... Africans came to be seen as mere savages whom it was legitimate and even laudable to enslave... With this new attitude we have entered the period of modern racism, and colonial conquests, accompanied by the same instrumental justification of a ‘natural superiority’ (Ibid.).

In other words, two major forces: external slave trade and European colonization, perhaps more than any other external influences, contributed to shape the course and process of Africa’s development. No comprehensive knowledge of Africa is, therefore, possible without the appreciation of the impact of these two forces. The external slave trade occurred along four major routes: the Trans-Saharan, the Red Sea, and the Indian Ocean route transported African slaves to the Mediterranean, Europe, and Asia centuries before the Trans-Atlantic route to the Americas began in the fifteenth century (Ohaegbulam, 1990: 121). It was also true that the Trans-Atlantic slave trade was more intense and uprooted several millions of Africans more than the other three (some scholars estimated from 9 million to 14 million, see Ibid.: 1990: 142 and Table 7.1). However, it is difficult to judge how each region and Africa in general may have been affected by such substantial depletion of its human resources. 'For one thing, we really have no idea how many other lives may have been lost in the business of securing slaves for export and in bringing them down to the coast' (Fage, 1995: 259). In general, as Fage (Ibid.: 260) put it:

It is frankly impossible to make a firm assessment of the total effect on Black Africa of the monstrous rape of its life, manpower and productivity by the export of slaves. Even the most elementary issue, namely the extent to which the export of slave affected the size and growth of populations, cannot really be tackled, since usually nothing but the crudest estimates exist for the size of the African population, their rates of natural increase, or their geographical distribution, for any period before the present century.

However, it is possible to point out that the slave trade, on the one hand, exploited Africa and distorted in many ways the continent’s economic, social and political development. On the other hand, it contributed to the rise of the Industrial Revolution in Europe and the Americas and consequently precipitated the rapid economic development that occurred in the two areas, which put the European powers in an advantageous position in the colonial partition of Africa. In a sense African slaves contributed to the colonization and destruction of their home continent. Furthermore, the slave trade changed the attitude of white people towards black people in general. Once Europeans began to use black people as a commodity they naturally developed an attitude of contempt for and superiority over them. As Ohaegbulam (1990: 122) put it, ‘no people can enslave or politically dominate another for centuries without developing a notion of such superiority, especially when the skin color and other physical characteristics of those enslaved or colonized differ from theirs’.

In order to survive the conditions created by the external slave trade many political communities (kingdoms, chiefdoms, etc.) diverted their energies from the peaceful development of politics, arts, and culture to preoccupation with slaving wars and destruction. Many African communities located settlements in a good defensive and inaccessible position at the cost of communications and agricultural production. Such settlement reinforced subsistence agriculture, discouraged market activities, and hid away the settlements not only from slave hunters as desired but also

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1^Colonialism is the subject of the next chapter; the impact of the slave trade will briefly be discussed here.
undesirably from the flow of modernizing ideas (Ohaegbulam, 1990: 145). With regard to its economic repercussions it is may justifiably be concluded that:

the clear losers in the growth of the Atlantic system, and woefully so, were the African economies. The demographic and disruptive effect of a trade which required the forceful capture and sale of human beings retarded the development of market activities and the evolution of institutional arrangements essential for the growth of capitalism. What is more, the operation of the slave trade prevented in various ways the growth of "normal" international trade between Africa and the rest of the ... Without the supply of African slave labor to the Americas, European merchants and governments would have been compelled by purely economic considerations to encourage the production of a wide range of commodities, including some of the American commodities, in Africa. This would have meant that the growth of world trade (between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries) would have been very much slower, and hence the rate of development in Western Europe and North America. But the history of Africa would have been entirely different. The level of economic and social development would not have been the same for all the regions of Africa, south of the Sahara. But all of them would have been far richer, regions poorly endowed with resources benefiting from the development of the better endowed ones through trade and other contacts. In the final analysis...the Atlantic economies that developed between 1451 and 1870, did so at the expense of the African Economies. (Quoted in Ohaegbulam, 1990: 147).

Table 7.1
Estimated Total of Slaves Exported from Black Africa, c.1670 -c. 1870

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Atlantic Trade</th>
<th>Sahara Trade</th>
<th>Indian Ocean and Red Sea Trades</th>
<th>Totals</th>
<th>Annual Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1651-1700</td>
<td>1230000</td>
<td>350000</td>
<td>150000</td>
<td>1730000</td>
<td>35000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1701-1750</td>
<td>2350000</td>
<td>350000</td>
<td>200000</td>
<td>2900000</td>
<td>58000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1751-1800</td>
<td>3200000</td>
<td>350000</td>
<td>200000</td>
<td>4330000</td>
<td>87000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1801-c 1870</td>
<td>3270000</td>
<td>1015000</td>
<td>770000</td>
<td>5055000</td>
<td>72000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10630000</td>
<td>2065000</td>
<td>1320000</td>
<td>14015000</td>
<td>14015000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Fage, 1995: 258

The same can be said with regard to the other three slave trade routes. In addition, as Davidson (1995: 221) points out, the slave trade struck Africa in two ways. First, by providing Africa with a cheap substitute, in exchange for slaves, the slave trade undermined the local production (e.g. cotton goods and metalware), and discouraged the expansion from the handicraft stage. Second, the slave trade deprived large numbers of African societies of many of their best producers, the youngest and the strongest of their men and women continuously for several centuries. In short, the negative impact of external slave trade on the economic, social and political development processes in Africa was far-reaching.

However, in examining the impact of both the slave trade and colonialism, it is crucial to maintain that the Africa societies did not remain static or stagnant. Rather, the societies with which Europeans came into contact were resilient and resourceful in adjusting themselves and their social and political institutions to alien influences and in ensuring their survival and perpetuation. Thus, to overlook this African resilience and adaptation is to fall into the Eurocentric conception of Africa as a passive continent in the dark ages, a Eurocentric historiography nurtured conception that was so obsessed with the might and superiority of Europe that it could see Africa, and the rest of the world, only in terms of its own impact.
(Ohaegbulam, 1990: 122-123). It is also important to note that one can not say, with certainty, how far African societies could or would have moved into cash economies and industrial methods of production if their early partnership with Europe, the partnership of the sixteenth century, had continued into a later time. Yet there are some interesting pointers, such as the development of textiles production into ‘cottage industry’, trade using credit, accumulation of large reserves in cash or goods, even the embarking on the business of charting ships and crews, which would indicate the direction of African development (Davidson, 1995: 221).

### 7.2.2 The Internal Environment

In addition to the international environment, the internal process which Africa in general and the Horn of Africa in particular went through after the 16th and/or 17th century also affected the political and socio-economic development. According to Davidson (1994: 76-78), from about 1600 a new situation began to unfold with two clear principal trends:

First, there is the continued growth and evolution of a large number, perhaps a very large number, of political systems; but for a long time ... this growth and evolution take place predominantly within the framework of existing structures: within the framework, that is, of Iron Age subsistence economies modified marginally by production for exchange... For after 1600 there is a second trend, ... Iron age Africa wrestles with its problems. New patterns are forged. New kinds of leaders appear. New imperatives are faced. Yet Iron Age Africa falls more and more behind a Euro-American world that is now moving rapidly into an age of science, mechanical invention, and early industrialism. ... after about 1600 the great part of Africa moves out of its customary certainties and modes of organization into a long transitional grapple with the challenges and problems of adjustment posed by what we may call modern society.

In short, there is important internal growth and there is a great and interesting variation of basic structures, but there is no essential new departure. Yet, new departures were greatly needed now. Furthermore, as Davidson (1995: 225-226) argues, 'looking back, ..., one can see that new elements were at work. However obscurely or indirectly, more and more population were now drawn within the orbit of continental crisis, slowly gathering, slowly widening, of unexampled magnitude: a crisis whose full and terrible effects would become manifest only late in the twentieth century'. Part of this crisis of system and structure arose from 'the dynamics of Iron Age success, which at least in several large regions, can be seen to have reached a maturity beyond which further expansion or economic development was going to need radical revision of ideology and system' (Ibid.: 277).  

It is true, as Davidson points out, that the absence of needed structural change, especially in economic and technological development, in which Africa began to lag behind Europe, played an important role in shaping the post-sixteenth and/or seventeenth century development in Africa. However, this alone can not explain everything that happened during this period, especially in the Horn of Africa. For there had been another important development which shaped the socio-political development of this part of Africa. The Horn of Africa had been on the move since the beginning of the 16th century, earlier in some cases, throughout the 17th and

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22In addition, as Davidson (Davidson, 1995: 226) explains, after 1600 there began a new period that was to culminate in European colonial invasion and its aftermath. From this period on ‘... Africa is carried by successive stages into an ever greater economic and technological inferiority against the industrial nations, and finally into a political subjection which goes on until the 1950s’ (Ibid.: 227).
18th centuries. In some instances this human movement (migration) continued up until the 19th century and the coming of European powers. Because the huge population movement had played a major role in the socio-political and economic development of the pre-colonial Horn of Africa it will be useful to consider the major population movements.

### 7.2.2 1 Pre-colonial Population Movements

African farmers, working with tropical and subtropical soils, were much more mobile than farmers in Europe or Asia who practised intensive agriculture, renewing the fertility of the same plot of land year after year. Farming in Africa had to be extensive, moving from field to field each year. This resulted in a population not tied to definite plots of land and more mobile than elsewhere (Vansina, 1992: 46). It seems that, looking back to history between 1500 and 1800 nobody remained in the same place.\(^{23}\) During this period, especially one part of Africa was subjected to a major redistribution of population and the ensuing creation of new societies and cultures. This is the area, known as the Horn of Africa, South of the Abyss or Upper Blue Nile, including most of what is now Somalia, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Northern Kenya, as well as east of the white Nile, north of Nyanza and South of the Sobat (Ibid.: 67). Several population movements were clearly involved, mainly of the Oromo and the Somali.\(^{24}\) The most spectacular was the migration of the Oromo from Southern Ethiopia to Western, Eastern and Northern Ethiopia about 1535 (Ibid). Other Oromo groups migrated or expanded to the south as far as the River Tana and even to the hinterlands of the coastal cities. From 1500 onwards, Somali movements of expansion also occurred on a large scale (Ibid.).\(^{25}\) They were not well known due to lack of study and, in part, because population movements have been obscured by the struggle between the highland Ethiopia and the Muslim emirate led by Ahmad Gragn (Ibid.).\(^{26}\) Ahmad Gragn was a Muslim leader who declared a Jihad as a means of expansion to control the better fertile land and expand Islam. As a result, he managed to control most of what is now Ethiopia as far as the Eritrean Red Sea coasts.\(^{27}\) Thus, by 1700 a large part of Ethiopia was under Oromo control, and the Somali and Oromo were locked in competition for good lands as well as access to water resources. (Ibid.: 67).\(^{28}\)

The huge population movements had, among other things, two important effects on the existing socio-economic and political systems. First, they unsettled the existing socio-economic and political systems and contributed to the reconstitution of new political communities and new political systems and structures. In the case of Ethiopia, for instance, as the result of the Oromo migration the Oromo people started to play a significant role as part of the ruling groups which had been dominated by the Amharic and Tigregna speaking people. The expansion of the Adals

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\(^{23}\) The causes perhaps have to do with the organization of space, either because the ratio of people to resources alters - through, for instance, overpopulation or climatic catastrophe - or because people reorganize space and its resources on a relatively large scale (Ibid.: 47).

\(^{24}\) It has been suggested (Vansina, 1992: 68) that not only drought and the collapse of a strong Ethiopian Empire contributed the population movement. The fundamental stresses between relatively high densities of population, in the Oromo heartland and the relatively low densities in northern Uganda and northern Kenya and Tanzania may have also contributed to the mobility.

\(^{25}\) On the origin and nature of Somali migration, see also Lewis, 1980: 20-24.

\(^{26}\) See also, Faje, 1993: 113.

\(^{27}\) On the struggle between the Ethiopian Christian highland and the Muslim Adal and the role of the Somali population, see Lewis, 1980: 25-27.

\(^{28}\) The similar population movement within the present Sudan will briefly be discussed later under the subtopic Sudan.
with the help of the Somalis, Ahmad Gragn as their leader, spread Islam throughout the present Ethiopia and Eritrea which had mainly been dominated by Orthodox Christianity. The impact of these population movements was not only felt in central and northern Ethiopia. It also gave rise to the emergence of independent (autonomous) mini-states in the southern and eastern part of the country. These mini-states were later incorporated into the centralized Ethiopian state. Second, the same population movements also resulted in the intermingling of different societies and cultures and created bigger communities with a mixture of different cultures and socio-economic systems. In this process conflicts (sometimes violent) and war were involved. Again in the case of Ethiopia, such conflicts continued up until the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. The same had been true in Sudan up until the establishment of the Turco-Egyptian rule. It was such conflicts and wars which were partially responsible for the destruction of existing political communities and the emergence of new political communities - states. It should be pointed out that the reconstitution of new political communities and political structures usual takes much longer than the destruction of the existing ones.

Violence and conflict as aspects of the constitution and reconstitution of political structures (states or otherwise) are connected with other factors: environmental circumscription, political evolution and social circumscription, which are also aspects of the (re)constitution of political structures (centralized state or otherwise) (Carneiro, 1970: 734-735). Moreover, the state also evolved when social groups voluntarily came together and submitted to a governing authority in order to gain the military and economic benefits of centralization (Connah, 1987: 9). It is, therefore, crucial to note that the emergence of the state involved both conflict and integrative elements, and that trade, warfare, irrigation, and perhaps one or more additional factors may have each served as different routes to statehood... Specifically, the initial centralization of a social system involves a process of integration through trade, warfare, irrigation, or some other means’ (Ibid.: 10).

7.2.2.2 Environmental Circumscription, Political Evolution and Social Circumscription

In addition to the population movements and the related violence and conflict, as indicated above, environmental circumscription, political evolution, social circumscription and war attached to all of these, also affected the (re)constitution of the pre-colonial political structures in the Horn of Africa. Environmental circumscription refers to areas of circumscribed agricultural land 'each of them set off by mountains, seas or deserts, and these environmental features sharply delimit the area that simple farming peoples could occupy and cultivate' (Carneiro, 1970: 734-735). What is the significance of circumscribed agricultural land for the (re)constitution of political structures or of the state? Under conditions of unlimited agricultural land and low population density, the effect of warfare was to disperse villages over a wide area, and to keep them autonomous. In marked contrast to the situation in limited land and low population density, in circumscribed agricultural areas the mountains, the desert and the sea - to say nothing of neighbouring villages - blocked escape in every direction. A village defeated in war had to be subordinate to the victor. But subordination sometimes involved a further loss of autonomy on the part of the defeated village - namely, incorporation into the political unit dominated by the victor. Through the recurrence of warfare of this type integrated territorial

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1These factors may explain why some societies created centralized political structures in Ethiopia and Sudan but not among the Somali society.
units, transcending the village level in size and in degree of organization, were created and the political evolution attained the level of the chiefdom (Ibid.). As land shortage continued and became even more acute, so did warfare. At this stage, however, the competing units were no longer small villages but, often, large chiefdoms. From this point on, through the conquest of chiefdom by chiefdom, the size of the political units increased at progressively faster rate (Ibid). As political units increased in size, they decreased in number, with the result that an entire area was eventually unified under the banner of the strongest chiefdom and became sufficiently centralized and complex (Ibid.: 736). This step and the whole process can occur more than once. The Axumite civilization which flourished since the first century AD if not before (Connah, 1987: 67) and its disintegration (or decline) and the reemergence of Ethiopia as a unified state since the nineteenth century can be a good example.

Political evolution refers to the process of the elaboration of the internal political structures. As Carneiro (1970: 736) asserts, 'while the aggregation of villages into chiefdoms, and of chiefdoms into kingdoms, was occurring by external acquisition, the structure of these increasingly larger political units was being elaborated by internal evolution'. The expansion of successful political units brought within their borders conquered peoples and territories, which had to be administered. And it was the individuals who had distinguished themselves in war who were generally appointed to political office and assigned the task of carrying out this administration. In addition to maintaining law and order, and collecting taxes, the functions of this class of administrators included mobilization of labour for building irrigation works, roads, fortresses, palaces, and temples. Thus, their function helped to weld an assorted collection of petty states into single integrated and centralized political units. Individuals, who owed their improved position to their exploits in war, became, along with the ruler and their kinsmen, the nucleus of an upper class. A lower class in turn emerged from the prisoners taken in war and were employed as servants and slaves by their captors. In this manner did war contribute to the rise of social classes. This in turn contributed to the creation and consolidation of larger political units (Ibid.). This seems the case in the southward expansion of the present Ethiopian state during the second half of the 19th century which resulted in bringing together the various mini-states under one centralized political centre.

Social circumscriptio is another factor to be considered in accounting for the (re)constitution of political structures or the rise of the state. By the effect of social circumscriptio it means: 'a high density of population in an area can produce effects on peoples living near the centre of the area that are similar to the effects produced by environmental circumscriptio' (Ibid.: 737). At the centre of an area villages are closer together than they are in the periphery. As a result, they tend to impinge on one another more, with the result that warfare is more frequent and intense in the centre than in the peripheral areas. Thus, what social circumscriptio generally entails is that as the size of the territory of a village is reduced and the population pressure becomes severe, warfare over land would be more frequent. But because adjacent land was already the property of other villages, a defeated village would have nowhere to flee. From this point on, the consequence of warfare for the village, and for the political evolution in general would be similar to that of the effect of environmental circumscriptio.

The war between the various smaller communities, the chiefdoms and kingdoms together with these factors gave rise to the emergence of a number of early states (kingdoms) in Sudan and
Ethiopia. However, perhaps because of the absence (weakness) of these factors the Somali society had not developed political units similar to that of Sudan and Ethiopia up until the creation of the colonial state. It may also be true that there was no need to develop such centralized political structures in Somali society, which was mainly nomad. This does not mean that there were no political units in Somali society. There were, but they were smaller and weaker when compared with those of Sudan and Ethiopia. In general, the different situations and necessities created different political structures within the region. This will take us to the discussion on the nature of the political structures created before colonial intrusion.

7.3 The Nature of Political Entities in the Pre-Colonial Horn of Africa

The different societies in the Horn of Africa had been creating and recreating political systems ranging from centralized monarchy to very loose clan based political structures in their long pre-colonial history. The emergence of diversified political structures is the result of the different effects of the factors discussed above. In other words, since the influence of these factors on the different societies was not the same, the result varied from society to society. In addition, as indicated above, the diversity of the political structures was the reflection of the different political thoughts, habits, customs and institutions of the various societies. With this in mind the remaining part of this chapter will focus on the nature of the political entities which existed before the colonial intrusion in the Horn of Africa.

7.3.1 Sudan

The period between 1500-1800, as was true with regard to the rest of the Horn of Africa, had been characterized by population movement from within the Sudan and from outside. In the north the slow penetration of Muslim Arabs in large numbers over a long period of time led to the gradual assimilation of the Christian Nubians and others to the larger Pan-Islamic world (Hasan and Ogot, 1992: 170). The process of cultural and ethnic assimilation, on the one hand, led to the Arabization and Islamization of large numbers of Sudanese people, and on the other hand, to the indigenization of the Arab immigrants (Ibid.). However, in the South, the impact of Islam and Arabic culture was negligible. This was because of the fact that the expansionist Nilotes from the South had succeeded in arresting the southward march of the Arabs as well as the spread of Islam. The Nilotes, especially the Shillak and the Jieng (Dinka), posed a serious threat to the northern Muslim states until the end of the 18th century (Ibid.). As a result, the process of southern expansion of Arabization and Islamization was halted during this period, thus creating a cultural frontier between what came to be known as the northern and southern Sudan (Ibid.: 170-171). The elaborate racial terms and prejudices which evolved on both sides of the frontier tended to portray each region as a separate ethnic and religious entity with little or no contact between the two. However, the division was not as clear-cut at it seems from the outside. It is also true that various distinct political entities were formed in both north and

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30 The division of Sudan, though it is more complex than it seems from the outside, into north and south can more or less be traced back to this period.

31 As Hasan and Ogot (1992: 171) argue, the historical reality was more complex than this for a number of reasons. First, the frontier between these two regions was frequently shifting. Secondly, the frontier was a wide zone extending a few hundred kilometers within which cultural, ethnic and social transformation was taking place all the time with people becoming Arabs, Fur, Fundj, Shilluk, Naath (Nuer) or Jieng according to political and economic circumstances. Thirdly,
south. The historical difference did not disappear after 1800. Rather it was kept as it was and even exacerbated during colonialism and after, as we will see in the next chapter. These are some of the important points to be considered in understanding the political development in pre-colonial Sudan.

With this understanding it is important to consider the various political entities (states) which existed in both northern and southern Sudan between 1500 and the establishment of the Turco-Egyptian Empire. The Fundj was one of the strong sultanates that existed in Sudan. The Fundj who were cattle nomads migrated down the Blue Nile and in 1504 defeated the Abdallabi state and reduced their king to the position of vassal. However, the Abdallabi continued to rule the northern part of the Fundj sultanate, as junior partner, until the Turco-Egyptian conquest of 1820 (Ibid.: 172-173). David Reuben, a Jewish traveller, reported that the ruler of the Fundj sultanate 'ruled over people both black and white' (Rotberg, 1965:129). In addition, Makk Dakin Wlad Nail, who reigned from about 1561 to 1576, promulgated the first Fundj code of laws and gave to the sultanate an administrative structure that may have corresponded with the shift of its ruling class from nomadic to more settled pursuits. Dakin appointed chiefs, many of whom appear to have possessed great power, to rule the various districts of the sultanate'(Ibid.: 130). The Fundj sultanate, according to Holt and Daly (1979: 32), 'was not a centralized or highly administered state, but rather a species of high-kingship, in which much power was held by subordinate rulers'. Ayittey (1991: 252) also characterized the Fundj as a large territorial state which was a confederation of autonomous areas. However, in the Fundj heartland, the king appointed the provincial governors, but there was a tendency for the office to become hereditary (Holt and Daly, 1979: 32). The Fundj ruled their domains from Sennar, which became their seat of government. According to Poncet, who visited Sennar in 1699, 'the Makk regularly held councils in the mornings and evenings in order to see that justice was done to his subjects and that no crime went unpunished' (Cited in Rotberg, 1965: 131).

In the middle of the sixteenth century the Fundj were defeated and driven into Ethiopia but regained their former position between 1568/69 and 1585/86 (Hasan and Ogot, 1992: 174). There was also a clash between the Abdallabi and the Fundj in 1611/12. Later on they managed to reach a settlement which gave the sultanate a fairly long period of stability (Ibid.). The extension of the Fundj authority as far as lower Nubia, which was originally dependent on the Abdallabi, seems to have been viewed with suspicion by the Ottoman, who conquered Egypt in 1517. Although frontier clashes were reported, the Ottomans did not press the issue until 1520-66 (Ibid. 74). It was later on that the Ottomans captured the strategic frontier fortresses of Ibrim and Dirr and built a fortress at Say which constituted the southern limits of Ottoman Egypt (Ibid.: 175). The Fundj sultanate was not only confronted with internal rivalries and with the Ottoman Egypt, it was also confronted with Ethiopia. However, there were also positive cooperation and economic interdependence between the two states and societies. In addition,

1. 'Within the northern Muslim sultanates the process of Arabization - which embraced Arabs and a host of indigenous Sudanese people - was more of a cultural connotation than an ethnic one. Finally, 'largely as a result of migration, political and economic factors, the population has crystallized during the period 1500-1800 into the present population of the Sudan (Ibid., 1992: 171-172).

2. 'The Fundj had fought two wars with Ethiopia, both largely triggered by border disputes but neither of which had led to any radical changes.

3. 'To the Ethiopians Sennar had long been their principal land outlet with the outside world. Through Sennar the Ethiopians obtained new bishops from Egypt and exchanged commercial commodities with the merchants. It was also along this route that European Christian missionaries found their way to Ethiopia (Hasan and Ogot: 178).
the Fundj sultanate had a number of long-distance trade routes that connected it with Egypt and the Red Sea. These routes played an important role in strengthening economic and cultural links with the outside world. Sennar was one of the most important trade centres for the exchange of slaves, gold, ostrich feathers and other African products, for fine cotton textiles, jewelry, weapons and other luxury items. Besides the revenue they levied at the custom posts, the sultans needed luxury goods to maintain their prestige and to reward their loyal supporters (Ibid.: 181). However, the decay of Sennar as a leading commercial centre was followed by political decline. In addition, the internal struggle within the sultanate weakened the power of the sultanate. As a result, when the Egyptian forces approached Sennar in 1821, the Sultanate was too feeble to make significant resistance (Ibid., 1992: 185).

The other important Islamic kingdom, which flourished in the savannah belt of Bilad al-Sudan, was the Fur sultanate. It occupied the western fringe of the east Bilad al-Sudan. To the east, the plains of Kordofan, which separated the Fur sultanate from the Fundj kingdom, were a cause for dispute between the two states, primarily for economic reasons. The proper islamation of the region began with the establishment of the Fur sultanate in the early seventeenth century. R. S. O’Faheey (Cited in Hasan and Ogot, 1992: 18) suggests that the rise of the Fur sultanate, like that of other Islamic Kingdoms of the Sudanic belt, was a product of long-distance trade. In addition, throughout the life of the Fur sultanate the issue of succession had been one important source of conflict. Because of this and other problems, it was only in 1741-42 that the sultanate established a fixed capital at al-Fashir. In the middle of the nineteenth century the Fur sultanate began to decline. In addition to the different sultanates discussed above there were also various autonomous political entities which emerged at some point in time and declined later in the northern part of the present Sudan. In other words, there was no one political centre that brought this region under its control.

In Southern Sudan, a number of kingdoms had also emerged among which the Shilluk kingdom was the dominant one. The Shilluk constitute the largest component of the Northern Luo group, the others being the Luo of Bahr al-Ghazal and the Anywa who straddle the Sudan-Ethiopia border. The first settlement was near Malakal, under their leader Nyikang (1490-1517) after defeating and driving out the Fundj. This group of Luo-speakers incorporated Fundj and Nuba elements among others. It was these diverse elements, Hasan and Ogot (1992: 193) argue, reflecting different cultures and economic traditions, that combined in the crucible of history to form what became known as the Shilluk nation from the second half of the seventeenth century. The Shilluk established a mixed economy of cattle-herding and cereal agriculture and lived in a string of villages on the west bank stretching from Muomo to Tonga, a distance of one hundred miles. According to G. Schweinfurth (cited in Hasan and Ogot, 1992: 192) this area was the most densely populated region of that part Africa then known to the outside world, including the Nile valley in Egypt. It may be because of the population pressure that the Shilluk began to expand in two frontier areas. They expanded northwards to control the White Nile from Muomo to Alays and to the region between the Nile and the Nuba hills. They looked to the northern and western frontiers as areas of economic opportunities, which provided an alternative source of supply (Ibid.: 195).

1On the other smaller states, for instance, the Keira sultanate, see Holt and Daly, 1979: 36-43.
From about 1630 onwards, another group, the Jii-speaking people - Jieng - arrived in the area and invaded the southern region of the Fundj. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Jieng expanded into the Southern Djazira, and gradually altered the balance of power in the region. Their presence was a threat to both the Shilluk and the Fundj, and the two combined forces against the Jieng, whom they regarded as a common enemy. They succeeded in preventing the Jieng from expanding northward and westward, and instead forced them eastward towards the Ethiopia border. This alliance between the Fundj and the Shilluk against the Jieng marked the beginning of a socio-economic interdependence that the Shilluk established with different groups at different times, including Arabs, European traders and the Mahdists - usually to exploit the Jieng (Ibid.: 196).

During the second half of seventeenth century, another important political development occurred which was to affect significantly the socio-economic processes in Shilluk land. A sense of national unity was forged among the diverse people who had settled in the area, and a more centralized form of administration was established under Reth. One of the main consequences of this development was the gradual introduction of the royal monopoly of economic resources as well as local and long-distance trade (Ibid.: 196). The military and economic successes were largely responsible for the centralization of the powers of the Reth. The process of consolidation was completed between 1690-1710, and Fashoda was made the permanent residence of the Reth (Ibid.: 197).

Furthermore, between 1780-1820 two important historical developments occurred (Hasan and Ogot, 1992: 197-198). The first was the mass migration of the Jieng across the river Sabat. This meant that the White Nile area, which for one and a half centuries had been completely dominated by the Shilluk, was henceforth to be shared with other Jii-speakers. Second, the armies of Muhammed Ali Pasha, viceroy of Egypt, invaded Sudan. The invasion not only ended the Fundj administration, but also forced the Shilluk southward and installed Turco-Egyptian rule. Despite sustained Shilluk resistance from 1821 up to 1826, a Turco-Egyptian government had been established in 1826 at Mandjar and the naval supremacy of the Shilluk on the White Nile was successfully challenged (Ibid.). Strictly speaking, however, Sudan was not conquered or ruled by Egyptians, but by a Turkish-speaking body whose members had dominated Egypt since medieval times (Ibid.). It is also important to point out that there was strong resistance by the black Sudanese against the foreign rule. Perhaps the most important were the 1844 Medani resistance, and the military revolt in Kassala in 1865 and a popular revolt in 1877 (Ibrahim, 1989: 360-363).

Another crucial point worth noting is that up to the beginning of Turkish rule in the Sudan in 1821, the political and economic powers of the Muslim northern Sudan states and the Southern Sudan peoples were comparable, if not evenly balanced. But the nineteenth century, especially the second half, was to be catastrophic for the people of Southern Sudan. It was a period of great material loss and humiliation, a period of chaos (Ibid.: 363)

After the establishment of the Turco-Egyptian rule Sudan was divided into provinces and districts under Egyptian and Turkish officers who were placed under the governor-general based

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35 For a more detailed account of the establishment of the Turco-Egyptian rule over Sudan, see Holt and Daly, 1979: 47-82.
at the newly founded town of Khartoum. The primary function of the alien regime was to collect revenue in the form of tribute and slaves to swell the ranks of the Egyptian army. Frequent raids were made for the purpose of capturing slaves, and from 1840 the traffic in human lives reached enormous proportions (Ibid.: 363-364). By 1860 it was estimated that an average of 2000 slaves was being sold annually at Kaka, one of the slave markets (Ibid.).

The southerners refused to cooperate with the traders and actively resisted their presence in their land. As the result of the Turco-Egyptian invasions and southern resistance many southerners were enslaved or killed in battles, and several groups nearly vanished as cohesive political or social units with few exceptions (Ibid.). The coming of the Turco-Egyptian forces into Sudan resulted in the reconstitution of Sudan in its present frontier. It was also during this period that the Turkish regime introduced its methods of political and economic organization, and techniques of production, transportation, and communications, derived from those employed in European states - all of which substantially modified the structure of the traditional society (Ibid.: 372).

The opening of the south offered a new opportunity to a particular sector of Northern society, subsequently known as al-Jallaba. After Upper Nile and the surrounding areas became accessible to traders from the North many began to rush there subsequently. These people went originally as servants and armed retainers of alien merchants, but gradually acquired increasing responsibility and power of their own. Though accelerating the process of Arabization and Islamization in the south, the Jallaba's resort to violence and their contemptuous attitude towards the southerners had, according to Ibrahim (1989: 373), nurtured the distrust and fear that still dominate the relation between the northern and southern parts of the country. The extensive drive of the Turkish imperialists to exploit Sudanese resources, as well as the socio-economic and technological innovations that they introduced, had profoundly shaken the traditional Sudanese society and provoked many uprisings and revolts. As Ibrahim (Ibid.: 375) asserts that the popular resistance did not commanded enough popular support to overthrow the government. It was only in 1885 that the Sudanese rose en masse in the Mahdist revolution that ended the Turkiyya, produced independent Sudan, and at the same time confronted advancing British imperial rule. At least that was the situation in the northern Sudan. However, in the south 'slave raiding, pillage and rapine continued unabated. The Mahdist government plundered the south for conscripts into its army. Bitter memories were engendered which tended to discredit both the Arabs and Islam in the eyes of the Africans in the post Mahdist period. What had been a socio-economic structure of domination in the Nile Valley was gradually transformed into a racial structure of domination. This in turn, led to a racial ideology of resistance among the Africans in Southern Sudan' (Ibid). The Mahdist movement was not only directed against the Turco-Egyptian rule over Sudan. It was pressed forward with the jihad on two fronts: against Egypt and Ethiopia.

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36 Among the many acts of resistance against and violent attacks on non-southerners, the 1854 attack by Bari people, the 1863 attack by Shilluk people attack on Baghra, the 1868 resistance of the Shilluk people against the invasion of the government forces, and the 1874 Shilluk rebellion all of which can be cited as evidence of the Southern resistance against alien forces (Ibrahim, 1989: 365-368).

37 For a more detailed account of the anti-Turco-Egyptian Mahdist movement and the establishment of the Mahdist state, see Holt and Daly, 1979: 85-98.

38 According to Ibrahim (1985: 77) the Mahdist force invaded Egypt, but they were defeated in 1889. Their attempt to advance on the east front was also checked and the Ansar lost Tokar and Kassala respectively in 1891 and 1894. The ideological commitment of the Mahdists had frustrated the attempt of the Ethiopia emperor to conclude an African alliance between Sudan and Ethiopia against European imperialism. For, as a pre-requisite to this alliance, the
Although the Mahdist movement liberated Sudan from Turco-Egyptian rule and created a strong and more centralized Mahdist state, Sudan was confronted with the invasion of another European power again with the help of Egypt. As the result of the decision of the British government to invade Sudan in March 1896, the Anglo-Egyptian force was formed (Ibrahim, 1985: 77). After facing very strong resistance the British finally managed to defeat the Mahdist force in November 1899 and establish the Anglo-Egyptian condominium over Sudan. This marked the collapse of the Mahdist state, although the Mahdiyya as a religion and political sentiment never died (Ibid. 78).

From what has been very briefly discussed above, a number of points should be stressed. First, in pre-colonial Sudan (to be more precise before the establishment of the Turco-Egyptian rule) there had been population movements from various directions which unsettled the existing socio-economic and political structures and then created new ones. In some cases complex political structures were created. Second, there had been conflicts (sometimes wars) which resulted in the destruction of some political entities and the emergence of others. Third, even though there had been constant interaction and intermingling between the different communities, there remained the division between the northern and southern part of present-day Sudan. Fourth, the different political communities were multi-ethnic and had decentralized political structures. Fifth, there had been strong economic relations between the different political communities within Sudan and with those of Egypt and Ethiopia. Sixth, the influence of pre-colonial foreign powers played a significant role in shaping the history of Sudan. Seventh, religion, especially Islam, and long-distance trade also played a very significant role in the creation and recreation of the different political entities and structures. Last but not least, as the result of all these factors there had been no one political centre which brought the different political communities (political entities) together up until the establishment the Turco-Egyptian rule (domination). However, it is possible to suggest that there would have been some sort of gradual centralization if it had not been interrupted by the Turco-Egyptian domination.

7.3.2 Ethiopia

The political history of Ethiopia is an interesting example of the continuous rise and fall of centralized states. It is also an interesting example of a country where various types of political structures ranging from tiny city-state (e.g. Harar city-state) to a centralized absolute monarchical state; and from single to multi-ethnic states existed. It is also a history where the political centre and the boundaries were changing. Furthermore, it is a history where foreign powers have played a significant role, especially since the second half of the 19th century, in the recreation of a centralized state. Therefore, in order to understand this complex political development we need to briefly look into pre-nineteenth century development. Then we need to look into the nineteenth century and the impact of the European powers in the political development. Finally, we need to look into the process of creating a centralized state, which gave rise to the unitary state in Ethiopia.

Mahdist leaders insisted that the emperor should accept and believe in Mahdism and Islam. The outcome was a long military confrontation that weakened both states and made them an easier prey for European colonialism.
To start with northern and central Ethiopia, after the decline of the Axumite kingdom the power of the central government was raised and declined from time to time. However, Ethiopia remained as a state with shifting political centres. For instance, in the sixteenth and seventeenth century the political and military power and the cultural development of the Christian Ethiopian Empire disintegrated, large sections of the Christian population were decimated and provinces separated from the empire for long periods (Haberland, 1992: 703). Then a period of consolidation of the empire and restoration of the Christian Ethiopian faith followed, though less exuberantly than in former times. From 1700, once again, there began a period of fragmentation of the empire which has been called the ‘Era of the princes’39 (Ibid.). The steadily increasing anarchy during this period only came to an end in 1855, when Emperor Tewodros II attempted to reunite the empire.

In the other parts of North-east Africa40, Islamic culture reached its peak around 1500, especially in the east and centre of the sub-continent, and warlike Islam was soon to achieve its greatest triumphs. ‘Fired by the concept of djihad’, according to Haberland (Ibid. 703-704), ‘Ahmed Ibn Ibrahim al-Ghazi, a brilliant military leader and champion of the faith... under the nickname Gragn (the lefthander), won victory after victory’. Gragn Ahmad and his followers overran the land of the Amhara and Tigray, destroying, subjugating and forcing them to embrace Islam, even if only temporarily. After the death of Gragn his supporters were defeated and the Christian Empire started to counter-attack. Finally the migrations of the great Oromo people, with a strong force at their disposal, destroyed the once flourishing communities and cultures of the Islamic peoples in central, south-east and south-west Ethiopia, leaving hardly a vestige (Ibid.: 704). The Oromo expansion also influenced the socio-political development of central, northeastern and northern Ethiopia to the extent of controlling the central state in Gondar, the first permanent capital city of Ethiopia. As a result, in addition to the Christian Ethiopians, two important peoples came on the scene, the Oromo and the Somali, who were to play a decisive role in the history of northeastern Africa. It is also important to note that the Ethiopian state had no one permanent centre for a long time. It was only in 1636/1638 that Gondar became the permanent residence of the imperial court and capital of Ethiopia (Haberland, 1992: 709).

In general, between 1529 (the start of the Djihad) and 1632 (the beginning of the restoration) the Ethiopian empire was struggling for survival. It was a dramatic period not only in political and military events, but also a time of intense intellectual and cultural conflict (Ibid.: 723). Iyasu I (1682-1706) was the last of the great emperors who fully exercised their power. He undertook the last and unsuccessful attempt to reestablish contact with Southwest Ethiopia. Shortly after the Iyasus’ death, however, internal weaknesses began and the empire degenerated into complete anarchy for about 100 years between 1755 and 1855 (Ibid.: 733).

The 19th Century Ethiopia

The 19th century was, once again, one of the most difficult periods in Ethiopia's history. The once centralized Christian state, much of which had been overrun by the Oromo, had declined

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39This was a period during which the central government was extremely weak while the regional rulers were much stronger. It was an important period in Ethiopian history in which regional leaders enjoyed maximum autonomy from the central government.

40Northeastern Africa and Horn of Africa are used interchangeably.
almost to dissolution. Though emperors still held nominal sovereignty, thus giving a semblance of unity, they were mere puppets of the feudal lords. The feudal lords had become virtually independent, and were constantly skirmishing among themselves (Punkhurst, 1989: 376). The highlands, the core of the empire, were divided into three autonomous entities: Tigre, Amhara and Shoa, besides several other smaller political units.

Another important part of northeast Africa, which had been a point of contention, was the Red Sea. The Red Sea Coast, especially Massawa, was a scene of conflict between four main interests: First, the Ottoman Empire, which had seized Massawa in 1857, establishing a garrison whose descendants constituted a small but powerful occupation force. Secondly, Egypt, whose rulers on several occasions purchased or usurped sovereignty on behalf of the Ottoman Empire. Thirdly, a local aristocratic family, descended from the Ottoman troops and the local Belaw, literally ‘deputy’ who was nominally in charge only of the coast, but exercised a strong hold over Massawa. Fourthly, the governors of Tigray, who, regarding the ports as indispensable for access to the sea, claimed historic rights there, but though dominating the trade of the interior, took only intermittent action to enforce their claims (Ibid.: 383).

To the south of Massawa the arid lowlands were occupied by the Afar, a kushitic-speaking nomadic people, who at the beginning of the 19th century were ruled by the inland sultanate of Awsa. Around 1810 the sultanate was weakened after the death of its ruler. However, the sultanate growth of strength was reinforced by the rise of Shoa, whose expanding trade resulted in the emergence of the port of Jadjura (Ibid.). The Danakiil coast acquired international interest after the British occupation of Aden in 1839. In the following year an officer of the British East Indian Company, Captain Moresby, purchased an offshore island from the Sultan of Tadjura for ‘ten bags of rice’ (Ibid.: 385). The chief also signed a document engaging “at all times to respect and regard the friendly advice” of the British, and “not to enter into any other Treaty or Bond with any other European nation or person” without British approval (Ibid.). Two Frenchmen acting for a French Company soon afterwards bought the coastal village of Edd from its chief for 1800 Maria Theresa dollars (Ibid.). Inland from the Somali coast, in the highlands, stood the walled Muslim city of Harar whose inhabitants spoke Adore, a Semitic language. The town had for centuries been on independent state ruled by an amir. By the early nineteenth century the city was torn by internal strife and under strong pressure from the Oromo (Ibid.: 387-388).

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*Tigre, the heartland of the ancient Axumite kingdom, was the northernmost and most powerful. It is important to note that there had sometimes been sharing of power between the ruler of Tigre and the Yajju Oromo dynasty and at other times conflict and rivalry between the two ruling groups over power and control of larger areas (Punkhurst, 1989: 377-379).

**Amhara, the second main division of the empire, lay to the northwest. Amhara owed much of its significance, among others, to its control of the imperial capital, Gonder. It should be noted here that as it was the case with Tigre, the Oromo dynasty was also involved in the power struggle with the Amhara.

†*Shoa was situated in the centre and Southeast of present Ethiopia. Amharic-speaking and Oromo-speaking people inhabited this part of the country. It had been isolated by the expansion of the Oromo, which had enabled its rulers to gain autonomy from their overlords at Gonder. Though linked to Gonder by a trade route, Shoa in fact had more important economic ties, through the Afar and Somali lowlands with the Gulf of Aden ports of Tadjurah and Zaila and the emporium of Harar. Through these routes a succession of rulers of Shoa obtained growing quantities of firearms with which they conquered the neighboring Oromo who lacked such weapons. This expansion gave Shoa control of trade with territories further inland that were rich in gold, ivory, coffee, spices and slaves (Punkhurst, 1989: 381). It should also be noted here that as the result of the southward expansion of Shoa more Oromo people joined the ruling class, however, there had also been resistance (uprising) against the Shoa rulers.

44 Most, if not all, of these entities were multiethnic.
Further inland again lay the Gurage region governed by a local dynasty. By the early nineteenth century this area had come under the rule of seven independent clans known as the Sebat Bet, or seven houses, whose lack of unity made them an easy prey to slave-raiders, and facilitated their annexation by Sahle Selassie of Shoa (Ibid.). To the southwest of the Ethiopian region lay the kingdom of Kaffa, a traditional state that spoke its own language. This region was isolated by Oromo expansion (Ibid.). According to Zewde (1991: 16), 'the first written reference to the kingdom goes back to the sixteenth century. At the apex of the political and social hierarchy was the king, the Tato, assisted by an advisory council of nobles, the Mikrecho'. In addition, the kingdoms of Walayta and Janjiro were also the other political entities that existed in southern Ethiopia. Both were ruled by their own kings assisted by advisory councils and assemblies of regional representatives (Ibid.: 16-18). The Oromo population mainly inhabited the regions south of the Blue Nile. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, three Oromo monarchies followed by another two emerged: Enarya (also known as Limmu), Goma, and Guma, and then Jimma-Kokka (also known as Jimma Abba Jifar and Gera (Punkhurst, 1989: 389-390). Other autonomous Oromo political entities, such as Leqa Naqamte and Jote Tullu’s kingdom, had emerged in the western part of Ethiopia (Zewde, 1991: 19). In addition, there were other smaller political entities in the western and southern part of Ethiopia (See Zewde, 1991: 20-21 for some of these political entities).

It is important to note here that the political entities in both the northern and southern part of Ethiopia did not exist in mutual isolation. As Zewde (Ibid.: 21) correctly points out, ‘the unity of interest that the long-distance trade created between them tempered the political and cultural heterogeneity depicted above. The network of trade routes that united north and south was one of the main bases of the process of unification that took place in the second half of the nineteenth century’. In the nineteenth century the Ethiopia long-distance trade had two major routes. The more important was the link between southwest Ethiopia and north. Beginning from Bonga in Kefa, this route linked such important commercial centres as Jiren in Jimma, Seqa in Limmu-Ennarya, Assandabo in Horro Gudru, Basso in Gojjam and Darita in Begemder with the imperial capital, Gondar. From there, it bifurcated. One branch went to Maramma on the Ethio-Sudanese frontier, and another, via Adwa, to Massawa on the Red Sea coast. The second major route ran from west to east. While initially secondary in importance it became the most important artery of commerce by the end of the nineteenth century. From Jiren and Seqa in the southwest, this route passed through such commercial landmarks as Soddo and Rogger to Alyu Amba, the commercial capital of Shawa, near Ankobar, then Shawa’s political capital. Thence, the route continued to Harar, political and economic centre of the east, and on to the coastal Somali towns of Zeila and Berbera (Ibid.: 22).

In addition to the two major trade routes there were at least three other types of interaction. The first was localized trade within the highlands. The second was trade relations between the peripheral lowlands and the adjoining highlands, such as the Anuak and the Oromo and between the Afar and the Wallo. The third was, one can say, trans-frontier trade, such as trade from Wallaga to Sudan and from southern Ethiopia to the coast of Somalia" (Ibid.; 22-24). It is crucial to note here that one of the impacts of the creation of rigid colonial boundaries was the disruption of the long-distance trade, which existed between the different political entities within the Horn of Africa.
7.3.3 Somalis and the Horn of Africa

The desert lowlands on the Gulf of Aden were inhabited by Muslim Somali, who spoke a Kushitic language and had long been under Arab influence. For some scholars the Somalis were not the original inhabitants of this area. This part of the Horn of Africa, according to Potholm (1970: 182), was originally populated by the bushmanoid peoples who were gradually absorbed by the Bantu-speaking groups who arrived from the south. These in turn were inundated by successive waves of pastoral peoples who migrated from the Arabian Peninsula. While these groups - who were later to become the Afar, Galla (Oromo), and Somali - moved inland, Yemenite Arabs set up city states such as Zeila, Berbera, Brava, and Merca along the coasts of the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. These coastal towns were conquered by the Portuguese in the 16th century and recaptured by various Arab groups later in the 17th century. These conquerers were replaced in turn by the Turks, the Egyptians and the sultan of Zanzibar (Ibid.: 182-183). Zeila, a port handling the trade of Shoa, the Ogaden and Harar, had since 1630 been a dependency of the Arab port of Mokha whose rulers had formed it out of a succession of Arab amirs whose authority, however, scarcely extended beyond the town. The rest of the coastal strip belonged to the nomadic Somali who also claimed ownership of Berbera (Punkhurst, 1989: 385).

Muhammed Ali, the Turco-Egyptian ruler, seized Berbera in 1821 attracted by the importance of the northern Somali coast, but abandoned it on account of local opposition. A decade or so later the Egyptians resumed their interest in the area but withdrew in 1841. The rest of the Somali land South of Zeila and Berbera was under the Majerteyn Sultanate, the protectorate of Oman, the Sultan of Zanzibar. The port of Mogadishu was practically autonomous. The hinterland of Mogadishu was controlled by the Geledi clan, whose sultans contracted alliances with many other clans in the region between the Shebelle and Juba rivers (Ibid.: 386-387). In all these areas there had been militant religious, political and economic movements, one against the other clans and Sultanates, in addition to foreign involvement and domestic resistance. Moreover, beginning in the early part of the 19th century, the last great wave of Somali migration carried nomads from the Ogaden plains towards the Juba river and beyond. Some of these nomads took part in the Berbera djihad, in late 1830s, and eventually pushed across the Juba, where they came into conflict with the Oromo (Ibid.).

Somali pastoral groups, with the absence of institutionalized hierarchical authority, according to Lewis (1980: 10), are not held together by attachment to chiefs. This principle of government, which is so important in so many other parts of Africa, is here replaced by binding ties of patrilineal kinship. The political allegiance of the Somali society is determined by descent in the male line and it is their lineage genealogies which direct the lines of political alliance and division (Ibid.). In general, the Somali people had, traditionally, a strong sense of cultural and linguistic unity, however, they did not form a single political unit. ‘They were a nation, not a state, although they possessed all the prerequisites for effective statehood. The six major divisions of the nation (the Dir, Isaq, Darod, etc.) did not regularly act as stable and autonomous political units’ (Lewis, 1993; 25). Perhaps they were too large and widely dispersed to do this, and lacked the necessary organization. They were in fact themselves divided into a host of subsidiary clans and clan divisions whose members were frequently widely scattered in their nomadic movements’ (Ibid.: 25). The lack of centralized political structure can be partially
explained by, first, the constant expansion, movement and nomadic lifestyle of the Somali population. Second, the factors that gave rise to the emergence of the state in Sudan and Ethiopia, namely environmental circumscription, political evolution and social circumscription were weaker in this part of the Horn of Africa. Thus, when the European colonialists came to the Somali inhabited part of the Horn, the Somali people, in spite of their cultural identity, did not constitute a single political unity. The foreign powers thus encountered no single nation, but congeries of disunited and often mutually hostile clans (Ibrahim, 1985: 83).

A number of points should be stressed with regard to the historical development of Somali society. First, the role of external forces, especially Arabs who came from different directions, played a significant role even before the coming of European powers. Second, Islam had been a strong uniting factor of the Somali society which otherwise had been divided among the different clans and sub-clans. Third, the strong long-distance trade between the Ethiopian highlands and the Somali coast and the absence of a central political system which brought the whole Somali society under its control made easier the incorporation of part of the Somali population into Ethiopia (see the next section of this chapter). In other words, the source of the Ethio-Somali conflict over Ogaden can be traced back to this period.

In general, as Punkhurst (1989: 390) put it, before the coming of European powers and the creation of centralized Ethiopia, the area presently known as Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia:

...constituted a galaxy of states and polities, each moving in its own orbit, but significantly affecting, and affected by, the other entities in the constellation. Each ruler kept a watchful eye on his neighbors but would often exchange gifts and courtesies with them unless actually at war. Dynastic marriages were made whenever practicable, though these only occasionally crossed barriers of religion. Commerce, on the other hand, made little distinction between faith, and trade routes linked traditionalist, Christian and Muslim localities. Ethnic and linguistic communities remained largely distinct, but there was much cross-fertilization of cultures. This was true not only of the Ethiopian highlands and the Red Sea coastlands, but also further south along the Somali Oromo frontier where later nineteenth century travelers reported the existence of bilingual trading communities.

7.4 The Emergence of Unified Ethiopia and European Intrusion in the Horn of Africa

The disunity of the first half of the 19th century gave way in the second half to two notable attempts at reunification of Ethiopia. The first attempt was made by emperor Theodros, whose reign put an end to the era of the Mesafent (princes). Theodros, after defeating almost all regional rulers of Tigray, Amhara and Shoa, crowned himself as emperor Theodros of Ethiopia in 1855. The last years of Theodros reign were very difficult ones. The Egyptians in Sudan and the Turks at Massawa were both hostile. The rulers of Tigré, Shoa and other regions were resisting his rule. There were rebellions everywhere. Finally, Theodros' attempt to reunify Ethiopia ended when he killed himself after losing the battle against the British invasion in 1868. However, he laid the foundation for the future unified Ethiopia.

When Theodros launched a reunifying mission in Ethiopia, European interest especially in the Red Sea coast, was enhanced by the opening of the Suez Canal in November 1869. In the same year the Italian Lazarist missionary, Giuseppe Supeto, purchased the post of Assab on behalf of
the Italian Ministry of Mines from two Afar Sultans for 6000 Maria Theresa dollars. Before that, in 1856, the French consul in Aden purchased the port of Obok (in the present Djibouti). Later a new treaty was also signed in 1862 with four Afar chiefs (Pankhurst, 1989: 402-403). In 1870, a new treaty was signed between the Italian Rubattino Shipping Company and the two Afar chiefs who sold the port in the previous year joined by a third chief, while another chief was to lease a nearby island for ten years. These developments laid the base for Italian contact with Shoa in the late 1870s and early 1880s (Ibid.: 403-404).

The death of Theodros had left northern and central Ethiopia divided with three rival personalities holding power in different areas. However, Emperor Tekle Giorgis took power in 1868 and ruled divided Ethiopia until 1871. In January 1872, after defeating Tekle Giorgis, Kassa, the ruler of Tigray was crowned Emperor Yohannes IV (Ibid.: 404). The new emperor achieved greater effective unification than Theodros by adopting a more conciliatory policy towards the provincial nobility. However, strong pressure from Egypt confronted him. Egypt at that time was building an empire in Sudan and hoped to annex Ethiopia. The stage to conflict was set in May 1868 when the Ottoman Sultan transferred Massawa once more to the ruler of Egypt. Having acquired a foothold to the east, the Egyptian determination to annex Ethiopia resulted in the battle of Gundam in 1875, and the battle of Gura in 1876, both of which Yohannes won (Ibid.: 405-407.) Though the victories at Gundam and Gura destroyed Egyptian dreams, Ethiopia also suffered greatly from the fighting. Many parts of the present Eritrea were depopulated as the result of the ravages of the Egyptians, and Asmara was almost deserted (Ibid. 407). The victories over Egypt enhanced the prestige and strength of Yohannes and left him free to proceed with the unification of the country. In the remaining years of his rule Yohannes was somehow able to unite Tigray, Amhara and Shoa and created a better-united Ethiopia. In the last years of Yohannes, however, a number of internal and external developments occurred, with long lasting effects. Internally, Minelik of Shoa expanded his control towards the south bringing together various regions under his rule. In short, the foundation of the present Ethiopia was in the making, especially in the south, southwest and southeast. Externally, the Egyptian rule collapsed in the whole of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden area bordering Ethiopia. In addition, since the Mahdists besieged several Sudanese towns with Egyptian garrisons and European inhabitants, Britain decided to request Emperor Yohannes for help in their evacuation. As a result, a treaty was signed in 1884 between Sir William Hewett of Britain and Yohannes. In this agreement Yohannes agreed to assist with the evacuation in return for getting back the lost territories in the northern part of Ethiopia (now part of Eritrea) and free port of Massawa. Yohannes played his part but the British did not. Instead, the British passed Massawa over to Italy in 1885. They did so in the hope of curbing the expansion of France, the principal rival in the scramble for Africa. The Italian power used Massawa as a springboard to control the whole of Eritrea and Ethiopia at large. While Yohannes was faced with the growing threat from Italy, the Mahdist forces started attacking the northwestern part of Ethiopia. The emperor hastened to Metamma to resist the Mahdists, but at the close of a victorious battle on 10 March 1889, he was wounded and died. The death of Yohannes created great confusion throughout Northern Ethiopia. It was during this period of difficulty that the Italians advanced rapidly on land. By the end of 1889 Italy occupied a stretch of land on the northern plateau where they established their colony of Eritrea with its capital at Asmara (Adpan, 1985: 267-268). In 1890 the Italian parliament gave the name Eritrea to the new colony.
At the end of this period, as Punkhurst (1989: 410-411) puts it, though Yohannes dominated the stage and was the ruler of the most powerful polity in the area and the only one significantly involved in international relations, his realm embraced only a fraction of the present Ethiopian territory. His empire, which was based on Tigray, nevertheless extended over virtually the entire Christian highlands. Further east, however, the Muslim sultanate of Awaša was independent. The lowlands to the north-west and north-east of Tigray were under the control of the Egyptians, for Yohannes, despite his victories over them, had been unable either to reverse all their recent encroachments or accomplish his cherished ambition of gaining access to the sea. Egyptian rule was, however, to come to an end in less than half a decade, though the area would then fall into the hands not of the rulers of Ethiopia, but of a colonial power, Italy. The lands to the west, south and east were not yet incorporated within the Ethiopian state, for though Menelik had already made himself master of parts of Gurage, his major expeditions to the south were several years away. In the southwest of the country a cluster of small independent states still existed. They included the old kingdom of Kaffa, Janjer and Walamo, as well as several small Oromo monarchies: Jimma, Leka, Limmu, Goma, Guma, Gera and some other lesser political entities. The Oromo, as well as other groups to the south, in Arussi, Borana and elsewhere, likewise had a separate political existence. To the southeast, Harar, once an independent city-state, was under the occupation of Egypt, though this was soon to come to an end and Menelik would gain control of the town.

Italy, while expanding into the hinterland of Northern Ethiopia from Massawa, established friendly relations with Menelik of Shewa to create a strong alliance against Emperor Yohannes. Menelik was also happy to be on good terms with Italy, which supplied him with the necessary weaponry so that he could one day fulfill his ambition to become Emperor of Ethiopia. For the same reason Menelik continued his expansion southward and was able to acquire the rich regions of south, southeast and southwest of the present Ethiopia between 1865-1889 (Akpan, 1985: 268). Menelik with the help of the weapons he received from Italy and the wealth he acquired from the newly controlled regions became the only strong ruler who could claim power over Ethiopia at large. Thus when Emperor Yohannes died Menelik became Emperor Menelik II of Ethiopia in 1889. Continuing his ambition to unite Ethiopia, especially in the south, southwest and southeast, Menelik was able to incorporate (reunited according to the official Ethiopian interpretation but colonized or conquered according to some ethnically organized political groups) all areas, which today are parts of Ethiopia.

The southern expansion of Menelik followed a traditional territorial expansion that had marked the Shoa kingdom since its inception.15 Two important factors contributed to this expansion: first, the urge to control the lucrative long-distance trade; second, the presence of the European colonial powers in the territories adjoining Ethiopia. Menelik, according to Zewde (Ibid.; 61), ‘in April 1891, in an effort to forestall the expansion of the colonial powers from their possessions adjoining Ethiopia, he defined in a well-publicized circular to European rulers what he considered to be the legitimate boundaries of the country’. Menelik, after completing the incorporation of the Oromos surrounding the Shoa kingdom, continued his expansion into the

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15 Menelik completed a process begun by his ancestors, such as Asfawasa (r. 1775-1808) and Wasansaggad (r. 1808-1812), and continued by his grandfather Negus Sahla-Sellas (r. 1813-1847) (Zewde, 1991: 60).

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Gurage and other regions of the present Ethiopia up until 1898. In general, the process of territorial expansion and the creation of a modern empire-state had been completed by 1898. It was during this period that Ethiopia took its present shape and established its boundaries. It was also the same period that the foundations for a centralized Ethiopian state and modern state institutions were laid down.

The southern expansion of Menelik (Ethiopia) and the incorporation of the different political entities into the larger Ethiopian state had been and still is interpreted differently by the different political groups. For many Ethiopian nationalists the expansion was the reunification of Ethiopia and the reconstitution of the centralized state. For some ethno-nationalists it was internal colonialism by the Amhara dominated ruling group. Thus, the ethno-nationalist movements, such as the Oromo and the Somalis, have been based on the second interpretation of history.

In addition to the incorporation of the different regions into one centralized state, Menelik also set up a ministerial system in order to give his government an institutional basis and some degree of continuity (Ibid.: 114). However, the different regions had significant autonomy and some of the traditional leaders were able to maintain their authority over their regions. This was completely changed after Emperor Haile Selassie took power on 2 November 1930. Emperor Haile Selassie was the one who created a unitary state and strengthened further the central government at the expense of the regional authorities. He replaced all the traditional regional rulers by appointees of the central government. As Zewde (Ibid.: 140) points out:

Having attained the height of his ambition, Hayla-Selassie stood poised to do away with the last vestiges of the Zama Mesafent. ... His successors, Yohannes and Menelik, had thus been forced to make varying degrees of compromise with regionalism. Iyyasu's rather heterodox approach to national integration had cost his throne. It was to be the major historical achievement of Hayla-Selassie that he finally succeeded in realizing the unitary state of which Tewodros dreamt. Altogether oblivious of the economic content of feudalism, the new emperor cast himself in the role of anti-feudal crusader. In actual fact, what he was doing was to reconstruct feudalism on a new and advanced basis, enhancing the political power of the monarchy and guaranteeing the economic privilege of the nobility that became the essence of absolutism in the Ethiopian context.

Thus, the first constitution of Ethiopia which was promulgated in 1931 set up the juridical framework of this emergent absolutism and political centralization (Ibid.).

To sum up, a number of points are worth emphasizing here. First, the rise and fall of the centralized state had dominated the pre-colonial history of Ethiopia, especially the northern and central parts. However, unlike Sudan and Somalia, Ethiopia as a state with fluid boundaries and shifting political centre existed for a long time. Second, before the creation of a unitary state at the end of the nineteenth century there were various autonomous (sometimes even independent)

"The first campaign was conducted in 1875-1876. However, it was in 1888 that the resistance of the Guraga was crushed. Between 1882-1886, Menelik was able to obtain the submission of more Oromo rulers (such as Kimsa of Leqa Neqame, Jote Tullu of Leqa Qellam, Abba Jifar II of Jima, Aris and the rulers of other Gibe River states further to the west. Following the evacuation of the Egyptians in 1885 Menelik defeated the emirates of Harar and controlled the city on 6 January 1887. In 1894, the powerful southern kingdom of Walaya was incorporated. In 1897, the kingdom of Kafa and the sheikdoms of Beni Shangul, Asosa and Khomosha were defeated and incorporated (For the details, See Zewde, 1991, 61-65).

"Iyyasu (1911-1916) was the ruler of Ethiopia before Haile Selassie, followed by Empress Zewditu Menelik (1916-1930)."
political entities, especially in the southern part of the country. Even the political system in the central and northern part of the country was decentralized where different regions enjoyed their autonomy. Third, the huge population movements, especially by the Oromo and Somali, and the nineteenth century, relatively small scale, southward population movements played a very significant role. These population movements not only changed the political landscape but also created a new socially and culturally complex society. Fourth, Christianity in the north and Islam in the south played a significant role in the constitution and reconstitution of the various political communities in the country. Finally, in addition to the internal factors, the colonial intrusion in the Horn of Africa contributed to the incorporation (unification) of the south and the north and the creation of a unitary state in Ethiopia.

In conclusion, it is crucial to make some general points to show the relevance of the pre-colonial history to the post-colonial failure/collapse of the state in the Horn of Africa. First, there was no one centralized political system, which brought the whole of the Sudan and Somalia under its control. The different kingdoms/sheikdoms/chiefdoms both in north and south were destroyed and replaced by one Sudan only under the Turco-Egyptian rule. However, the division between the mainly Islam north and the south remained unchanged. Thus, the major problem of Sudan can be traced back to the existence of this division. The pre-colonial Somali society continued without a central political structure up until the creation of post-colonial Somalia. The Ethiopian case was different. Ethiopia as a state, especially in the northern and central part, existed for a long time. In the south, however, there existed many autonomous political entities (states). This does not mean that there was no relation between the north and the south. Even though there had been interruption when the central government was weak, there were political relations mainly through tribute payment to the central government. More importantly, there were strong long-distance trades connecting most of the political entities in both north and south. However, it was at the end of the nineteenth century that a unitary state was created (recreated) in Ethiopia. The incorporation of the different political entities into the central government and the creation of a unitary state, through violence and war, and at the expense of the autonomy of the various political communities has been the source of the ongoing political conflict in Ethiopia. The problem of Ogaden, Oromo and the other ethno-nationalists movements can be traced back to this historical development.

Second, the various political entities (kingdoms/chiefdoms/sheikdoms) had decentralized political structures (sometimes confederal structures) in which lower levels of government or regions enjoyed wider autonomy. Even in the case of Ethiopia where centralized government existed for a long time, regional leaders enjoyed wider autonomy up until the establishment of the unitary state at the beginning of the twentieth century. It is important to compare such political structures with what was created by colonialism and after. Third, the boundaries between the various political communities were fluid as compared to the rigidity of the colonial boundaries. These fluid boundaries facilitated a relatively free movement of people and the establishment of different long-distance trade routes connecting the various communities throughout the Horn of Africa. As we can see in the next chapter these important trade routes were destroyed by the creation of rigid colonial boundaries. Finally, the different societies in this part of Africa had been capable of constructing complex and diversified political structures (systems). As it is illustrated above those societies and their political structures were dynamic or there were changes and continuities. The centralized political entities were later weakened,
disintegrated and reconstituted into many kingdoms and chiefdoms (sheikdoms in some cases). Decentralized political entities were reconstituted into more centralized ones. Contrary to the mainstream Eurocentric historical account most of those political entities were multi-ethnic/tribal. The existence of a more diversified political structure served the society better than what we are going to see in the next two chapters, the colonial and post-colonial political structures.