Intimate Family Affairs and Re-imagining Nationhood in Maaza Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*[1]

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Abstract

It is an undeniable fact that in East Africa and the Horn of Africa — Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea and Sudan — have been blacklisted by global communities such as the United Nations (UN), the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the African Union (AU) as unstable nations because of continued civil wars, coups, violence, genocide, drought and famine that have resulted in the migration of people with their property. However, this state of instability, apart from suggesting the 'failure' of the post-colonial nation, it impliedly calls for ways on how to re-construct the 'so called' failed or unstable nations in order to resettle the displaced souls. Reading Maaza Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* from a post-colonial perspective, this paper explores how the narrative uses a family-nation metaphor to enter socio-cultural, economic and political spaces in order to interrogate the disintegration of the nation and, using family as a microcosm of the nation, proposes ways of re-building the bygone fragmented nation of Ethiopia. In illuminating how Mengiste joins other African women writers who assume authority in commenting 'the state' of the post-colonial nation[2], I try to argue that Mengiste's narrative suggests the institution of the family as a central pillar towards re-construction of nations wrecked by wars.

[1] This paper is part of my PhD project that examines the representation of family by East and West African women writers in the national and transnational contexts.

[2]Narratives by Ethiopian diasporic writers such as Notes from the *Hyena's Belly* (2000) by Nega Mezlekia, *Of Beetles and Angels: A True Story of American Dream* (2001) by Mawi Asgedom*Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia* (2008) by Rebeca Hailu represent horrors, socio-economic and political unrest in Ethiopia from the respective writers' experience as victims of the revolution.