At Issue: The "Muslims in Ethiopia Complex" and Muslim Identity: The Trilogy of Discourse, Policy, and Identity

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Abstract: The "Muslims in Ethiopia complex" envelops three interrelated fundamental dimensions in the relation between Muslims and Ethiopia. The first is viewing it as a discourse among academics in "Ethiopian Studies." Utilizing the broader rubric of "Hi/storying,"the present article argues that, except for a few lately emerging counteractive discourses, it has largely remained unabated. The second view is that of it as the policy and praxis of many of the ruling elites in Ethiopian history. The article argues that although the expressions of this policy and practice have been changing over time, there are still instances of its continuation as policy to this day. Third, and related closely to the above dimensions, is the view of this complex as the actual marginalized lived experiences and the associated self-perception of Muslims. However, as the unintended outcome of this policy, the article argues for the progressively developing "Ethiopian Muslims" consciousness and identity. It concludes by tracing and examining past and present expressions of the "Ethiopian Muslims" identity.

Introduction

Understanding the relationship between Ethiopia and Islam has for decades been of little interest to social scientists. The problem even gets worse for the issue of Muslim identity in Ethiopia. A closer scrutiny of pertinent literatures shows wide gaps in research engagements that aim to bridge the affinities of Islam, Muslims, and Ethiopia. Notwithstanding evidence of the past and present showing mutual convergences, many of the past and contemporary social scientific discourses favor divergences and incompatibilities. Consequently, the focus to a larger extent tilted towards the notion of incompatibility and divergence between Islam and Ethiopia. As I will argue, this in turn has led to a dualism in Ethiopian history, culture, and society, a dualism that assumes a Christian Ethiopia and Islam as foreign. The externalization of Islam and thus Muslims, as I will demonstrate, is part and parcel of what I call the "Muslims in Ethiopia complex" (hereafter referred to as the complex). It has three fundamental and relevant dimensions: one is the view of it as a discourse among academics in the field; the second is as a policy and praxis of the Abyssinian kingdom and/or the Ethiopian state; and the third is that of the overall condition of Muslims and the resulting "Muslims in Ethiopia" self-perception.[1] It

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should be noted that these dimensions are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are closely related.

The present article, thus, argues that except for a few recent studies, the overwhelming majority of academic engagements still explicitly portrays dualism in Ethiopian history, culture and society and thus largely remains under the shadow of the complex. Second, although there are certain changes in the ways the ruling elites view and treat Islam and Muslims in Ethiopia, especially in the existing Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) government (1991 to present), there are various instances and growing evidences that suggest the perpetuation of this complex. In other words, except for some reform efforts in the 1990s, the EPRDF regime is still failing to address some of the historically evolving questions of Muslims in the country. Thirdly, despite the failure of the ruling state elites and the social sciences to respond to the changing circumstances of Muslims, Muslim self-perception and identity has been shifting from one of Muslims in Ethiopia to more of being Ethiopian Muslims. As I will briefly discuss below, the complex has partly played a role in the emergence and development of this shift in the question of Muslim identity within Ethiopia.

The purpose of this contribution is basically twofold. In the first place, it closely engages past researches to see how Islam and Muslims are studied and represented. This paves the way for critically examining some of the widely held knowledge and discourses, on the one hand, and exploring, if any, continuity of change in this regard, on the other. Second, by complementing the already produced knowledge with current evidence and developments, it aims to shade some light on the shift in identity construction of Muslims from being Muslims in Ethiopia to becoming more one of Ethiopian Muslims. Accordingly, the first part of this article questions the dualism in academic discourses. The second part briefly explores the ways in which various ruling elites approached issues of Islam and Muslims in the country. The third part closely examines the relationship between the complex as a policy, specifically focusing on the EPRDF regime and its implications for the Muslim identity in Ethiopia.

The Muslims in Ethiopia Complex: Engaging the Actors

The Muslims in Ethiopia complex is a state of imagination, portrayal, and execution of the task of disentangling Islam and Muslims from Abyssinia and/or Ethiopia and the resulting intended sociocultural, economic, and political consequences. However, it has also produced unanticipated and antithetical outcomes. It has been the creative imagination, underrepresentation, and obsession of many academics in their discourses and narratives in what has been called "Ethiopian Studies." For centuries, it has been recycled and executed in various forms and content by many of the kings and state elites in Abyssinia and/or Ethiopia in their physical and ideological combat with Islam and its adherents.

Above all, the complex has had deeper repercussions for Islam and Muslims in the country. These repercussions include at least one intended and other unintended consequences. Among the observable direct outcomes of the Abyssinian and/or Ethiopian state policies and practices directed against Muslims has been peripheralization.[2] In other words, Muslims have been made to suffer from marginalization, discrimination, oppression, and underrepresentation, especially in the country's economic and political institutions.[3] This in turn had its own other outcomes. Among other things is the development of an inferiority complex among Muslims. In the words

of Østebø, "Through a largely derogatory categorization of the Muslims by the Christian other, the former has developed a distinct self-definition seeing themselves as inferior to the latter."[4] Put simply, the complex reflects, on the one hand, the actual socio-economic and political conditions of Muslims, and on the other the associated low self-perception, strangeness, and feeling of alienation.

In spite of this, the complex had set in motion a trajectory that has more far-reaching consequences than those direct intentional interventions and their consequences. While the state elites and kings have been pursuing the policy of peripheralization of Muslims in the country, portions of the Muslim population, especially Muslim soldiers and their sultanates, religious, and intellectual leaders, by mobilizing and building local resistance, have struggled and fought back to defend their cultural, religious, and human rights and identities. This unintended repercussion of the Muslims in Ethiopia project of the subsequent ruling elites later developed into questions of identity, of Islam, and of Muslims' role and status in Abyssinia and/Ethiopia. The following sections will attempt specifically to shed some light on this and the above two dimensions of the complex: as discourse among academics; the complex and the ruling elites; and finally, the issue of Muslim identity.

The Muslims in Ethiopia Complex as a Discourse

Discourses play significant role in shaping our worldviews and understanding in multiple ways. For Foucault, discourses operate in four fundamental ways.[5] The first is when they create a world. They do so primarily by bringing together a wide array of associations and by organizing our interaction with the world around us that create meaningful understandings. The second is when they produce knowledge and the "truth." In this context, for instance, "certain discourses in certain contexts have the power to convince people to accept statements as true."[6] The third is whenever a discourse exists there is an equally important issue in human social existence, power. In other words, discourses and power are highly inseparable to an extent that any discourse assumes power. The fourth is when they uncover not only what it is being communicated, but also, and most importantly, who is communicating.

Of the above four important ways in which discourses operate, the first three are especially important in framing how the Muslims in Ethiopia complex is discursively constructed, reproduced, and sustained over a long period of time in Ethiopia. Many of the academics, from within and abroad, who have studied and written about Abyssinian and/or Ethiopian history, culture, and society have produced their own version of history, culture and society with certain identifiable features. One is the creation of a new world for the country. They have created a country and society, in essence, a different version of Abyssinia and/or Ethiopia that has lost much of its touch with its existing and observable realities on the ground. They have created, in their discourses and narratives, an over essentialized, homogenous and "thousands years old" intact culture and society that has disentangled, partly or completely, aspects of an equally important body of history, culture and society. The second and closely related with the first is the creation of knowledge and the "truth." One is the creation of dualism in Ethiopian history, culture, and society. It assumes the local, Christian Abyssinia and/or Ethiopia and the alien, foreign Islam and Muslims. This and related other discursive formations, however,

underpin omissions and commissions, false dichotomies, double standards, and generally what has recently been called "hi/storying."[7]

Lastly, the complex also reflects the intrinsic discourse-power relations. In this regard, questions worth asking include who says what, for whom, why, and under what circumstance. As I will note below, the production of knowledge especially in the areas of Abyssinian and/or Ethiopian history, culture, and society has been largely monopolized by academic elites with certain common features. Generally speaking, they focus on the northern section of the present day Ethiopia, specifically the Amhara and Tigray people, Christianity as a religion, and the simultaneous and inseparable peripheralization of other relevant cultures and peoples. In addition, these academics have been largely partisans and many of them were either followers or sympathizers of the Orthodox Church.[8] Owing to this and related biases, scholarly engagements in the Ethiopian studies, especially studies focusing on Islam, Christianity and Ethiopia have been largely entangled with "inherent biases and unfounded assumptions."[9]

In short, the Muslims in Ethiopia complex as discourse has largely remained unabated except for barely sufficient writings and publications in the twenty-first century. The following section examines the this discourse under the broader rubric of "Hi/storying" as an exemplary discourse among academics and ends with a brief remark on its continuity and/or rupture at this particular point in time.

"Hi/storying" as an Exemplary Discourse

One key aspect of the Muslims in Ethiopia complex among Ethiopian Studies academics is "Hi/storying." As a discourse, it entails the "simultaneousness and inseparability of the processes of "telling" the "hi/story" and making it."[10] These two processes, namely, "telling" and "making," broadly encompasses mechanisms, intended or unintended, of double standards, omissions and commissions, "un-Ethiopianizing" narratives, false dichotomies, unfounded claims and speculations, and other elements. Let's closely examine some of these mechanisms of "telling" and "making" of Abyssinian and/or Ethiopian history, culture, and society and see how they feed into the dualist and incompatibility model.

For one thing, much of the social science research in general and Ethiopian historiography in particular that claim to address the relation between Islam and Ethiopia generally exhibit "un-Ethiopianizing" academic discourse. This has been grounded in the idea that Islam and Ethiopia have a "compatibility problem." It primarily views Islam " as an external political force, rather than being one of the essential elements of Ethiopian culture . . . [And] *firm and persistent reluctance* to conceive of, let alone recognize, a history of Islam in Ethiopia" (emphasis added).[11] In other words, Islam and/or Muslims represented an alien or foreign entity with different culture, history and identity while Abyssinia and/or Ethiopia represented a society or culture subsuming Christianity, peculiar history of civilization, and composed of two major ethnic groups, the Amhara and Tigray. By this discursive formation, the "Ethiopian Studies" was running the risk of un-Ethiopianizing an equally important body of history, culture and society.[12] It is this academic discourse that I have called above the dualism in Ethiopian history, culture, and society. The "persistent reluctance" of the un-Ethiopianizing discourse was not, however, without a consequence. For instance, there is ample evidence that suggests a general

tendency among these scholars not to even recognize Islamic studies under the broader scheme of Ethiopian studies.[13]

Closer to the above discourse under hi/storying is the proliferation of ungrounded claims and speculations in "Ethiopian Studies." One good example in this regard would be the claim that Islam represents a hostile external religion that paved its way into the Christian other, Abyssinia and/or Ethiopia.[14] This view primarily presupposes the recurrent frictions sustained overtime between the Muslims and Christians in the country, especially in the years between the tenth and twentieth century. For Hagai Erlich, however, the hostility of Islam and thus Muslims against "Christian Ethiopia" is closely wrapped up with the very ontology of Islam. I will briefly comment on two of his accounts for the very genesis of the Islam vs. Christian Ethiopia divide.

The first dubious account revolves around a Hadith where "A lean-legged from among the Ethiopians [*dhu al-suwayqatayn*] will [eventually] destroy the Ka`aba."[15] From this hadith, Erlich concludes that the "image of the Ethiopians as the ultimate enemies of Islam was consequently preserved."[16] The key question then, however, is "Is that actually the case?" The claim is erroneous for two important reasons. For one thing, the Hadith does not mention or even imply, in any way, of Ethiopians in the future destruction of Ka'aba. It just only, and does so explicitly, mention "a lean-legged" from among the Ethiopians, singular not plural, an individual not society. In fact, an extended version of the same Hadith reported in another tradition states: "A man from Ethiopia with two lean legs will destroy the Ka'bah, take away its treasures and remove its covers. As if I were looking at him, he is a bald man with crooked arms and legs who is attacking the Ka'bah with his iron shovel and pickaxe."[17] Obviously, the essence and only message of the aforementioned Hadith is that there will be a "burglar" who is an Ethiopian by origin. Second, and more importantly, no mention of this person's religion, Islam or Christianity, is to be found in this Hadith. In other words, the Hadith does not assume a Christian Ethiopian going after the Ka'aba of Islam.

Erlich's second piece of evidence for the foreign Islam vs. Christian Ethiopia divide is from the Qur'an. Similar to the above Hadith, the chapter Erlich picked up from the Qur'an also addresses the issue of tearing down the Ka'aba. Presumably, Erlich understood the weight of an argument that can be linked to the Qur'an, which is generally believed to be stronger than prophetic traditions like Hadith. However, his reading of the Surah or chapter of the Qur'an is as misleading as his reading of the aforementioned Hadith. The chapter is called "Surah of the Elephants." He interprets, I would rather argue transforms, the Surah of the Elephants as an encounter wherein " The Ka'aba . . . was miraculously saved from the Ethiopians as Allah "sent against them birds in flocks (abablis)…who hurled clay stones upon them."[18] The problem with this assertion, time and again, is its simplistic projection and transfer of the line of argument. In other words, just exactly like the above Hadith, Erlich projects and squeezes "Ethiopia" out of the "owners of the Elephant." Put simply, when the Qur'an mentions the owners of the Elephant who came to destroy Ka'aba, Erlich categorically imagines Ethiopian society. Secondly, it must be clear by now that it is not that the Ka'aba was "saved from Ethiopians;" rather, it was saved from the "owners of the Elephant" who were intending to destroy it.

Apart from the above inadequacies, it should be noted that in either of the above cases, the quoted Hadith and the Surah from the Qur'an do not necessarily assume "Ethiopia," and if it

should, it must be Abyssinia. For as long as our latest understanding goes, Ethiopia as a country and society is the brainchild of Menelik II (1889-1913) in the early twentieth century.[19] Abyssinia, however, was based present day northern Ethiopia and had some loose control over parts of Menelik II's Ethiopia in prior periods. One of the probable causes for imagining earlier encounters between Christian Abyssinians and Muslims in terms of Ethiopia and Islam is an attempt to give a shaky genealogical foundation for the incompatibility model within which Erlich's thought operates. Moreover, as briefly noted in later sections, Muslim-Christian relations have different dynamics and shape before and after the advent of Menelik II's "Christian Ethiopia" project.

In short, Erlich's reading of the Ethiopia-Islam relationship is based largely on the narration that claims to unveil the convergence of, and creates a picture of, Islam and Muslims in some innovative ways "seeking its [Ethiopia] destruction and replacement."[20] As one representative figure of this view, in almost all of his Ethiopia and Islam related publications, Erlich implicitly endorsed and "transplanted" the thesis of "Clash of Civilizations" to the Ethiopian case. Similar to the twentieth century "Clash of Civilizations" of Samuel Huntington, Erlich joins him in his belief in an inevitable clash of cultures, mutually exclusive as per his highly essentialized and dualist view of the cultures, both in history and ideology. The cause of this "clash" for Erlich, however, is the incompatibility between "Christian Ethiopia" and foreign Islam.[21]

The second mechanism, through which the hi/storying discourse operates, is the production of "knowledge" and "truth" through double standards and false dichotomies. For instance, similar set of actions taken by two opposite forces, especially those involving Muslims and Christians in Abyssinian and/or Ethiopian history have been approached and interpreted in radically different ways. In the aftermath of these encounters, many academics emphasize the victory of Christians at the expense of the invading Muslims or, conversely, foreign, Islamic conquest of the native Christian population of Ethiopia.[22] For the presumed native Christian state and population, a new set of standards or conceptual constructs like "patriots," "heroes," "peaceful," and "tolerant" were created to justify various actions taken against the "colonizing, intolerant, destructive, and brutal Muslim" foreigners.[23] This binary opposition thus served the incompatibility model that only sees natural tendencies of divergences between Muslims and Christians in Ethiopia.[24]

A typical and good example in this regard would be the war fought between the 1520s and 1540s. As a leader on the Muslim side, Imam Ahmed Ibn Ibrahim El Ghazi (in Amharic, known as "Ahmed Gran," meaning "the left-handed") fought and managed to defeat the Christian side in the widely known battle of Shembera Kure in 1529. Later, however, he suffered defeat. El Ghazi has attracted much attention in later historical discourses and among many recent and contemporary historians and historiographers. This attention was characterized by parallel, but opposite reactions from scholars in the field. The great majority decided to label El Ghazi as "a danger," "a surrogate," "a trauma" and "invasion syndrome" for Ethiopia, "a precursor to fundamentalism," and "destructive" to Ethiopia.[25] Ironically, notwithstanding these and other instances of hi/storying, many Muslims in Ethiopia and Somalia, in and out of Ethiopia, embraced him as a national hero.[26]

Closely related to the above is that there has always been a general tendency among Ethiopian Studies academics in to eulogize and affirm many of the actions of Christian

Ethiopians while downplaying the supposedly "non-Ethiopian" other's effort and voice. Bahru Zewde, for instance, believed that the city of Harar was "occupied" by Egypt, but he immediately twisted it into "expansion" for Menelik II when expanding his Ethiopian empire.[27] Like Zewde, Erlich reduced Menelik II's conquest and annexation of "the Somali-inhabited Ogaden desert and vast areas inhabited by other local peoples" to "occupied" while a similar set of actions taken by Imam Ahmed were blatantly disparaged as "destruction" and representing an epitome of "Islamic extremism" and "fundamentalism."[28] For many of the country's non-Amhara, Muslim and other, however, Menelik II's aggressive "state formation" in the late nineteenth century has been seen as "the "scramble for Africa" on the colonizers side.[29] While demonizing Imam Ahmed's actions, Erlich rather euphemistically neutralizes and reduces the "Crusader-ness" of Yohannes IV (1872-1889) to something patriotic because he acted "in the spirit of the Ahmed Gragn syndrome."[30] To Hagai Erlich, in virtually all of his Ethiopia and Islam related publications, the brutality and aggressiveness of many of the kings in Ethiopian history, especially starting from Abraha's encounter with pre-Islamic Arabs in the sixth century through Yohannes IV and then to Menelik II, does not have any place in his hi/storing.

By the same token, many of the actions of Islamic sultanates and dynasties, from the ninth century Makhzumi dynasty, to the powerful sixteenth century Adal sultanate, and up to the nineteenth century Muslim sultanates in Abyssinia, were categorically reduced to "revolts" or at times "invaders," for they fought the Christianizing force from the north, that is "Christian Ethiopia."[31] Contrary to the view that sees violence and hostility in Islam, its expansion along the four corners of the country had favorable outcomes for some of the population within and around Abyssinia. The fast paced spread of Islam in the south, for instance, contrary to the conventional view that sees a threat and destabilizing effect in Islam, had served the people to tackle forced religious conversions and persecution directed at them by the "expanding" Christian force from the north. In fact, Islam was received enthusiastically among this section of the society for it had rendered "a new ideological force of resistance against the territorial expansion of the Christian kingdom from the north."[32] Islam not only gave an ideological impetus for the south but also to others in the country. It was also the raison d'etre for the then Oromo resistance in Ethiopia. During those brutal years, "Islam became a sort of rallying point even a resistance ideology of Muslims against Abyssinian oppression . . . in effect, the Oromo needed a strong ideology against the well-established state and the hegemony of Christian rulers."[33]

In any case, filled with unfounded assumptions, speculations and biases, both the latent and manifest arguments of these pursuits under what has been called "Ethiopian Studies" paved the way for dualism in Ethiopian history, culture, and society. This was a dualism based principally on an incompatibility model that has long been downplaying the convergence and unity model that, to the contrary, equally recognizes the differences of all the actors involved. Put it simply, the Islam and/or Muslims dimension of Abyssinian and/or Ethiopian history, culture, and society has been portrayed as a serious cause of sociocultural and ideological concern that threatens the "Ethiopian equilibrium."

The Muslims in Ethiopia Complex as a Discourse: Continuity or Rupture?

The Muslims in Ethiopia complex as an academic discourse has largely remained unabated to this day except for some lately emerging studies in the area of identity studies, especially along ethnic politics and identities, other historical, and other anthropological and historiographical works. Of the many ethnic groups in the present day Ethiopia, the Oromo are undoubtedly one of the most widely studied, and this has brought with it a visible paradigm shift in understanding the past and present of Abyssinian and/or Ethiopian history, culture, and society. As it has been called, "Oromo Studies" has questioned the very ontology of the regime of knowledge which has historically been ethnocentric and, as I argued above, un-Ethiopianizing.[34]

As for the nature of scholarship on Islam and Muslims, the quantity and quality of knowledge production, however, has been scanty and not encouraging. There have been few studies with major effects in relation to the already established Ethiopian Studies. To my knowledge, the only primary research that had been carried out concerning the different facets of Islam and Muslims in Ethiopia and that has gotten wider circulation in the world academic community are two PhD dissertations. One is the study by the late Hussein Ahmed, "father" of Islamic and Muslims studies in Ethiopia and Professor of History at Addis Ababa University, who undertook a primary in-depth investigation into nineteenth century Islam in Wallo.[35] The second work is that of Terje Østebø, Associate Professor of Religion at the University of Florida, on Salafism among Oromo Muslims.[36] These and related other recently published historiographical research and reviews made some significant contributions by deconstructing and reconstructing again Abyssinian and/or Ethiopian history, culture, and society. I will now discuss two key observations of the change underscored and implied in these engagements.

First, these engagements, especially Ahmed's studies of Islam and Muslims in Ethiopia, have questioned the very ontology of Ethiopian Studies. Using the case of Wallo and a closer exploration of the origin, expansion, and currents of Islam and Muslims in the region, he has challenged the incompatibility model that assumes dualism in Abyssinian and/or Ethiopian history, culture and society. For him, the un-Ethiopianizing discourse considers Islam and Muslims as an outside antithesis, when in fact they are the product of internal synthesis. In his words, Muslim culture in Ethiopia is "one of the essential elements of Ethiopian culture . . ."[37]

Second, Terje Østebø's studies, especially of Bale in the Oromo region, unequivocally established whether or not Islam and/or Muslims have been violent and destructive. He produces ample empirical evidence that questioned the misreading of various activities commonly attributed to Islam and Muslims by taking examples from the largest Ethiopian ethnic group of Muslims, the Oromo. He argued that Muslim religious reform and revival efforts have been, for many years, taken to mean the very genesis of radicalism and extremism that would threaten the "Ethiopian Equilibrium." This is thus fundamentally different from the general portrayal and representation of Islam and Ethiopian Muslims. Unfortunately, however, this general view, on the one hand, fed into the papproach toward Muslims among academics already alluded to, and, on the other, the raison d'etre and modus operandi of Muslims in Ethiopia complex as a policy and actions of the various ruling elites towards Islam and Muslims in the country for many years.

The Muslims in Ethiopia Complex as Policy and Praxis

Next to the Muslims in Ethiopia complex as a discourse among Ethiopian Studies academics is how it functioned as policy and praxis of many of the ruling elites throughout Abyssinian and/or Ethiopian history. It was used and applied by many of the kings and state elites in their hand-to-hand and ideological combat against Islam and Muslims.

The advent and expansion of Islam among Abyssinians in the years between the seventh and twelfth centuries had posed some fundamental challenges, especially to the ruling Abyssinian elites. These challenges were primarily political and religious by nature. As Islam intensified, converting people in Abyssinian region, its territorial penetration and socio-political organizational structures, for instance, the development of Islamic sultanates and kingdoms, were also increasingly becoming more visible. This was the moment about which Edward Gibbon wrote of Abyssinia as being "Encompassed on all sides by the enemies of their religion."[38] Contrary to Gibbon, Trimingham held that the enmity between Muslims and Christian Abyssinians was not religious in nature but about political predominance.[39] I will not comment on the relative weigh of these arguments beyond noting that the interplay of the two can adequately explain not only the initial genesis of "incompatibility" but also its mature expressions in the later periods.

By the end of thirteenth and at the beginning of fourteenth century, approximately seven Islamic sultanates had been founded: Ifat, Dawro, Arbabani, Hadya, Sharkah, Bali, and Dara.[40] In those years, according to Trimingham, "the actual area of these Muslims kingdoms was much larger than that of the Christian kingdom."[41] In the middle of this massive socio-political transformation, the Solomonic Dynasty came to power. The Solomonic Dynasty, which differed fundamentally in its domestic policies from the preceding Zagwe dynasty, started implementing a policy of "repression, conquest and expansion."[42] This policy was the modus operandi, especially for such Christian Abyssinian kings as Amda Sion (1314-44), Negus Dawit I (1382-1411), and Zar'a Yaqob (1434-68). The pursuit of this policy was, on the one hand, the result of suspicion and fear of the expanding force of Muslims, and on the other the socio-political challenge that this caused.

The outcome of this policy was a source of constant bloodshed on both sides. The other consequence of this intervention was the change in the status of many of the region's Islamic sultanates. After King Amda Sion paralyzed the strongest Islamic sultanate, Ifat, the independence of all other sultanates ended and later on reduced to tributary entities under the larger political control of the Christian ruling elites. From this time up until the nineteenth century, the condition of Muslims deteriorated. Apart from losing their independence, these sultanates experienced alienation in terms of religious freedom and economic conditions. For instance, Mazaga, which was part of Tigray, had been banned from building a mosque. The Portuguese priest Fancisco Alvarez observed this situation when he was engaged in his missionary and political activities. He noted that:

> In this country there are villages of Moors, separated from the Christians; they say that they pay much tribute to the lords of the country in gold and silk stuffs. They do not serve in the general services like the Christians; they have not got mosques, because they do not allow them to build or possess them.[43]

He also observed the same complaint among other Muslims, especially in the North, writing: "While we were in this country the Moors, inhabitants of this town, were complaining, saying that the Prester John had by force levied upon them a thousand ouquias of gold . . ."[44]

The accumulation of such political, economic, and religious alienation and exploitation paved the way for the sixteenth century massive conquest of the Christian kingdom by the Islamic sultanate of Adel under the leadership of El Gazi. The 1529 "victory" over the Christians was primarily achieved by the coordination of the already resentful sultanates and Muslims living in the different parts of the country.[45] Shihab ad-Din wrote that the success of El Gazi's conquest largely depended on the willing participation of Muslims who had the chance to reverse the exploitative control of Christian rulers over them. Among these groups were the people of Mazaga, who not only welcomed El Gazi's victory, but also, once the Muslims lost the war in 1542, sought the protection of the Ottoman Empire from the newly victorious Christian regime.[46] Put simply, contrary to the popular view of Muslims besieging the Christian kingdom in the years between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Abyssinian Christian kingdom rather:

> . . . militarily subjugated their neighboring Muslim sultanates, most prominently Ifat and Adal, and politically divided the sultanates' ruling families to keep them weak. These tactics, designed to wrest control of trade from the sultanates, were resoundingly successful until Muslims unified around military/religious leaders, primary among them being Imam Gran, who in 1531 conquered the Ethiopian Empire.[47]

It should be noted that the nature of ruling elites' policy in the fifteenth and sixteenth century Abyssinia shifted fundamentally from the previous "expansion, repression and conquest" to what I would call purifying Abyssinia of Islam and its Muslims. This was the period in which an "African crusade" was waged against Abyssinian Muslims. In fact, the ruling elites, especially King Lebna Dengle (1508-1540), believed that:

> The Franks from the end of the earth would come by sea and would join with the Abyssinians, and would destroy Jiddah and Tor and Mekkah; and that so many people would cross over and would pull down Mekkah, and without moving would hand the stones from one to another and would throw them into the Red Sea, and Mekkah would remain a razed plain, and that also they would take the great city of Cairo, and upon that there would be great differences as to whose it should be, and the Franks would remain in the great city.[48]

Following the recurrent wars of the sixteenth century, the country and its people had incurred a massive loss of human life and material resources.

The complex, however, reached its mature expression in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when Yohannes IV and Menelik II came to power consecutively. During the terms of these two kings, excluding Amda Sion's earlier legacies, Muslims suffered more significantly than ever before. Under Yohannes IV, Muslim Abyssinians were given the choice of accepting Christianity or face persecution. The resistance of the people of Wollo under Sheikh Talha and their subsequent massive persecution and forceful conversion to Christianity was the rule rather than the exception.[49] Similarly, Menelik II's vision for a united and greater Christian

Ethiopia resulted in the religious as well as military campaigns that led to the creation of modern Ethiopia. Pausewang concisely summarized the brutal experiences under Menelik II's campaigns thus:

> [the people] have not forgotten the historical experience of being conquered by Emperor Menilek, during the second half of 19th century. They have not overcome the trauma of Menilek using modern firearms imported from Europe, to crush their resistance. For them, Ethiopia participated in the "scramble for Africa" on the colonisers side, being the only African power to succeed in participating in the partition of Africa into colonial spheres of interest. They still suffer from the deep trauma of being treated as second class human beings. They experienced being economically exploited, culturally suppressed, and relegated to a kind of sub-human status, by the administration and the nobility from the North.[50]

A slightly positive change in policy toward Islam and Muslims was observed during the EPRDF regime in the early 1990s. This change in policy, which I would call adaptive rather than transformative, was the result of multiple, but necessary factors, of which I will address two. First is the late consciousness of the ruling state elites that Ethiopia as a country will no longer continue to be viewed through primordial lens, for its people with multiple socio-cultural, religious, historical, and politico-economic experiences have their own stake in it. However, although the EPRDF regime recognized this in the new constitution, its practical implementation has been backfiring in many respects. An important case in point is the Muslim movements in Ethiopia, which I address below. Second is the emergence of various interest groups in the country: one is the identity question of Ethiopia's ethnic groups (for instance, the Oromo); the second, and the very subject of this article, is the historically evolving identity question of Muslims underpinning economic, political, cultural, and religious rights and entitlements.

The Muslims in Ethiopia Complex and Muslim Identity

After it had come to power, the EPRDF regime introduced its own version of Ethiopia wherein "Muslim Ethiopians" appeared to replace the Muslims in Ethiopia complex. The opening of this public space had facilitated the way for the revival and expression of cultural and religious identities among Muslims. Most importantly, and unexpectedly, this period paved the way for Muslims to recollect the collective consciousness of their shared historical experiences in the country. There are two foundations for this development: first, the collective pattern of a similar experience of socio-cultural, economic and political oppression, exploitation, and misrepresentation; and second, the role of religious revival and reform activities that generally helped shape the development of Muslim identity as "Muslim Ethiopians." It should be noted that Muslims in Ethiopia, as alluded to in the introduction, has been the actual socioeconomic and political condition of Muslims and the associated low self-perception and alienation under earlier policy.

In the first case, the constant struggle of Muslims under the policy of the various ruling elites in the past helped nurture a sense of community. During those periods, many "historical records, both oral and documentary, testify more to the interactions and commonalities than to

the distinct and separate identities of the Muslim communities of Ethiopia."[51] This is more analogous to what Karl Marx thought of as "class in itself" in which case the working class "constituted in itself by virtue of the similar situation of workers, their common alienation from the means of production within capitalism. By virtue of their shared situation, workers have similar interests (i.e. things that are in their interest)."[52] In this regard, Muslim Ethiopianness could be seen then as the unintended outcome of such policy. One practical example in this regard would be the case study undertaken among the Wollo Muslims who have been residing in the northern section of Ethiopia.

Rukya Hassan detected and has shown a process of definition and redefinition of Wollo Muslim identity. She found that people who consider themselves Muslims and at the same time Amhara adopted various strategies through which they demarcated what they considered was Islamic and what was not. The Wollo, a Muslim population living within the broader Christian Amhara region, developed a modified linguistic system, which she termed the "Amharic Speaking Muslim Community of Wollo (ASMCW)."[53] This modification is accomplished by shifting from Amhara-Amharic, which is Christian in the analysis, to Amharic-Islamic. This, in essence, is a dialectical shift of identity marked by religion through which "we" is discursively constructed and defined against "them."

A more matured expression of this identity has been the product of post 1990s Muslim revival and reform activities. Owing to the EPRDF regime's policy, the post 1990s period saw the proliferation of religious institutions, intellectual movements, the production of religious materials, massive and intensive communications, and related other mechanisms of revival and reform activities. Some of the well-known organizations and associations such the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council (EIASC), the Ethiopian Muslim Youth Association, and the Ethiopian Muslim Unity Association were established, among others.[54] The production of Islamic newspapers and magazines like *Bilal* played a significant role in mobilizing urban Muslims along a growing and increasingly recognized dialectical process of definition and redefinition of themselves; their role in Ethiopia; and in cementing the social bond among the socio-culturally different Muslim urbanites.[55] Between 2000 and 2010, a number of other locally distributed and popular weekly newspapers such as *Salafia*, *Hikma*, and, most notably, *Yemuslimoch Guday* played a significant role for the new generation of Ethiopian Muslims. Before the EPRDF government banned it, *Yemuslimoch Guday* arguably influenced the development of collective consciousness among the urban dwellers and educated circles in Ethiopia.[56] The most recurrent themes of this weekly newspaper were the global and local dynamics of Islam, Islamic and Muslim history, Islam and Ethiopia, and other closely related issues.

The progressively maturing collective consciousness along the lines of Muslim Ethiopians has been gaining momentum in the subsequent periods with the introduction and intensification of social and other communication media. The introduction of a television channel for Muslim Ethiopians is one good example. The launch of this TV channel, TV Africa, presented Ethiopian Muslims with Islamic programs often accompanied by historical and cultural content. With around-the-clock Islamic programming, the channel uses more than one local language to get its messages across to Ethiopian Muslims. In addition to Amharic, programs have been produced in other widely spoken languages, including Oromo-Oromiffa,

Somali-Somaligna, Afar-Afarigna, and Tigray-Tigrigna. In general terms, this TV channel based in Sudan, provided Ethiopian Muslims with alternative narrations of "what it means to be a Muslim and Ethiopian."

Similarly, social media has also been playing a significant role that cannot be underestimated. The intensification of interaction facilitated by Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and various websites, with content ranging in focus from purely religious and political to historical, have been playing their part in this development of collective consciousness among the Muslim community in Ethiopia. It is interesting to note here the role that is being played by *Dimtsachin Yisema* ("Let Our Voice Be Heard") in the current fallout between the EPRDF regime and Muslims.[57] It is a key platform for the mass mobilization of Muslims in Ethiopia and the Muslim Ethiopian diaspora against some of the repressive moves of the EPRDF regime. *Dimtsachin Yisema* does this and promotes other related activities principally through using Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

The message of these Muslim reform and revival activities, as viewed by the EPRDF regime, was not necessarily one of the peaceful development of Muslim Ethiopianness. Rather, the government alleged that it was one violence, extremism, and intolerance.[58] The regime did not view it as a Muslim Ethiopianness that constantly negotiates, dialectically engages, and responds to the question of what it means to be a Muslim and Ethiopian? The EPRDF regime's reluctant shift in policy towards "Muslim Ethiopians" became something different—in the words of Østebø, "from containment to the production of a governmental Islam."[59]

The details of the EPRDF's moves towards the "production and containment" of Islam appear in Østebø's well-substantiated account.[60] It is pertinent to add, however, that the supposed earlier EPRDF optimism toward Islam and Muslims was not genuinely transformative but more of an adoptive deceit. EPRDF's recent introduction of "Governmental Islam," otherwise known as the Ahbash sect, partly explains the government's initial intent to regulate or even arrest the growing consciousness, reformist, and revivalist activities of Muslims, which thus captures the adoptive nature of its policy. In other words, the change in EPRDF policy towards Islam was not transformative and thus was not qualitatively different from the previous Muslims in Ethiopia complex policies of earlier Christian rulers. However, as the saying "bending the twig twig too far will lash back with destructive ferocity" goes, the policy has aroused nationwide protests that have been characterized as "peaceful," "calm," and "disciplined."[61] In addition, through time, these protests have developed into a powerful movement with "[a] more sophisticated campaign strategy and ensured the peaceful progress."[62]

Like the previous complex policies, however, it has created a platform whereby the Muslims proactively exploited the friction for strengthening the collectivity among the various Muslim communities in Ethiopia. Some of the slogans in the post 2010 mass Muslim demonstrations in Ethiopia can be taken to support this. Among the slogans, for instance, *"mengest bemuslimoch guday talqa aygba"* (government shall not interfere in the affairs of Muslims); *"muslimoch ande nen aneleyayem"* (we Muslims are united and will not be divided); *"Yemuslimoch mebt yikeber"* (Muslim rights be respected); and others communicate important messages.[63] The "production of Islam" induced fear, anger, and response among Muslims, as can be deduced from the above slogans, as they perceived an existential threat wit the intent to

dismantle the collective integrity of Muslim Ethiopians. In general terms, this reflects, on the one hand, an identity boundary for the collective *"muslimoch"* (we Muslims) and, on the other, that this identity boundary has aspects that cannot be negotiated with others including the government.

A closer examination of the existing fallout between Ethiopian Muslims and the EPRDF regime lead to two important implications. The first one is that the pragmatic trajectory of Muslim consciousness of themselves, the country, and the ruling EPRDF regime. The protests which have been carried out since 2011 not only show the shift in Muslim consciousness but also their perception of and role in Ethiopia. We see, especially in the demonstrations and Muslim produced local intellectual materials, a transformation of consciousness from the feeling of strangeness and thus "Muslims in Ethiopia" to more of a proactive citizenry or, what I called, Ethiopian Muslims.[64] As active citizens also, they have been posing a meticulously articulated demand for rights and freedom other. This demand, for instance for religious freedom, is therefore an important expression of citizens who felt and acted as locals and natives, not as strangers in the Christian Ethiopia or Muslims in Ethiopia sense.

The second implication is closely related to EPRDF's policy of the "containment and production of Islam." While the Muslims self-perception went through some significant changes, with the unintended lending hand of, but not limited to, EPRDF's initial appeasing policy, the government is lagging behind on the same trajectory of change. In other words, once the regime begun implementing the "improved" policy of production and containment, it had to deal with the constant protests and demonstrations all across the country, often times, with harsh measures of incarcerations, bans, and so forth. In short, the EPRDF government's reluctance and insistence on not peacefully responding to and addressing some of the demands of Muslims in the country has not been changing for quiet sometime, and this would remain the principal bone of contention for the probable future. As of recently, the government has been taking more severe measures, especially against the "Muslims representatives," and as such, the future may appear to yield gloomy outcomes for both parties.[65]

Conclusion

This article has examined three interrelated facets of the Muslims in Ethiopia complex. The first dimension involves the view of the Muslims in Ethiopia complex as a discourse among Ethiopian Studies. In this connection, the article applied the concept of Hi/storying as an exemplary discourse and concluded that, except for few emerging research studies, the complex as a discourse remains unchallenged. Thus there is an urgent need for more primary research. Through the generation of primary data from the understudied side, that of Islam and Muslims in Abyssinia and/or Ethiopia, the discourses on Islam and Muslims could assume greater balance.

The complex's second aspect included the view of it as a policy and practice of many of the ruling elites, which reached its peak during the times of King Amda Sion, Yohannes IV and Menelik II. The advent and expansion of Islam in and around Abyssinia had caused these ruling elites to adopt peripheralization and the policy of "cleansing" Abyssinia of Islam and Muslims. This aggressive move, especially the recurrent attacks, restrained religious freedom, led to the economic exploitation of Muslims, and partially produced the development of a sense of

inferiority and alienation. Yet, it also paved the way for the strengthening of collectivity and elevated Muslim self-perception in the later periods. The Muslim reversal of Christian control in the sixteenth century testified to the expression of collectivity among Muslims. This, accordingly, constituted the third dimension of the Muslims in Ethiopia complex, that is, their actual inferior and "unwanted" condition. However, an unintended consequence of the Muslims in Ethiopia complex policy facilitated the development of Muslim identity as Ethiopian Muslims. Similarly, although the existing EPRDF regime appeared to open its door for "Muslim Ethiopians" since 1990s, it more recently shifted the policy towards "containment" which had its own implications for Muslim revival and reform activities. Despite the government's repressive actions, Muslim identity has been shifting, due to past and present circumstances, more toward becoming Ethiopian Muslims.

As it now stands, the shift of Muslim identity from being outsiders to being stakeholders has not been accompanied by a greater degree of flexibility and action on the government's part. Even though the government appears to be taking a stand against its own Muslim population on some contemporary issues, the growing Muslim consciousness has sent an implicit message that Muslim citizens in Ethiopia will no longer see and live in a Muslims in Ethiopia world unless the government recognizes and begins to take actions in favor of Ethiopian Muslims.

Notes

1   Here Abyssinia refers to the northern part of present day Ethiopia whose people primarily speak Ge'ez, Tigrina, and Amharic. Ethiopia, on the other hand, is the "whole region . . . the modern state . . . founded by Menelik II" and subsequently ruled by Hailesillasie, the Dergue, and presently, the EPRDF regime (Trimingham 1952, p. v).
2   A process involving the perpetuation of inequalities, exclusion, and marginalization; see Bernt and Colini 2013.
3   Patrick and Østebø 2013.
4   Østebø 2007, p. 3.
5   Foucault 1972.
6   Whisnant 2012, p. 6.
7   See Yusuf 2009.
8   See Bruce 1813; Budge 1928; Sergew 1967; Trimingham 1952; Toggai 2008.
9   Østebø 2007, p. 1.
10   Yusuf 2009, p. 381.
11   Ahmed 1998, p. xvi.
12   By the sixteenth century one third of the total population was estimated to be Muslim (Trimingham 1952, p. 101). Despite conflicting estimations, more than a third of the current population is also Muslim.

13 Kassay 2009, p. 11.
14 Proponents of this view primarily included Trimingham 1952; Abir 1978; Ephrem 2008; and Erlich (1994, 2009, 2010, 2013).
15 Erlich 2009, p. 458. Hadith is a tradition, especially sayings of Muhammad, prophet of Islam. Ka'ba is one of the holiest places of the religion of Islam and it is located in Mecca, Saudi Arabia where Muslims annually visit in millions.
16 Ibid.
17 Bukhari, 1994, Vol. II, p.385., no.1595-1596.
18 Erlich 2009, p. 458.
19 Trimingham 1952.
20 Erlich 1994, p. 22.
21 This is a recurrent theme recycled in all of his publications. In fact, I would argue this constitutes his principal thesis for Ethiopia-Islam relations. See Erlich's introductions in his publications (1994, 2006, 2009, 2010, and 2013).
22 Sergew 1967; Erlich 1994; Bahru 2001; and Ephrem 2008.
23 Yusuf 2009, p. 382.
24 This had a devastating consequence. The knowledge production under the incompatibility model interacts with government's actions, and as a result, this will pose significant danger ". . that it will have a legitimizing effect instead of an explanatory power" (Ramos 2013, p. 16).
25 Bahru 2001; Milkias 2011, p. 192; Erlich 2013, p. 9; Ephrem 2008; Trimingham 1952.
26 See, for instance, the comments of Prof. Lapiso and a Harari resident from Ethiopia in the documentary titled "IMAM AHMED: Ethiopian Military Genius & A Hero." It can be viewed http://www.ethiotube.net/video/17000/IMAM-AHMED-Ethiopian-Military-Genius--A-Hero and also in the *New World Encyclopedia* http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Ahmad_ibn_Ibrihim_al-Ghazi.
27 Bahru 2001, p.20, 63
28 Erlich 2010, p. 6.
29 Pausewang 2009, p. 4.
30 Erlich 2010, p. 4.
31 Erlich 1994, pp. 26-28.
32 Seifuddin 1997, p. 129.
33 Gnamo 2002, p.108.
34 See, for instance, the nature and content of the *Journal of Oromo Studies*, http://www.oromostudies.org/publications/osa-journal
35 Ahmed 1985 dissertation and subsequent 2001 book.
36 Østebø 2009a.
37 Ahmed 1998, p. xvi.
38 Gibbon 1776-1787, vol. iv, Chap. 47, Pt. 5. It should be noted that the presence of Muslims in Abyssinia was not limited to "all sides," but also within the Abyssinian cultural and geographic boundaries. There are many evidences that showed not only Muslims lived, for

instance, in Abyssinia, but also, and most importantly, had a sultanate. The Mazaga Islamic kingdom in Tigray, the inner core of Abyssinia is a good example (Alvarez 1881, p. 95). Muslims in Wollo and Shoa are another good examples in later periods.

39 Trimingham 1952, p.65

40 Al-Umari cited in Trimingham 1952, pp. 72-73. See also Ulrich 1977. The seven named sultanates is the number that it is commonly utilized. Other scholars list greater or lesser numbers. Shihab ad-Din (2003) and Alvarez (1881) include Mazaga, referred to in the following paragraph, as another sultanate/kingdom in their fifteenth century travel accounts.

41 Trimingham 1952, p. 68.

42 Ibid., p. 76.

43 Alvarez 1881, p. 95.

44 Ibid., p. 104.

45 Owens 2008.

46 Orhonlu 1996, p. 47.

47 Owens 2008, p. v.

48 Alvarez 1881, p. 255.

49 Hussein 1998.

50 Pausewang 2009, p. 552.

51 Hussien 2010, p. 111.

52 Marx in Jenkins 2008, p. 110.

53 Rukya 2008, p. 3.

54 Hussien 1994.

55 See Carmichael 1996; Hussien 1998.

56 "Yemuslimoch Guday" means Muslim Affairs.

57 For a detailed discussion of the "fallout," please see Østebø 2013.

58 Østebø 2012 challenges the "extremism" and "violence" rhetoric of the government.

59 See Østebø 2013 for a detailed discussion.

60 Ibid.

61 Østebø 2014, p. 172.

62 Jawar 2013, p. 4.

63 Personal communication with an acclaimed Muslim activist (requested anonymity), July 15, 2015.

64 See, for instance, Jebel 2012, which is one of the widely circulated books before and during Muslim protests in Ethiopia, Ahmedin Jabal, 2012. Jabal is a researcher, activist. and member of 'Muslims' Representatives' now in detention, Ethiopia. Also see Kamil 2015.

65 http://addisstandard.com/an-ethiopian-court-jailed-muslim-leaders-activists-to-lengthy-terms/ Accessed in Monday, August 10, 2015.

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