

## Islam and Islamism in Ethiopia & the Horn of Africa

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The year 2010 was spent on my ongoing research on Islamism in Ethiopia/Horn of Africa. Being appointed to the Center for African Studies & Department of Religion in August 2010, and therefore being in a transitional phase, my work has had the form of several smaller projects, all related to contemporary Islam in the Horn of Africa. The first was a study of Salafism in Bale, Ethiopia, expanding my initial research for my PhD dissertation. The study discusses the trajectory of the early Salafi movement in that region, paying attention to the role of agents of change, in the form of an emerging class of local merchants and graduates returning from Islamic universities in Saudi Arabia during the 1960s. This is going to be published as a journal article in Africa in 2011.

Secondly, I was commissioned by the International Law and Policy Institute (Norway) to write a report on Islamism in the Horn of Africa. The

report entitled “Islamism in the Horn of Africa: Assessing Ideologies, Actors, and Objectives” (report no 5/2010) was published in June 2010. Drawing on my own fieldwork experiences/findings and reviewing the available literature, the report analyzes recent developments, with regard to Islamist movements in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, and Sudan. It surveys the main actors, discusses the trajectories over the last decades, and seeks to present a more nuanced picture of this highly dynamic and heterogeneous phenomenon.

Thirdly, I co-organized (together with Patrick Desplat, University of Cologne) a workshop on Islam in contemporary Ethiopia at the University of Bergen, Norway, which was co-sponsored by the Center for African Studies, University of Florida. The workshop was called “Transforming Identities and New Representations of Islam in Contemporary Ethiopia,” and

saw the participation of 12 scholars from various parts of the world. The focus was on changes with regard to Muslim communities in post-1991 Ethiopia, and the papers dealt with intra-religious dynamics within these Muslim communities, Islam in Ethiopian public and political spheres, and shed light on Islam in Ethiopia in relation to the geopolitical discourses in the wider Horn of Africa.

Lastly, I have started preparing a larger project called Religion and Ethnicity in Ethiopia. The project takes Islam and Oromo ethno-nationalism in eastern Ethiopia as a point of departure and seeks to forward suggestions on how to conceptualize the relationship between religious and ethnic identities in relation to boundary-making and conflicts. The project is funded by the Norwegian Non-fiction Writers and Translation Association and will begin in 2011.



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