

Islam, Ethnicity and Reformism in the Horn of Africa and Africa

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Much of my research has in 2012 been devoted to a project on religion and ethnicity in the Horn of Africa. Spring 2012 was largely spent on analyzing data and writing. The project is (so far) focusing on the so-called Somali and Oromo liberation movements struggling for various forms of autonomy for Ethiopian Somalis and Oromo. The aim of the research is to provide much-needed empirical knowledge and new perspectives on the nature and developments of the Somali and Oromo ethno-nationalist movements in the southeastern parts of Ethiopia. As they emerged in Muslim-dominated areas, a major thesis of the project is that religion (i.e. Islam) has played a more important role than generally assumed. The project will also provide a more nuanced understanding of inter-religious relations in Ethiopia/Horn of Africa. In particular, I challenge the assumption that Ethiopia is a model for peaceful inter-religious co-existence, and demonstrate how the historical dominance of Christianity as a political culture and state-ideology has produced a lasting asymmetric relationship and consequently antagonistic attitudes between Christians and Muslims. The more general and theoretical objective is to apply the empirical findings to generate new perspectives on how to conceptualize the relationship between religion and ethnicity, particularly with regard to inter-group conflicts.

Another project has been to map out some of the particular features of Salafism in Africa. Based on my own research and review of relevant literature, I have investigated the historical trajectories, some major ideological features, and how Salafism in Africa in a disparate manner relates to politics and political power. The objective is to demonstrate how Salafism at the outset is a religious movement, devoted to securing religious purity, and how developments over the last decades have produced an increasingly heteroge-

neous movement. Much of the material has been presented at different international conferences, and the planned output will be 2-3 journal articles.

In addition, I have, together with Marit Østebø, been working on a project on the role of religious (Muslim) leaders in combating female genital mutilation (FGM) in Ethiopia. The project problematizes NGOs' somewhat uncritical use of religious leaders, and argues that their potential positive role is intrinsically related to historical trajectories, where local discourses have made their authority more fluctuating than generally assumed. The output here will be a journal article, ready for publication in 2013.

I have also, together with Patrick

Desplat (Cologne University), completed the publication process of the edited volume *Muslim Ethiopia: The Christian Legacy, Identity Politics and Islamic Reformism*. This book focuses on changes with regard to Muslim communities in post-1991 Ethiopia, including intra-religious dynamics within the Muslim communities, Islam intersecting with Ethiopian public and political spheres, and Islam in Ethiopia in relation to the geo-political discourses in the wider Horn of Africa. The book will be published in 2013.

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