State- Religion Interactions in Ethiopia: Trajectories and Forms

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ይህ ጥናታዊ ጽሑፍ በዘመናዊቷ ኢትዮጵያ ያለውን የመንግሥት እና የሃይማኖት መስተጋብር ተለዋዋጭነት አስመልክቶ አስቀድሞ የተዘጋጁ ሥነ-ጽሑፎችን በመገምገም ትንታኔ ይሰጣል። በዘመናዊቷ ኢትዮጵያ የመንግሥት እና የሃይማኖት መስተጋብሮች በሀገሪቱ ውስጥ ባለው የፖለቲካ እድገት፤ በሃይማኖት ቡድኖች ውስጥ እና በሃይማኖቶች መካከል ያለው የሥልጣን ሽግሽግ እና በዓለም አቀፍና በአህጉራዊ ኩነታዎች በሚወሰኑ ተደጋጋሚ ሃይታዊ ከፍታዎች እና ዝቅታዎች የሚታወቁ መኾናቸውን ጥናታዊ ግምገማው አመልክቷል። መስተጋብሮቹ ሊታዩ የሚችሉት በመጀመሪያ ሃይማኖታዊ ጉዳዮችን በመቀበል በሃይማኖት ጉዳዩ ተቀራርቦ የመሥራት አካሄድን ተከትሎ፤ ቀጥሎም ወጥ የኾነ የቁጥጥር ተግባራት በማካወን፣ ከዚያም በስውራዊ ተጽእኖ ውስጥ በማስገባት፤ በመጨረሻም ግልጽ በኾነ የመንግሥት ጣልቃ ገብነት ነው። መንግሥት በተከተላቸው በእነዚህ የመንግሥት የሃይማኖት ጣልቃ ገብነት አቅጣጫዎች ውስጥ ደረጃዎች ያሉ ቢመስሉም፤ ያልተቋረጡ እና ተደጋጋሚ ባሕርያትም እንዲሁ ይስተዋሉባቸዋል። ይህ ጥናታዊ ወረቀት አስቀድመው የተዘጋጁት ሥነ-ጽሑፎች ሁሉም በሚባል ደረጃ ያስባቸውን ተጨባጭ የጥናታዊ ሥነ ዘዴ ጥንኬሬዎችን እና ድክመቶች ለይቶ አሳይቷል። ከጥናታዊ ሥነ ዘዴ አንጻር፤ ሁሉም ሥነ-ጽሑፎች ማለት በሚቻል ደረጃ ቁጥር ተኮር (quantitative) አቀራረብን ተከትለዋል። ይህ ቁጥር ተኮር ጥናታዊ ዘዴ ምሁራን የመንግሥት እና የሃይማኖት መስተጋብር ውስብስብ ተፈጥሮን እንዲለዩ የሚያስችል ቢኾንም፤ በተመሳሳይ ጊዜ ስለ ክሥተቶች አጠቃላይ ግንዛቤ እንዳይኖራ ያደርጋል። ከአንዱ አውድ የተገኘ ውጤቶች ለሌሎች አውዶች ትርጉም ላይኖራቸው ይችላል። እንዲሁም የመንግሥት እና የሃይማኖት መስተጋብር ከቦታ ቦታ እና ከአካል ክልል ሊለያይ ይችላል። ከተጨባጭነት አንጻር ሲታይ ደግሞ፤ በመንግሥትና በሃይማኖት ውጥረት ጊዜ ሥነ-ጽሑፎቹ በመንግሥትና በሃይማኖት መስተጋብር ላይ ጠንካራ ትንታኔ የሚሰጡ ቢኾኑም፤ የመንግሥትንና የሃይማኖትን የዕለት ተዕለት እንቅስቃሴና የዕለት ተዕለት ገጠመኞች ከመሸፈን አንጻር ግን ድክመት አለባቸው። ስለኾነም፤ በ 'በሰላም ጊዜ' የሚደረገ በየእለቱ የሚኖሩ የመንግሥት እና የሃይማኖት መስተጋብሮች እንዲደበቁ ያደርጋሉ። ይህም፣ የመንግሥት እና የሃይማኖት መስተጋብር ተፈጥሮ እና ጥልቀት በውጥረት እና በሰላም ጊዜ ልዩነት ይኖረው አይኖረው የምናውቀው ነገር እንዳይኖር ያደርጋል። ከዚህም በላይ፣ ሥነ-ጽሑፎቹ የመንግሥትና የሃይማኖት መስተጋብርን በዓነነት በሁለቱ መካከል ያለውን ተቋማዊ

ግንኙነት በኢሊቶቹ ላይ በማተኮር የማቅረብ አዝማሚያ አላቸው። የዚህ ዓይነቱ አካሄድ ውጤት ደግሞ ምእመናን መንግሥትን እንዴት እንደሚመለከቱት እና በመንግሥት ርምጃ ምን ዓይነት ተጽእኖ እንደሚደርስባቸው የሚያሳይ ኢይኾንም ማለት ነው። ነገር ግን በግለሰብ አማኝ ደረጃ ያለውን አመለካከት መፈተሽ ወሳኝ ጉዳይ ነው ምክንያቱም የአክራሪነት መነሻዎች ተቋማዊ የመኾናቸውን ያህል ግለሰባዊ ክሥተቶችም ናቸውና ነው።

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1. Introduction

A state's roles in managing inter-group relations are immensely important to entrench and preserve the values and traditions necessary for peaceful coexistence. To this end, states protect and promote the rights of citizens, maintain peace and order and resolve internal conflict by controlling vitriolic teachings and regulating the dissemination of provocative messages. Inter- religious tensions and conflicts are aspects of societal interaction in which a state has an important stake. Though state and religion are separate institutions, the two are not independent of each other. The state, for instance, has the responsibility to settle inter-religious disputes by organizing religious dialogues on various social problems, giving legal status to the different religions, and managing the way worship is practiced and burial places are acquired. However, if the state is not impartial or if it is passive in its dealings with religion in multi- religious societies, it could rather be a cause for conflict and tensions (Klein, 2012). Such internal conflict often causes destruction of property, loss of life, social exclusion, and interreligious intolerance. This implies that the nature of state-religion relation could have significant effect on the nature of interreligious relation. If the state is assumed to favor one religion, religious groups that feel marginalized may trigger conflict against the privileged group.

Modern societies have many demands that must be fulfilled by different human groups. Some of the demands of one group may clash with the other. The clashes of interests will be resolved by negotiation of the parties or resolved with resort to governmental intervention. The state has irreplaceable role in maintaining peace and order. In carrying out its function the state is expected to be impartial to the values of different groups. The groups that are tempting the government are religious groups which frequently clash each other and with the government itself. On the one hand, conflicts prevail between different religious groups due to their competing values. On the other hand, the religious interests promoted by worshipers clash with the secularization and civilization interests promoted by the state. These multifaceted interactions between religious groups and vis-à-vis the state's agenda makes the issue so complex.

In the age of globalization, many demands came from different religious groups which cannot be easily addressed by the government in its disposal. The requirement of the state to maintain order and the clashing interest's of different religious organizations makes their interaction complex and difficult to manage.

Ethiopia is one of the countries which are harboring many religious organizations and affected by the ensuing clashes of interests. It is an old country with a tradition of accommodating and hosting the major religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. These religious groups historically clash each other in times but are exemplar to live together in harmony with each other. This seems paradox but it has been the reality in Ethiopia. Hence, this study intends to examine certain substantive and methodological strengths and shortcomings of existing literature on state-religion interactions in Ethiopia.

Before delving into the discussion of critical engagement review of existing literature on contemporary Ethiopia the paper reviews the historical interaction between state and religion in Ethiopia.

2. State- Religion Interaction in Ethiopia: A Bird's Eye View

A glance at the politico-religious history of Ethiopia indicates that religious diversity and interreligious coexistence has been the feature of the country for millennia notwithstanding emerging revisionist historical presentations. There are thus scholars who attest that Ethiopia is a land of exemplary tolerance (Abbink, 2011; Desplat, 2005; Hussein, 2006;). The age-old culture of religious tolerance has been entrenched among Jews, Christians, and Muslims.

However, other scholars argue that in the political history of Ethiopia all religions except Orthodox Christianity were discriminated against and excluded from influencing the palace politics (Henze, 2000; Hussein, 2006; Østebø & Hustien, 2006. While the state allowed the church for a full use of its resources to practice and expand Christianity, it denied the same privilege from other religions (Bahru, 2002; Hussein, 2006; Tadesse, 1972). The point is the Ethiopian Empire had been favoring the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (henceforth EOC) both in the economic and political sphere as it was considered as a state religion (Abbink, 2011; Dereje, 2011). There had also been occasions where

the emperors or the nobles manipulated religious polemics to entrench their power and discriminate followers of other religions or factions often with the intention of weakening a rival king that adhered or who claimed to adhere to another religion (Abbink, 2011). The state and the church viewed those who subscribed to other religions as a "second subject", or even at times as aliens (Hussein, 2006). Abbink (1998, pp.113) reflects the state of affairs vis-à-vis Islam as follows:

> *Despite its ancient history and roots in the country, Islam in Ethiopia has always been a religion with secondary and, in the eyes of many Ethiopian leaders inferior, status; it emerged in the shadow of Christianity and often suffered from suppression and discrimination. This has had its impact on social opportunities, religious and civil rights and the patterns of self-organization of the Muslims.*

Ethiopian Islam, and for that matter Christianity, has been inseparably linked with the nature and functioning of the Ethiopian state and its economic base (Abbink, 1998). There are differing understandings of this historical evolution among scholars of Ethiopian politics and history. There are three scholarly currents when it comes to religious issues in the country while uniformly endorsing the view that religion and state had been entwined for a long time in Ethiopian history. There, however, appears to be diverging scholarly views with regard to the state of religious tolerance and coexistence in Ethiopia. Some have called Ethiopia a country of 'religious righteousness' where different faiths have been coexisting. In contrast, others are of the view that the country`s religious landscape has been characterized by marginalization, exclusion, and at times inclusionary currents. Still some others provide a nuanced analysis by dissecting religious tolerance in terms of grassroots communal interactions and leader-follower interaction.

Muslims in Ethiopia were able to be engaged in commercial activities which enabled them to dominate the then thriving long distance trade. Such a trade was a factor for the emergence of Muslim principalities in the southern part of the country (Bahru, 2002; Medhane, 2004a; Tadesse, 1972; Trimingham, 1952). Yet, Christianity remained an advantaged as a state religion entitled to give ideological legitimacy for the state and in turn gaining favor and resources from the state. As Tadesse (1972) states, Christianity

was considered an identity of the Ethiopian state throughout the medieval period that for instance explains why the state gladly sponsored "episode of S'adqan and the Nine Saints" in their effort to expand Christianity into the interior of the country and why it helped them in planting monastic life in the country. Church and state were in symbiosis ever since Christianity was instituted as a state religion during the Axumite period. Subsequently, the expansion of the state into Agew interior, Amhara, Showa to the south, Tigre and into various parts of the country accompanied by the introduction of Christianity, consented or otherwise. In a nutshell, political power and Orthodox Christianity were inseparable for a long time in Ethiopian history.

Similarly, the Muslim Sultanates that emerged along the long distance trade introduced Islam as a religion in their own domain (Taddesse, 1972). The expansion of Islam religion in the lowland was a gradual process that covered the Somali and other pastoralists in the eleventh and twelfth centuries (Abbink, 1998). Along with those expansions Islamic learning centers were established in areas like Harar, Massawa, Zeyla, and later Jimma. Geographically speaking, Islam was more settled in the northeast, east and southeast and a small strip of the west. It was adhered by the Afar, Harari, Argobba, Somali, Garri, part of the Oromo, part of the Gurage, Beni Shangul and others (Abbink, 1998). Gradually, the Muslim society became influential society in the country, as it was able to establish Muslim dynasties. This has led some to argue that, Islam has played roles more vital in the political and military history of the country than what is acknowledged in the country`s historiography (Hussein, 2006).

Islam was, however, not able to penetrate the central part of the country where Orthodox Christianity was a dominant source of power (Medhane, 2004a; Tadesse, 1972). Hence, its expansion was limited to the peripheral areas of the country where it had been a source of political and military power and that, while Christianity has a firm grip in the central part of the country, Islam dominated the peripheral areas. In due course, each creed had shown the zeal to expand to each other's main stay areas.

Such ambitions to expand to the domain of the other had led to various conflicts between the Christian highland Kingdom and the various Muslim Sultanates. The animosity was primarily driven by economic and political interests though religion was utilized as an engine to mobilize supporters (Trimingahm, 1952; Hussein, 2006; Desplat, 2005).

In general, the Ethiopian state was a Christian state from the Aksumite period to the 1974 revolution, Christianity being a state religion. The monarchical system was faced with the challenge of 'national integration' as it had been ruling a religiously diverse population using a single ideology of the so called Solomonic legend which demanded the King of Kings of the country to claim to be a descendant of King Solomon of Israel.

The Modern Ethiopian state is forged by Menelik II who expanded the domain of the Ethiopian state incorporating a huge chunk of land and a diverse population under its domain. That has increased the religious diversity of the Ethiopian state and the number of people who do not follow Christianity has significantly increased. Though the cultural landscape of the country was fast changing during his reign, Menelik II, like other Ethiopian emperors, pursued a policy that favored the EOC in Ethiopia in general and in Addis Ababa in particular (Trimingham, 1952). However, compared to his predecessor, he took some pragmatist measures to accommodate his newly incorporated subjects by accepting as Muslim rulers *Abba Jifar* and others so long as they peacefully submitted to his sovereign power and agreed to pay the tributes due to a subject (Abbink,1998; Henze, 2000; Marcus, 1975). *Lïj Iyyasu* was the successor of the throne after the death of emperor Menelik and his religious policy was accommodative in contrast to his predecessors. His religious policy was to assimilate the Muslim society in to the "Ethiopian nation-state project" to the end of which he was a regular guest to Muslim chiefs, built alliances with them, and assisted neighboring Muslim chiefs, notably the rebellious Somali leader known as Mohammed 'Abdilleh Hassan in his rebellion against the British (Abbink, 1998; Bahru, 2002; Medhane, 2004a). He also tried to forge alliance with the Turks to counterbalance the influence of the British and the French and Italian Colonial powers who had long been conspiring to subdue the Ethiopian state under their own sphere of influence. However, the incorporative measures of *Lïj Iyyasu* were unfortunately viewed as treacherous acts of "disestablishing the Orthodox Church" (Hussein, 2006; 8). As Hussein argues Iyasu's alliance with Ottoman Turkey and the Somali nationalists led to his downfall since it was interpreted as anti-Christian and anti- European. His efforts of integrating the Muslim population into the Ethiopian state were manipulated by the Italians in their bid to control the country after their occupation in1936 (Abbink, 1998). They pursued policy that privileged the Muslims population. Accordingly, over 50 new mosques were built in Addis Ababa including the grand

Anwar mosque, Islamic education was encouraged, Arabic schools were introduced, pilgrimages to Mecca and Medina were financed, and Muslim political and religious leaders were financially supported (Hussein, 2006). Thus, the Italian pro-Islamic policy somehow strained the inter-religious relations between Christians and Muslims in later years when *Hayla̋ Sïllase* tried to restore the pre-occupation status quo (Hussein, 2006). Due to such occurrences, highland Christians began to view Muslim competitors as treacherous (Abbink, 1998).

 Hence, after restoring his absolute power, emperor *Hayla̋ Sïllase* took ruthless measures on the Muslim leaders accusing them of national treason because of their "collaboration with the enemy" (Hussein, 2006, pp. 9). In contradiction with the view of the then incumbent state, scholars like Hussein (2006) view the position of Ethiopian Muslims at that time as reasonable in view of their alleged status as subject. Thus, the harsh policy of the state made Islam a "marginalized religion" both in and out Addis Ababa. The alienated Muslim population thus supported the 1974 downfall of the Monarchy.

The outbreak of the 1974 popular revolution has therefore come as longed for opportunity for the deprived like Ethiopian Muslims who then expected a better policy towards their religion (Medhne, 2004a; Wedu, 2006, 2012). Driven by their expectation, in April 20, 1974, they in fact expressed their grievance against the cracking imperial state by participating in a peaceful mass demonstration held in Addis Ababa.

The charisma of the Muslim population appeared to have been boosted as the Derg took some measures favoring the Muslim population though these changes proved to be short-lived when the junta soon became hostile to any form of religious expression. Yet, the 1974 revolution was a remarkable departure in that it made the state officially secular ending the centuries old marriage between state and church. In relative terms, religions started enjoying some privileges. With regard to Islamic religion, the new incumbent regime gave recognition to their 'religious festivals as public' and granted them equal rights with their Christian fellows (Østebø & Haustein, 2011; Abbink, 2011). However, when the *Därg* soon launched its harsh control over all religious institutions it reversed all the hopes (Medhane, 2004a, 2006). The regime branded religion as 'false ideology,' 'backward,' and 'antidevelopment' and hence its policies were geared towards a religion-free population (Østebø & Haustein , 2006). For the regime that bragged so

noisily of its Marxist stature, religion was the 'opium of the masses'. However, its anti-religious policy in a deeply religious context was widely unpopular if not outrageous.

Having provided a highlight of state-religion historical interactions, the remaining part of this section delves in to the discussion of the post 1991 state–religion interactions. Critical engagement review of existing literature on contemporary Ethiopia has been given due emphasis. Even though it is difficult to level state-religion interaction via clear period, the paper put those interactions naming as tendencies of liberalization, subtle manipulation and tendencies of over interventions. Those classifications have emanated from the overall assessment of the literature on the issue.

3. State- Religion Interactions in Contemporary Ethiopia

3.1. Tendencies of liberalization

Since the world is becoming a village through the process of globalization, religious interaction at the international level began to impact the social interaction at the national level in a number of countries. The global issues pertaining to inter-religious interaction began to be part of the national agenda of many countries. Studies conducted by different scholars assert that religious issues and controversies at the international level have been transformed to be part of the national agenda (Tekalign, 2008; Medhane, 2004b; Alagaw, 2012). It has also given rise to a global revivalist movement driven by a greater demand for recognition of religious identity in the public space of many countries. This is the more so with regard to the Muslim religion as there are groups that employ violence in the name of and with the aim of liberating that religion from what they call decadent forces. The 9/11 attack and other similar incidents are an attestation to this trend in response of which the global war on terror is declared.

Two major events shifted the religious landscape of Ethiopia in the post 1991 period. First, the end of the Cold War and the consequent process of greater global interaction has not only brought to the fore identity-based conflicts but also has accelerated trans-regional and trans-continental societal and cultural interactions. This trend is declared to be 'the end of history' in some quarters and the beginning of the 'clash of civilizations' in other. Second and related to the first point is the downfall of the military regime and the coming to power of the current regime with the agenda of political liberalization.

These two processes affected the dynamics of state-religion interaction and inter-religious relations in Ethiopia.

First, as part of the globalization process, the Muslim and Christian population began to get global connection and global resources. The process permitted local Christian and Muslim` institutions to reconnect to global institutions and preachers at a time when Islam and Christianity in all sects are trying to reform and enlarge their doctrine at the global level (Abbink, 2011; Desplat, 2005; Østebø, 2011). As stated above, the tendency to employ violence to advance one`s religious agenda has given rise to the war on terror. The Ethiopian state also joined what president Bush called the coalition of the willing and began to battle terrorism in an already embattled region. This has its own repercussion on the dynamics of state-religion interaction in the country the detail of which is provided below.

Second, the post 1991 political liberalization in Ethiopia has created a favorable ground for inter religious interactions among religious groups in Ethiopia (Medhane, 2006). The liberalization of the state control over religions has created a favorable atmosphere for religious institutions to practice their religious freedom. State and religion are declared to be a separate phenomenon and that one can not intervene in the affair of the others. This being the case, it has to be reckoned that what this exactly means has been open to contestation both among religious groups. As a new situation of increased religious freedom emerged, this inevitably paved the way for marked enthusiasm and for the boosting of religious activities among the Muslim populations, others brand of Christianity and indigenous religions. The new policy is intended to strengthen the peaceful coexistence of various religions, give public space for religious groups, and keep a division between religion and the state (Abbink, 2014). The liberalization process has brought a number of ramifications with regard to the conditions pertaining to state- religion interaction. Religious activities have visibly increased. Religion and religious institutions have become open to new forms of influence from abroad (Karbo, 2013). Aspects of the effects of liberalization are aptly summarized by Karbo (2013, pp. 13) in the following words:

> *…Christianity was exposed to new influences particularly from the west. Islam on its part resumed its direct contacts with the Middle East. Inspired and*

> *aided by different brands of global Islam, benefitting from the new political and economic dispensation in Ethiopia, Muslims in Ethiopia gradually began to adopt Arabic.*

The political liberalization of the state policy has changed the discourse of inter religious relations among different religious groups. This development began to be strongly implicated in dynamics of inter-religious interactions. Together with the globalization process, liberalization rendered the quest for revival of religiosity a reality in Ethiopia. This revivalism entails a shift in the religious polemics between Christians and Muslims in country. The religious polemics in Ethiopia has become the primary manifestation of the ideological battle among the faith communities in the public space (Abbink, 2011). The polemics ignites religious enmity among faith communities. It challenged the secular nature of the state. As Østebø (2012) argues, the state policy resulted in a 'more fluid and competitive configuration' among religious groups in Ethiopia.

Seeking to redress the injustice of the past, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPDRF), when it assumed power in 1991, introduced a policy intended to honor the rights of various religious communities. The level of the freedom provided in the constitution could be taken as a millstone in the country`s history (Østebø, 2011). The policy reform introduced by the new regime has been praised as 'far reaching' and it was claimed to have satisfied the ambition of Ethiopian Muslims (Hussien, 2006).

Almost most literature on the tendencies of liberalization policy has mentioned and appreciated that measure that was taken by the EPRDF government. One of the strengthen of scholars' work on the political liberalization and global events has linked with the development of local and trans-regional as well as to the global occurrence regarding the Ethiopian state-religious interactions. However, appreciating those liberal policies without unchecked mechanism and without assessing the repercussion interactions between state and religion in Ethiopia has one of the missing points of the literatures. Most authors in their various articles called the interactions state-religion as "Golden Age". However, the unchecked mechanism may be the initial stage of the tension between state-religious interactions. Critical assessment on of the state-religion interactions under the tendencies of liberalization has still lacks.

While this literature elaborated the state-religion relations depending largely on Muslims engagement with the government and to a lesser extent state- protestant relations, it overlooked the fact that its conclusion may not be applicable for other religions mainly Orthodox Christians. The Orthodox Church has been dominant throughout the long history of the country and hence, liberalization would have entailed a different dynamics of interaction with the state than other religions. Though these studies help us understand the reform process and the emergent dynamics they largely rely on observable occurrence. What is missing from such kind of analysis, though this is not necessarily their weakness, is the view from below meaning that what liberalization was not meant for large section of people and how it affects their perception of and interaction with the government is largely missing. Østebø (2010) has somehow dealt with these in a passing though his primary concern is intra religious dynamics within Islam. Hence, it might be time to have a local turn in the study of state- religion interaction.

3.2. Subtle Manipulation

Even if the EPRDF introduced secularism and claimed to champion mutual disengagement between state and religion, at times there have been practices of government's subtle manipulation in religious institutions often driven by the regime`s desire to consolidate its grip on power (Abbink, 2011; Abreha, 2014; Dereje 2011a, Hussein, 2006; Merfie, 2014; Mesfin, 2013; Østebø, 2011).

Though both Ethiopian Muslims and Christians in all sects have their own respective 'demands for rights', the state has been reluctant to fulfill these demands which leads to the escalation of tension and conflicts with government (Dereje, 2011). Similarly, as Østebø (2010) argues, "reconfigurations of Ethiopia's religious landscape" by government policy have caused "growing discomfort" among religious groups. There are, however, various loopholes in the legal provisions. The constitution has not clearly stated the extent to which religious freedom needs to be exercised. The rights and the possible limitation imposed on such rights in connection with an individual right of propagation, as a believer, or the right of churches, mosques, temples and relevant establishments to propagate their religion as institutions is not succinctly provided in both the constitution and other laws (Takalign, 2008; Yitaktu, 2006; Yonas, 2012).

These loopholes have led to conflicts between state and religious groups on the one hand and among the followers of the various institutions on the other.

The growing visibility of Islam in the post-1991 period has resulted in an increase of mosques, 'Muslim religious clothing's', religious literature, religious schools, skullcaps and white robes among males in different parts of the country (Østebø, 2012). The Saudi-based Muslim World League (MWL) initially funded these schools and religious literatures. In the subsequent years, the 'unchecked reviving of Islam' has worried the regime and the Christian population as they perceived it in light of the global 'trends of politicization of Islam' (Østebø, 2006, 2011). Hence, the Ethiopian government has come to be increasingly repressive towards anything that even remotely resembles a manifestation of religious radicalism (Abbink, 2011).

The government`s fear of radicalism got worse due to incidents like the aborted assassination attempt on the former Egyptian president, Hosni Mubarak, in Addis Ababa, protest for the incorporation of the value and principles of Sheria in the constitution, and a bomb attack in Addis Ababa waged by al-Ittihad Al-Islamyia. Later, due to the 9/11 terror-attack and the increased geopolitical tensions in the region as a result of bloody engagements declared sub regional extremist like the United Islamic Courts and in Somalia al-Shabab in Somalia there seems to have arisen "genuine fear of Islam in Ethiopia" (Dereje, 2013; Østebø, 2011). Østebø (2011, pp. 11) argues that the regime's "attempt to curb any [Islamic] movements" emanates from the fear of possible threats. The fear of radicalization and politicization of the Ethiopian Muslim cause and the subsequent desire to establish an Islamic Ethiopian state is thus shared by scholars (Ephraim, 2008; Erlich, 2007).

However, there are also dissenting views (Abadir, 2015; Mulunehe, 2014) arguing that the western media and the Ethiopian government have intentionally conjoined to implant Islam phobia in the minds of Ethiopian's hoping especially to 'evoke Christian fears' where, in fact, there has not been any noticeable threat. Abadir (2015, pp. 25) says:

> Government narrative creates a rift between Muslims and Christians and erodes
> their shared social capital, the rift will serve as a space in which stereotypes,
> and mistrust can grow and become the dominant misunderstanding of the

other. Thus, while the governments divide and rule strategy may shore it up in the short run, it will create increasingly divided and mutually mistrusting religious communities in the long run.

3.4 Element of subtle manipulation

Most of these arguments about state manipulation of about religion are based on inferences from behavioral and institutional tendencies within each religion that are difficult empirically to demonstrate. However, arguments based on these factors remain just as that without being backed up by observable facts.

3.5 Tendencies of State Overt Intervention

As a result of the regime's incessant accusations of growing Islamic radicalization, its priority is geared to crashing the alleged "extremism". Karbo (2013, pp. 11) stated the security repercussion of this trends of radicalization in the following ways:

> …*The teachings of the Wahhabiyas or the Middle Eastern Arab Islam are seen as uncompromising; whose only goal is Islamic victory in Ethiopia. These sources of tension between the various strands of Islam on the one hand, and between Islam and the state on the other, and between Islam and Christianity on yet another level continue to be a major source of instability in the country*

This necessitated overt intervention in religious affairs by the Ethiopian government. This is especially important in relation to the Muslim religion where there is an ongoing controversy between the state and a section of the Muslim population. Since 2011, a serious of events and decisions generated tensions between the Ethiopian government and a section of Muslim community. A manifestation of the unhealthy development was the 1995 clash of police with Muslims at the al-Anwar mosque, in which nine peoples were killed, over 100 wounded, and hundreds of Muslims were imprisoned (Østebø, 2005).

Recently, widened the protest and there came violent clashes between police and demonstrators in Addis Ababa, Arsi and Wello where people were killed or

wounded (Østebø, 2011). A twenty-nine member committee elected in Awolia School was tasked to solve the disagreement. According to Abadir (2015:24), "In December of 2011, this group started as a pressure group, and later became a protest movement, aiming to convince the government to terminate its "Ahabshization project" in which the government tried to force the Ahbashe sect of Lebanon as the official religion of Ethiopian Muslims". Later, the reaction of this group to the government allegation and then suppression was rallied around slogan called *Dïms'aččïn Yïssäma* (Let our voice be heard) (Abadir, 2015; Dereje, 2011; Østebø, 2011). The group has been accused by the state of "plotting acts of 'terrorism', an accusation that is viewed by many observers of Ethiopian politics as the culmination of the subtle process of state intervention in religious matters.

However, the High Court of Ethiopia has, as per the state's allegation, affirmed that most of the members of the committee have planned to establish an Islamic Ethiopian State within a period of thirty to forty years. The accusations of the court included trying to dislodge government from Muslims aspiration to derail the constitution and the constitutional government, to uphold establish Selefeya and Whabbi abrogating Al-*Habesh*, and endangering public life by eroding the tolerant assets of the society.

Finally, in July 6, 2015, the High Courts incriminated the defendants of violating article 4 of Anti- Terrorism Proclamation 652/2001 as well as Article 117of the Criminal law, with Abubeker Ahemed and 17 members being sentenced to serve of jail and against others ranging from seven to twenty years (Abadir, 2015; Addis Standard, 2015; Tameru, 2015)**.**

The Muslim community has been calling for a new Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (Mejlis) so that Muslims in Ethiopia will have a legitimate and functional Islamic community organization (Dereje, 2013; Østebø, 2011). The discontent began to be expressed in Friday's prayers during which they called for the election of a new Council and urged the government to keep its hands off. Undeterred

by their cries, the government arrested a dozen organizers of the protest who claim to act on behalf of the Muslim population. The regime alleges that they are radicalizing the Muslim population and supporting terrorist acts and ideologies.

A similar allegation of state intervention on religious matters was discernable within the EOC, during the election selection of the late Patriarch *Abunaä̈P'awlos* who was not widely accepted by the Christian population as his enthronement contravened the law of the church. The relevant law dictates that a patriarch cannot be elected while an incumbent is alive and that, even when its decided to unseat him under special circumstances of dishonoring his creed, it needs to be approved by a two-third majority of the synod. The patriarch who was serving the church during the previous regime argues that he was coerced to leave his post and the country to replace him by a pro-EPRDF figure head (Østebø, 2011). Though the government has been rejecting such accusations, individuals who held high ranking government positions during the process and other sources witnessed otherwise. The former Prime Minister, *Tamïrat Layne*, as well as sources from WikiLeaks confirmed claims of the defunct father (Mesfin, 2013, 2012, 2012; Solomon, 2013).

Following the natural death of patriarch *Abunä̈ Pawlos*, a letter written by the former president of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, *Gïrma Wäldägiyorgis*, to the two contending synods of the Ethiopian church was controversial. The letter invited the unseated *Abunä̈ Märqoriwos* to hold his former position "for the sake of the church's strong union." Girma blurted that *Abunä̈ Märqoriwos* was forced by *Tamïrat Layne*; it was the interest of neither the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo church nor of *Abba Märqoriwos* (VOA, 2012). In the same way, *Gïrma* also wrote to the *Aqabe Mänbär* the interim Patriarch *Abunä̈Natna'el* to reinstate *Abunä̈Märqoriwos*. However, Girma soon made a u-turn claiming he wrote the letter from personal interest. He claimed it had nothing to do with his official capacity as president.

On behalf of the church, *Abunä¨Natna'el* also opposed the intervention of *Gïrma* in church affairs. Appearing on the same media again, Girma said he withdrew his letter accusing unnamed figures for misleading him to act off his limits. His contradictory message to the public only served to corroborate the claim of continued state meddling in church affairs (Lomi, 2013). Some section of the believers allege that the government did not accept the letter of *Gïrma*, for *Abunä¨ Märqoriwos* is not welcome thus forcing Girma to dishonor his own letter. Thus, the allegation has argued that this was taken as a case in point to the flagrant and rampant state intervention in matters of the creed.

According to Ephraim (2008), Solomon (2013) and Konjo (2014) patriarchies *Abunä Täklähaymanot* during the defunct Derg regime and *Abunä P'awlos'* during the incumbent of EPRDF were enthroned disregarding the regulation of the church. Hence, the due regard was given to the regime interest rather than to the cannon of the church.

As to Jörg (2011), however, argues, "there are no clear indications of direct government intervention", though the major contention of the believers is that 'religious leaders are not free from EPRDF political manipulations. Similarly, Østebø (2011, pp.761) claims that the opponents of the late Patriarch *Abunä P'awlos'* capitalized on "his ethnicity to paint him as a puppet of the EPRDF". Similarly, Temesgen (2014) argued that the church's structure is controlled by "one ethnic group" that is loyal to the government making the structure easily manipulative.

As a result of this, Dereje (2011) indicates that the reality on the ground is the Christian population has smoldering grievances that surface in occasional conflicts against the government. There were conflicts between the government and Orthodox Christians in Addis Ababa and other places due for example to a certain hermit, *Abba Amïha Iyyäsus*. During the 1993 student protest at Addis Ababa University the church made a decision to let security forces enter inside the church and brutalize students seeking refugee which clearly contravened the

churches law and such an irreligious act of betrayal raised the consternation on the part of the Orthodox believers (Arehibu, 2013).

Moreover, it is not uncommon to hear complaints and outright criticisms of the government from members of the synod. For instance, in the 2014 discussion on religious tolerance in Ethiopia some members of the synod took issue with the government regarding its historical interpretations of the country`s history and the place of the church in it. Whether there is religious fundamentalism within the EOTC, what the very meaning of religious tolerance has been a hot agenda in Ethiopia (Addis Guday, 2014). These bald members of the synod are of the view that the government depicts the church as oppressor because of its close relationship with previous regimes and that the idea of religious tolerance is being misinterpreted to mean accepting others even when they are intolerant. They argue that expressing grievances of the Christian population against the action of local government officials is being interpreted as engaging in politics and hence interfering in political matters while the unconstitutional actions of local government officials is covered up under the label of maintaining law and order.

Similarly, some of the measures the church has taken in response to the 2005 post election crisis appear to indicate the same currents of subtle manipulation. Some students of the Holy Trinity College requested the church to have days of remembrance and peace. However, the then patriarch not only staunchly defended the government but also expelled students at the vanguard from the college.

The dominated trend in the literature is to focus on the drivers, pathways, and trajectories of radicalization, doing side the pitfalls and outcomes of policies aimed at stemming the trend. There is a compelling need to return to the basic by interrogating first and for most, the dynamics of states' responses to different shades of religious expressions---revivalism, radicalism, terrorism---and the divergent ramifications on and intertwinements with interreligious interactions.

In specific term, existing scholarship on the relationship between state and religion, and between/among religions recognize four broad trends along the tendency of subtle manipulation and state intervention.

(i) where state ideology is the driver of policy responses to religion (Dereje, 2011; Haustein & Østebø, 2011; Østebø, 2014); (ii) the threat perception by the state emanating from religion as a determinant of state policy (Abbink, 2014); (iii) narrative around identity and competing claims for a space in the public sphere by different religious groups (Abbink, 2011, 1998; Dereje, 2011b; Hussien, 2006; Dereje, 2013); and (iv) dynamics within each religion (Østebø, 2014, 2010; Rettberg, 2014; Desplat, 2005; Zerihun, 2014). According to Hussein and Østebø (2014), then, the policy landscape relating to the religious lines the current regime is largely mediated by the contradictory processes and aspirations embedded in the twin process of liberalization and the exercise of hegemony by the state. Abbink (2014), on the other hand, approached the issue in terms of the legal framework mediating state-religion interactions, the attendant vulnerability of the state, and the historical rooted contentions and cooperation among religious groups in Ethiopia. Other scholars viewed state –religion and inter religious interactions adopting an inside-out approach; meaning that they focus on the tension and interaction within each religion and their ramification for state-society interactions.

4. General Remarks

These studies, useful as they are, have a number of shortcomings. First, they are based mostly on methodological foundation: they generally draw conclusions from key moments, or incidents, thereby missing the vast, mostly unseen complex processes but leading to such incidents.

By extrapolating the nature of state-religion and interreligious interactions based on isolated events, significant as those might seem the conclusion precedes the analysis. Second, almost all the studies are overly, elitist, relying mostly on

key issues /moments. The views of ordinary citizens and their visibility in the religo-political landscape of the country is missing. Third, extant studies ascribe greater salience to the state in shaping interactions between different groups. Only little of known about the extent that inter religious interactions are driven by state policy; in which case one can argue that the state has captured religion; hardly the extent to which religions might also have capture the state. Finally, these studies are not anchored a firm conceptual and theoretical frameworks the type that critically interrogates the nexus between state and religion. In reality however, because frameworks to explain one aspect of state-religion interactions may not fully capture the whole picture the like hood of hasty generalization is high. Hence, it is an urgent imperative to simultaneously interrogate the dynamics of state- religion and inter religion interaction in Ethiopia in order to harvest holistic insights on the dynamics or undercurrents that are not obvious.

Generally, the state's approach to religion alternates between the three different approaches: liberalization, subtle manipulation, and occasional outright intervention with each policy measure having its own effect on the nature of state-religion relations in contemporary Ethiopia. A legal framework to determine the pours boundary of state-religion interactions is very essential to the peaceful coexistence among the two institutions and the laity.

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