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The civil rights movement of Ethiopian Muslims in 2012: historical grounds and driving forces

Éloi Ficquet

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Abstract

During the first half of 2012, Ethiopian Muslims demonstrated with mass rallies every Friday. They were campaigning for the respect of constitutional rights to religious freedom. Their anger was particularly directed at the so-called 'Ahbash' movement, founded in Lebanon in the 1980s by an Ethiopian Islamic scholar. In 2011, followers of this movement were suspected of taking root in Ethiopia by promoting a doctrine that would become official with the support of the authoritarian regime under the control of the EPRDF party. This chapter examines three dimensions of this controversy that reflect the challenges of participation of Muslims to Ethiopian citizenship. First, the figure of the shaykh 'Abdullāh al-Harārī (1920–2008), who was at the origin of the Ahbash movement, offers an insight into the long-standing divisions between Ethiopian Muslims regarding their sense of belonging to the national identity. Second, the outbreak of protests against the Ahbash doctrine followed a cycle of repeated controversies over the organisation and independence of the representative bodies of the community. Finally, the weekly demonstrations displayed the inventive dynamics of a social movement of unprecedented scale in a context of political transition before and after the death of PM Meles Zenawi in August 2012.

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Introduction

Dimsatchin yissema, 'Let our voice be heard'. This statement in the Amharic language was one of the main slogans chanted by large crowds outside mosques every Friday during the first six months of 2012, in the Muslim neighbourhoods of the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, and other predominantly Muslim cities of various sizes. Taken up as the title of a Facebook page (in Amharic, English, Arabic), as well as on placards and T-shirts worn by the protesters, this expression has become one of the emblems of this movement.

Another non-religious symbol of this mobilisation was the yellow card, borrowed from the football register and taken from the civil movements described as 'Arab springs'. By brandishing this warning sign, the demonstrators did not intend to encourage the overthrow of power, but to

protest against excessive political control over religious activities. The watchwords called for respect for the separation between the state and religions under the terms of Article 11 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia, in force since 1995.

In the wake of the Arab Spring movements, digital social networks played an important role in the deployment and coordination of demonstrations. ‘Anti-Ahbash’ was the watchword taken up by hashtags and the headings of websites that disseminated information about the mobilisation. The terms that compose this watchword may seem paradoxical. Indeed, in Arabic, *al-Aḥbāsh* is the plural form of *al-Ḥabasha*, meaning ‘Ethiopians’. The Ethiopian Muslims mobilised in this social movement did not call themselves ‘anti-Ethiopian’, but rather demanded full recognition of Ethiopian citizenship and related rights. They challenged a doctrinal movement founded in Lebanon by a Muslim scholar of Ethiopian origin, whose followers called ‘Ahbash’ were suspected of wanting to establish themselves in Ethiopia, with the support of the authorities.

This summary chapter considers three dimensions of this controversy. First, the figure of the shaykh at the origin of the Ahbash movement offers an insight into the long-standing divisions between Ethiopian Muslims regarding their sense of belonging to the national space, their relations with the state and the international networks in which they participate. Second, the outbreak of protests against the authorities' support for the Ahbash doctrine followed a cycle of repeated controversies over the organisation and independence of

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community representative bodies. Finally, the weekly demonstrations displayed the inventive dynamics of a social movement of unprecedented scale in a political context of inflexible authority facing an unforeseen transition.

The Ahbash movement: the banned shaykh and the return of his followers

The Association of Islamic Charitable Projects (in Arabic: *Jam‘iyya al-Mashārī‘ al-Khayriyya al-Islāmiyya*, in English *Association of Islamic charitable Projects*, AICP), founded in Beirut in 1930, became from 1983 the official façade of the religious movement commonly referred to as *al-Aḥbāsh*. This term, which means ‘the Ethiopians’ in Arabic, indicates a link between this

movement and Ethiopia due to the origin of its founder and ideologue, the shaykh ‘Abdullāh Muḥammad Yūsuf al-Hararī al-Ḥabashī, born in 1920, died in 2008. The two final attributes (*nisba*) of his name indicate his place of birth in the city of Harar in eastern Ethiopia, *Habasha* in Arabic, hence the name taken by his followers in Lebanon and throughout the world.

The shaykh had left Ethiopia in 1947, because of quarrels that broke out in Harar in the post-Second World War context. In those days, Ethiopia had to rebuild an imperial state, dismantled by five years of Italian occupation (1936–1941) and then placed under British trusteeship. Decolonisation processes then began to raise the question of the reunification of peoples separated by colonial borders. The shaykh ‘Abdullāh rallied to the supporters of Ethiopian unity, against other religious leaders of Harar who were partisans of the Wahhabi rigorist doctrine and supported political strategies of regional convergence with the idea of unifying all the components of a great Somali nation. The confrontation was so hard between shaykh ‘Abdullāh and his rivals that he was described as *shaykh al-fitna*, the ‘shaykh of discord’. Banished from Ethiopia in 1947, along with some of his opponents, he went first to Saudi Arabia, then to Jerusalem and Syria, where he completed his spiritual training. He finally settled in Lebanon, where he published his work and gathered around him a few followers before becoming the head of the charitable association from which his doctrine could be widely disseminated.

The numerous theological essays published by shaykh ‘Abdullāh al-Hararī are particularly critical of all the principles of radical Salafist Islam, or Wahhabism, condemned as deceptive innovations and deviations. In particular, the Salafists are vilified by al-Hararī for their misuse of *takfir* (denouncing other Muslims as miscreants), for their political project of Islamic absolutism aimed at the restoration of the Caliphate, and for their justification of violence in achieving this goal. In its numerous works, shaykh al-Hararī advocates, for example, the plurality of religious interpretations within Islam, tolerance between religions, the rejection of violence, a quietist attitude advocating submission to any kind of ruling authority or the authorisation of modern clothing and behaviour for women. These positions are based on a combination of different currents of thought, including the *Shafi’ī* legal school, Sufi mysticism and borrowing from some elements of Shia Islam. The interpretations proposed by al-Hararī are so personal that they cannot be considered a typical expression of Ethiopian Islam, nor of the Islam practised in Harar. Under no circumstances can the interpretation and practice of Islam by the Ahabash followers be

considered as a form of diffraction of Islam as practised in Ethiopia, even if they take their inspiration from certain liberalities that can be observed in the Ethiopian multi-religious context.

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In addition to doctrine, the other characteristic of this movement lies in its communication strategy, which has contributed to the rapid expansion of its regional and international network, first through radio broadcasts and then through early use of the internet with online preaching and multilingual discussion groups. Religious messages transcribed into pop or rap music also contributed to the spread of the movement towards the urban and international middle classes. Several branches of the movement were established in Europe or North America, addressing a fairly large audience attracted by the moderate aspect of its discourse and by a practice of Islam compatible with modern, multi-faith social environments.

These elements of tolerance and modernity mainstreamed into religious discourse help to explain why the doctrinal and media apparatus of the Ahabash movement could be seen as an attractive instrument in the fight against extremism in the eyes of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) leadership, whose ideological background was a combination of secularised Marxist thought accommodated to the liberal principles of international organisations, while maintaining a background of obedience to national Orthodox Christianity. However, behind politically correct posturing served by an effective communication strategy, the Ahabash movement confronted its opponents with methods of 'verbal warfare', using a whole range of defamatory tactics, outrageous statements, declarations of exclusion from Islam, intimidation and political collusion.¹ In return, the Ahabash were vilified by their detractors as an instrument of propaganda of the secular Syrian Alawite military regime in the 1990s. These rhetorical and political tensions led to violent clashes in the political-religious arena in Lebanon culminating in 1995 with the assassination of the leader of the movement, Nizār al-Halabi, by a group of Palestinian activists. In 2010, some armed groups affiliated to Ahabash fought in the streets of Beirut against Hezbollah supporters. Relations between the two parties, both pro-Syrian, deteriorated after the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005, in which they were suspected.

Among the Muslims of Harar and the surrounding region of Hararge, the shaykh 'Abdullah al-Hararī was known and respected in his homeland as a successful scholar of high standing. When

he visited Harar at the end of his life, in 1996 and 2003,² the shaykh received a warm welcome from the people and did not provoke hostile reactions, although the discord of the past was not forgotten. However, the presence of his organisation and the influence of his doctrine have long been negligible in the places of expression, practice and thought of Ethiopian Islam.

The seminars of dissent (2011)

In order to tackle concerns about the spread and strengthening of radical Muslim religious movements, considered foreign and harmful, the Ethiopian authorities have allowed preachers from the Ahbash movement to disseminate their teachings in Ethiopia through a programme of training seminars. This initiative, however, reawakened age-old polemics in Ethiopian Islam. Some inadvertence can be seen in this approach. In the eyes of the Ethiopian state authorities in charge of monitoring and regulating religious practices, the ideas of the Lebanese Ahbash, which appeared moderate and adapted to modernity, were considered all the more acceptable to Ethiopian Muslim opinion since they came from a great Muslim scholar of Ethiopian origin. However, this presupposition was based on binary stereotypical assumptions that pitted one category of Muslims perceived as well-integrated and harmless, i.e. uncompromising and accommodating with other religions, against another category of Muslims subject to external influences, characterised as extremist or fundamentalist,

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more assertive and uncompromising, ostensibly assertive and distinctive, with high moral standards and openly critical of established lifestyles.

According to this binary perspective, Sufi mystical Islam would correspond to a more authentically Ethiopian or Ethiopianised Islam. Indeed, several Sufi currents of Islam have long been established in Ethiopia and have contributed greatly to the penetration and circulation of Islamic belief and thought in all the territories that make up the country today. Mystical rituals, involving the intermediation of holy personalities, have shown themselves to be compatible with local cultural beliefs and practices, such as spirit cults, and open to inter-religious interaction, especially Orthodox Christianity. However, the idea of instituting Sufism, through the version reconstructed by the Ahbash movement, as the only legitimate doctrine representative of the community of faith and law of Islam in Ethiopia was, on the part of the authorities, an ignorance

of the internal dynamics of plurality, i.e. of coexistence and rivalry, between several legal traditions and currents within Islam.

The dynamic plurality of Ethiopian Islam has been constantly renewed by incoming or outgoing flows: reception of learned authorities from neighbouring Arabia or from further afield; international circulation of pilgrims and intellectuals (students or renowned experts); commercial exchanges of objects and works that can be used for various purposes. The Sufi orders have been particularly active in these international movements, and are in no way the expression of a specifically Ethiopian 'mystical melting pot'. On the contrary, rigorous conceptions of Islam have been conceived and promoted locally by Ethiopian Sufi Muslim thinkers from major centres of religious education. It is by associating and confronting these positions and debates from outside and inside that Islam has established itself in Ethiopia as a religion of diversity. Depending on places, periods and socio-political situations, this religion has oscillated between two poles, one normative and rigorous, the other more adaptive and conciliatory towards local practices.³

This inability (or unwillingness) to consider the plurality of Islam accounted for an important part of the choices that underpinned the Ethiopian government's religious policy. The will to exercise doctrinal control over Islam took a concrete form in the setting up of a programme of training seminars entrusted to instructors attached to the Ahbash movement, under the patronage of the Ethiopian Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs, with the support of the Ministry of Federal Affairs.

The first of these seminars was held at Haramaya University in the east of the country near the city of Harar in June 2011. Officially, the aim was to instruct community representatives, including mosque leaders, for a two-week course on the constitutionally mandated rights and duties in religious matters. It was also intended to train the participants in the prevention of religious extremism and to provide them with arguments to counter the theses of Salafist fundamentalism.⁴ A significant number of religious leaders, about 1,300, are said to have participated. The seminar opened with an inaugural conference in Harar, in the presence of the Minister of Federal Affairs, and was followed by a closing conference in Addis Ababa. The event was therefore highly visible to the public.

Since the disputed elections of 2005, the practice of the training seminar has become the favourite tool of the Ethiopian government for the indoctrination and supervision of the elite.

Monitoring the attendance of participants and the conformity of their views and positions is helpful to ensure their loyalty. Based on the procedures recommended by international aid standards, this system of government action is also appreciated by donors as quantifiable performance indicators in the evaluation grids for public policies under headings such as ‘capacity building’, ‘dissemination of good practices’ or ‘dialogue with civil society’.

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Contrary to the usual practice of obedient attendance, several participants in the first sessions of the seminar openly expressed their dissatisfaction or refused to participate. The main criticisms focused on the presence of instructors from Lebanon, distributing to participants teaching materials published by the Ahabash charity organisation. The vice-president of the Ahabash foundation, Dr Samir Qadi, gave a presentation in English at the closing conference in Addis Ababa on the threat of Salafi extremism.⁵ Such an advocacy of the Ahabash ideology was seen as an attempt to impose an official doctrine of Islam under the control of the state. The seminars would probably not have caused such a stir if they had remained at the formal exposure, by recognised Ethiopian scholarly authorities, of government positions on the constitutional provisions relating to the separation of political power and religious cults. Conversely, the authorities considered that it was their responsibility to take preventive measures against the threat of external influences channelled through religious institutions to subvert the unity of the nation and threaten its security.

A conflict of representativeness

Since the first years of the federal system in 1991–1992, relations between the government and the Muslim community have been mainly based on the Ethiopian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, commonly referred to as the Majlis in Arabic.⁶ This institution has an institutional status as an association and is run by an elected assembly of 11 members. The Majlis is officially accredited as the only body empowered to represent and defend the community’s interests, as well as to supervise all organisations related to the practice and teaching of Islam (mosques, schools, charities). Without a legal framework to guarantee its independence and establish the extent of its responsibilities and the way it operates, this organisation has acted as the executive arm of the state for the control of religious activities. Its composition and the scope of its authority had already been the subject of violent contestation and tension on several occasions, notably in 1995 and

2004.⁷ The recurrent polemic among Ethiopian Muslims on the authority of the Majlis was reactivated by the debate on the de-radicalisation seminars entrusted to the Ahabash organisation. Faced with the first criticisms expressed locally, the Majlis followed the unwavering line of government action by maintaining the organisation of seminars in other regions. ‘Certified’ preachers, having participated in the seminars, were subsequently assigned to the country’s main mosques and religious schools.

This determination of the authorities to reform Islam from within led to the first expressions of outrage and dissent in Muslim opinion through private gatherings and mosques. The Muslim press (notably the weekly magazines *Hijra* or *Yamuslimoch Gudday*) began to report on these matters. These worrying questions concerned a rather large population, not very militant, but careful to respect the principle of separation between the sphere of religious faith and the sphere of political authority. The authorities saw in these initial reactions a confirmation of the growing influence of radical Islamist positions, prompting them to harden their stance and take measures of institutional control which led to an amplification of the controversy.

Behind the ideological dispute over the introduction of the doctrine of the Lebanese Ahabash movement, an underlying conflict resurfaced over the legitimacy and representativeness of religious institutions in a secularised social and constitutional setting. By claiming the application of constitutional rights to religious freedom, the hard core of the protests challenged the composition and functioning of the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs. The protest was not limited to criticising the established structures, but tended to invalidate them, leading to increased tensions. The central actors of the movement were in fact advocating for the defence

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of the network formed around the private community school Awoliya, which was supported as a non-governmental organisation by foreign funding – Saudi in particular – and which had long exercised functions of representation as an alternative to public authority.

Many actors in the Muslim business community in Ethiopia received education at this school, which was founded in the 1960s with the support of Saudi funds. The school had long acted as an informal coordinating and representative body for the community before the Ethiopian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (the Majlis) was formally established. For the network of teachers, students, alumni and supporters of this institution, the debate around the Ahabash seminars

promoted by the Majlis was an opportunity to reaffirm their influence and legitimacy as an informal collective of community spokespersons against the institutionalised authority of the Majlis. In return, the Majlis asserted its authority to dismantle this well-established and reputable private rival organisation.

The first step in this power struggle began in September 2011, with the withdrawal of the licence of the International Islamic Relief Organization, a Saudi NGO that had funded the Awoliya School since its foundation. The reasons given were legal, within the framework of the Ethiopian NGO law of 6 January 2009, which drastically limited the authorised domains of activity and outside sources of funding. In December 2011, the institutional conflict continued with the dismissal of the school's administrators and Arabic language teachers, who were replaced by individuals deemed trustworthy for the Majlis' administration. For former students and supporters of Awoliya, this decision represented an unacceptable abuse of power. It marked the end of the mediations seeking a way out of the crisis and led to the start of a mass demonstration in the school compound on 4 January 2012, gathering at least 2,500 supporters. Since the violent repression of the post-election unrest in 2005, it was the first time that a mass protest of this scale had taken place in Addis Ababa.

An unprecedented Muslim mobilisation

This large rally in support of the Awoliya School was the starting point of a series of protests that continued for more than six months, giving rise to a level of mobilisation unprecedented for a religious community in the recent political history of Ethiopia. Every Friday, after the great prayer, crowds of Muslim men and women gathered in ever-increasing numbers. The Awoliya School and the Anwar Grand Mosque in Addis Ababa became the epicentre of a wave of protests that spread to many cities, mainly in Muslim-majority areas. The motionless crowd spilled over into the streets adjacent to the mosques in a peaceful manner. The movement coordinators were particularly vigilant in holding this line of non-violence and not allowing grievances to deviate from issues of religious freedom and community representation.

The government did not respond immediately to the initial demonstrations. In official statements, these public expressions of discontent were at first minimised, being reduced to an insignificant number of troublemakers. However, the rallies continued to grow in size, reaching

several large cities, to the point of presenting signs of revolt. The Muslim issue then became the government's main concern, prompting it to take urgent action and to show its determination not to give in to the discontent of a large, though difficult to measure, part of the Muslim population.⁸ Three months after the first demonstrations, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi (1995–2012) reacted with a speech to parliament on 17 April 2012. In a much less conciliatory style than his speeches in English to international partners, he accused the demonstrators of promoting Salafist doctrine, suggesting that they were agents of a jihadist plot linked to the Al-Qaeda organisation whose cells were recently discovered in the territories

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of Arsi and Bale in Oromiya. After explaining the nature of the threat, he stressed that the government would not hesitate to crack down on any extremist group threatening the peace and order of the country.

The intransigence of this discourse, and the repression that followed, contrasted with the non-violent strategy of the protests and the areligious character of the slogans, which dealt with questions of rights and citizenship. Far from deterring the continuation of the movement, this hardening of tone by the authorities strengthened the determination of the demonstrators. In order to break up the marches, the police used tear gas and even physical violence. In the face of this repression, the durability of the protest movement was due to its capacity for self-control through the precepts of non-violence advocating a calm and impassive collective attitude. The watchwords clearly proscribed violent actions, such as stone-throwing or looting, which could have led to even more brutal repression in the name of public security. Faced with accusations of religious extremism and terrorist inclination, the demonstrators presented an opposite face to the public and the international media, being aware that the success of their movement in the long term depended mainly on their image.

A shift in the rhetoric of the movement from a religious controversy to a civil right struggle thus occurred. The first rallies were characterised by the incantation in unison of the formula *Allahu akbar*, following a mode of expression characteristic of protest movements in Arab countries, such as in Yemen. The condemnations focused on the Ahabash doctrine, which was rejected as a deviant sect. Gradually, the rallies adopted secular mottos such as *dimtsachin yissema* 'let our voice be heard', which became the hallmark of the movement, while concentrating the

religious polemic on the question of respecting constitutional limits against state interference in religious affairs.

The communication strategy was also visual, using non-religious symbols such as yellow cards as a warning sign, or white ribbons as a demand for peace and an assertion of non-violence. Following the example of the social movements of the ‘Arab Spring’, the movement’s dynamic was reinforced by the use of new communication technologies. Calls for demonstrations and slogans were disseminated via SMS. Information, opinions, instructions and catchwords were circulated through online social media (Facebook, Twitter). In-depth analyses of the situation were published and commented on blogs. Numerous videos of the demonstrations in many cities, testifying to the extent of the movement, were posted on platforms such as YouTube and widely picked up and watched through the Ethiopian diaspora media (*Esat, Bilaltube*).

One of the particular features of the impetus of this movement was the maintenance over time of its legalist and non-violent nature so as not to give credence to the accusations made by the government of a movement guided by radical groups linked to foreign terrorist organisations. On the part of the demonstrators, it was a question of claiming their rights as citizens, these rights having been acquired at the end of a long and difficult process of integration into the state. The central theme of the movement was neither the overthrow of power nor the recognition of specific rights for Muslims. On the contrary, the main expectation was the return of the government to the attitude of pluralistic neutrality that had characterised its religious policy since the establishment of the federal regime in 1991, and which was broadly satisfactory to most Muslims, notwithstanding the persistence of disagreements on issues of representation and the existence of pockets of tension.

However, the religious dimension of the movement was not completely wiped out. Several mobilisations took the form of recitation ceremonies of spiritual poems in homage to the prophet of Islam. The practice of the *mawlid* ritual, popular in Sufi Islam and firmly rejected by the Salafists, was intended to show that the movement was not in the hands of religious

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extremists, guided by the struggle against Sufism, but rather carried by a conciliatory vision of Ethiopian Islam in its diversity. Within the Muslim community, however, disagreements arose over how religious gatherings were misused to cover up political meetings.

Another politically religiously significant development was the message of solidarity sent in May 2012 to Ethiopian Muslim protesters by the US-based Synod of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Exile, which has influence among conservative Ethiopians in the North American diaspora most hostile to the EPRDF regime. This statement reflected the fact that part of the Christian population did not consider the Muslim movement as an Islamist threat, but as an expression of civil society demanding the withdrawal of state control over religious activities.

Among the claims voiced by the demonstrators, the election of new members of the representative assembly of the Majlis was accepted by the government as a way out of the crisis. However, the organisation of the election was once again subject to disputes over whether the election should be held in local government offices under state supervision or in mosques. Another contentious issue was that the movement had itself institutionalised by a self-proclaimed committee composed of 17 personalities linked to the Awoliya network. This initiative was perceived by the authorities as a trick to circumvent the Majlis.

In July 2012, the protest intensified before the celebration of Ramadan. The situation was strained by increasingly insistent rumours about the deterioration of the Prime Minister's health. The government claimed that his temporary absence was not a cause for concern, but with the prolonged illness of the head of government, the executive branch was increasingly paralysed in its functioning. In this critical situation, the government could show no signs of weakening. The crisis had to stop and repression was intensified. A wave of arrests was carried out against protest leaders, their supporters and journalists. These police operations provoked violent clashes the week before the beginning of Ramadan. The period of Muslim fasting, however, did not lead to increased tension. Public attention was polarised by news of the Prime Minister's health, with widespread rumours that his death was being kept hidden.⁹ The end of the fast, marked by the celebration of Eid al Fitr on Saturday 18 August, was the occasion for some demonstrations aimed at reawakening the protest. However, three days later, the death of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi was announced publicly. The national mourning was a moment of respect and national unity that could not be disrupted. During this interruption, the question of the formation of a new government gave hope to the demonstrators that there would be an amnesty for the detainees. On 21 September 2012, former Deputy Prime Minister Haile Mariam Dessalegn was sworn in as the Chief Executive pledging to continue the policy of his mentor and predecessor. The main challenge of this transition was to leave no room for any suspicion of weakening or vacancy of power. Elections for the Majlis

were held in early October 2012. Anti-Ahbash activists complained that the process was unfair, as their representatives were kept in prison. The election result, described as ‘free and democratic’ by the authorities’ self-satisfaction statements, confirmed the control of the Majlis by party affiliates.

The members of the Arbitration Committee and other figures of the protest movement were kept in prison. After being postponed several times, their trial took place in July 2015. The court found the eighteen defendants guilty on charges of attempted terrorism. From the summer of 2015 onwards, another non-religious protest movement was initiated by the Oromo youth known as Qeerroo. Following similar mobilisation strategies to those initiated by the Ethiopian Muslim civil rights movement, these Oromo protesters were campaigning for justice and democracy, demanding the release of all political prisoners. After several months of crisis, the imprisoned Muslim activists were released in February 2018, along with other journalists and prominent opposition figures. This was the first act of an end to the EPRDF regime. Abiy Ahmed was then appointed Prime Minister in April 2018. A Protestant himself, descended from an Amhara Orthodox Christian mother and an Oromo Muslim father, he embodied the enchanting promises of reconciliation of all parts of the Ethiopian nation. At the same time, he reactivated internal political divisions in order to impose himself in power, leading to the opening of the fault lines of a civil war, in which the religious factor has been inoperative.

Further readings

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Notes

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- ¹ On the al-Ahbash movement, its doctrinal basis and its Middle Eastern and international developments, see Hamzeh, Nizar and Dekmejian, Hrair. 1996. "A Sufi Response to Political Islamism: Al-Ahbash of Lebanon." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 28, no. 2: 217–229; Kabha, Mustafa and Erlich, Haggai. 2006. "Al-Ahbash and Wahhabiya: Interpretations of Islam." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 38, no. 4: 519–538; Avon, Dominique. 2008. "Les Ahbaches. Un mouvement libanais sunnite contesté dans un monde globalisé." *Cahiers d'études du religieux* 2. <https://doi.org/10.4000/cerri.331> (Retrieved on: January 14, 2020).
- ² These dates are given by Desplat, Patrick. 2005. "The Articulation of Religious Identities and their Boundaries in Ethiopia: Labelling Difference and Processes of Contextualization in Islam." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 35, no. 4: 500–501. In April 2012, a Harari informant showed me pictures of the 2003 visit.
- ³ This is shown by the remarkable study done by Terje Østebø on the establishment and development of Puritan Salafist Islam in the Oromo territory of Bale. See Østebø, Terje. 2012. *Localising Salafism. Religious Change among Oromo Muslims in Bale, Ethiopia*. Leiden-Boston: Brill.
- ⁴ Abbink, Jon. 2014. "Religious Freedom and the Political Order: The Ethiopian 'secular state' and the Containment of Muslim Identity Politics." *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 8, no. 3: 353.
- ⁵ Terje Østebø gives several details on the organisation of the seminar and cites in particular the introductory lecture by Samir Qadi. See Østebø, Terje. 2013. "Islam and State Relations in Ethiopia: From Containment to the Production of a Governmental Islam." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81, no. 4: 1029–1060.
- ⁶ The creation of this representative assembly had been one of the demands of Muslim Ethiopians during the massive protests in the spring of 1974, which led to the fall of the monarchy. The revolutionary military regime responded to many of the demands for recognition of the practice of Islam and the representation of Muslims in political bodies. A representative council was established by leading figures in the community, recognised de facto, but without formal legal status. See Hussein Ahmed. 1994. "Islam and Islamic Discourse in Ethiopia (1973–1993)." In *New Trends in Ethiopian Studies*, vol. 1, edited by Harold G. Marcus: 775–801. Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press.

⁷ See Haustein, Jörg and Østebø, Terje. 2011. "EPRDF's Revolutionary Democracy and Religious Plurality: Islam and Christianity in Post-Derg Ethiopia." *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 5, no. 4: 762.

⁸ According to official statistics from the 2007 census, Muslims represent 34% of the Ethiopian population. Among this Muslim population, it is difficult to measure the proportion of people who support government policy or the protest movement. A large proportion of Muslims appears to have been neutral, unmobilised, waiting for a return to the *status quo*.

⁹ See Ficquet, Eloi. 2016. "La mort du Premier ministre éthiopien Meles Zenawi (août 2012): dissimulation, assumption et sanctification." *Politique africaine* 142: 31–56.