Islam, Ethnicity, and Conflict in Ethiopia

Focusing on the role of religion and ethnicity in times of conflict, Terje Østebø investigates the Muslim-dominated insurgency against the Ethiopian state in the 1960s, shedding new light on this understudied case to contribute to a deeper understanding of religion, interreligious relations, ethnicity, and ethno-nationalism in the Horn of Africa. *Islam, Ethnicity, and Conflict in Ethiopia* develops new theoretical perspectives on the interrelations between ethnic and religious identities, by applying the term *peoplehood* as an analytical tool; one that allows for more flexible perspectives. Exploring the interplay of imagination and lived, affective reality, and inspired by the “materiality turn” in cultural and religious studies, Østebø argues for an integrated approach that recognizes and explores embodiment and emplacement as intrinsic to formations of ethnic and religious identities.

Terje Østebø is Associate Professor in the Center for African Studies and the Department of Religion at the University of Florida where his research focuses on Islam in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa and Salafism in Africa. He is the author of *Localising Salafism* (2012) and the coeditor of *Muslim Ethiopia* (2013).
African Studies Series

The African Studies series, founded in 1968, is a prestigious series of monographs, general surveys, and textbooks on Africa covering history, political science, anthropology, economics, and ecological and environmental issues. The series seeks to publish work by senior scholars as well as the best new research.

Editorial Board:
David Anderson, The University of Warwick
Catherine Boone, The London School of Economics and Political Science
Carolyn Brown, Rutgers University, New Jersey
Christopher Clapham, University of Cambridge
Michael Gomez, New York University
Richard Roberts, Stanford University, California
David Robinson, Michigan State University
Leonardo A. Villalón, University of Florida

Other titles in the series are listed at the back of the book.
Islam, Ethnicity, and Conflict in Ethiopia
The Bale Insurgency, 1963–1970

TERJE ØSTEBØ
University of Florida
To Marit
# Contents

List of Maps  
List of Figures  
List of Tables  
Acknowledgments  

1 Introduction  

2 *Islaama* Peoplehood and Landscapes of Bale  

3 Conquest and Resistance  

4 Bale at War  

5 The Insurgency: Fighters and Fragmentation  

6 Peasant Insurgency without Peasants  

7 Land Tenure and the Land-Clan Connection  

8 Christianity, Nation, and Amhara Peoplehood  

9 Trans-local Dynamics: The Bale Insurgency in the Context of the Horn  

10 *Islaama* vs Amhara and the Making of Local Antagonism  

11 The Bale Insurgency, *Islaama*, and Oromo Ethno-nationalism  

12 Conclusions  

Glossary  

References  

Index
Maps

1 Ethiopia – and Bale  page xiii
2.1 1960 administrative structures of Bale (adapted from Gebru Tareke (1991))  37
7.1 Clans’ geographical distribution in Bale  186
Figures

2.1 The central highlands of Bale  page 39
2.2 Bale Mountains  40
2.3 The Sanate plateau  41
2.4 The lowlands of Bale  42
2.5 Arsi Oromo Clan system  47
2.6 The Shrine of Sheikh Hussein  57
3.1 Imam Muhammad Sayyid’s travel documents (1)  80
3.2 Imam Muhammad Sayyid’s travel documents (2)  81
4.1 Mt. Gona in Sewena  94
4.2 One of Waqo Gutu’s wives and sons  114
4.3 Waqo Lugu surrenders to General Jagama Kello  115
4.4 Waqo Lugu’s armory  116
4.5 Waqo Gutu surrenders to General Jagama Kello  117
5.1 Hassan Roba  124
5.2 The leaders of the insurgency  126
5.3 Hajji Adam Sado  144
11.1 Sheikh Hussein Sura  302
Tables

2.1 The seven hajji, clans, and shrines  
6.1 Main Balabats, clan affiliation, and geographical locations  
6.2 Estimated population size, density, and number of households according to awraja in 1968  
6.3 Distribution of actual land and measured land in hectares according to awraja  
6.4 Distribution of type of measured land according to awraja  
6.5 Distribution of government land according to land classification and awraja  
6.6 Distribution of measured confiscated land according to land classification and awraja
Acknowledgments

This study has been years in the making and could not have been completed without the help and assistance of a range of people who need to be acknowledged. To start with, I want to express my gratitude for the generous support from the Norwegian Non-Fiction Writers and Translators Association, enabling me to conduct fieldwork in Ethiopia and to concentrate on writing. I also need to thank the University of Florida for awarding small grants for travel and a full year of sabbatical leave.

The work has been made possible by the valuable help from people in Bale and elsewhere in Ethiopia. First of all, I thus wish to thank all my informants – who are too many to mention by name – in Bale as well as in other parts of Ethiopia for trusting me and for welcoming me into their lives. I am thankful for their willingness to share from their memory, knowledge, and thoughts. The present text belongs, in this manner, to them. I am in particular grateful to Awel Abdullatif, Muhammad Jemal, Nuredin Aman, and Ziad Alieh for being invaluable bridges between my interlocutors and me. I also need to thank Hajji Abadir Hussein and Idris Obsa. I am, moreover, grateful to the late Qenazmach Abdulqadir Qadi Ahmed and General Jagama Kello for providing photographs from a bygone era.

My thanks are also due to friends and colleagues within the community of Ethiopianists across the world – for fruitful inputs, reading drafts, and other forms of support: Teferi Adam, Cedric Barnes, Dereje Feyissa, Tobias Hagmann, Mohammed Hassan, James McCann, Hassan Muhammad Kawo, Chuck Schaefer, Kjetil Tronvoll, and Feqadu Tufa. I am similarly grateful for support from colleagues and students at the University of Florida: Yekatit Getachew, Bhakti Mamtora, and in particular my former colleague Manuel Vasquez for detailed reading of earlier drafts.

Cambridge University Press has provided invaluable support getting this book ready. I want to thank Daniel Brown, Maria Marsh, and the
xii

Acknowledgments

editors of the African Studies Series – David Anderson, Catherine Boone, Carolyn Brown, Christopher Clapham, Michael Gomez, Nancy J. Jacobs, Richard Roberts, David Robinson, and Leonardo A. Villalón – for believing in the project. I am also grateful for valuable suggestions from the two anonymous reviewers, and for assistance from the staff at Cambridge University Press.

Lastly, my truly felt gratitude goes to my family. To my daughters, Victoria and Julia, for their patience during their father’s periods of absence and for being such sources of inspiration. To my wife, Marit, for all the years together in Bale, for working together in the field, for sharing her findings and ideas from her own research in Bale, for diligent reading of the many drafts of this text, and for her relentless support and encouragement.
Map 1 Ethiopia – and Bale