

The rise and expansion of Islam in Bale of Ethiopia:

Socio-cultural and political factors and inter- religious relations

By

TESHOME AMENU

THE NORWEGIAN TEACHER ACADEMY
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

May 2008

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Philosophy in Religious Education at
Norsk Lærerakademi (NLA), Bergen, Norway

Contents

DECLARATION	4
DEDICATION	5
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	7
ACRONYMS	9
GLOSSARY	10
1. INTRODUCTION	11
1.1 Objectives of the study.....	12
1.2 Significance of the study	13
1.3 Methods of data Collection.....	13
1.4 The study Area and the people.....	14
1.5 Theoretical Framework.....	16
1.6 Structure of the research.....	21
2. EARLY RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL SETTINGS OF THE ARSI OROMO OF BALE	23
2.1 The Islamic Sultanate of Bale	23
2.2 The history of the Oromo	25
2.2.1 The Oromo Socio-Political Institutions	25
2.2.2 Waaqefannaa (the religion of the Oromo)	26
2.2.3 The Oromo movement and expansion.....	27
2.2.4 The Story and settlements of the Arsi Oromo.....	30
2.3 Religious Pilgrimage.....	32
2.3.1 Dirre Sheik Hussein (Sheik Hussein Shrine)	32
2.3.2 The caves of Sof-Umar	34
3. ISLAM’S POSITION IN THE PAST THREE REGIMES OF ETHIOPIA	37
3.1. Conquest and expansion of the Imperial Government of Ethiopia (1855-1974) ...	37
3.1.1 The Reign of Menelik (1889-1913).....	39
3.1.2 The Reign of Haile Sellassie (1913-1974)	41

3.1.2.1 The Period of the Italian Occupation (1936-1941).....	44
3.1.2.2 The Bale Peasant Rebellion.....	46
3.2 The Dergue regime (1974-1991)	48
3.3 Post Dergue period (1991 until now).....	49
4. FACTORS FOR EXPANSION OF ISLAM IN BALE.....	53
4.1 Trade and Outside influence.....	55
4.2 Socio-cultural factors	57
4.2.1 Kinship-Gosa (clanship).....	57
4.2.2 Marriage relationship	59
4. 3 Religio-political Factors:	61
4.4 The contribution of the Salafi movement	62
5. INTER-RELIGIOUS RELATIONS IN BALE.....	65
5.1 Christian-Muslim relations.....	65
5.2 The Islamic beliefs and practices	66
5.3 Theological Controversies between Christianity and Islam.....	68
5.4. Proper approaches in witnessing among Muslims	70
5.4.1 Dialogue.....	71
5.4.2 Looking for points of contact	73
5.4.3 The authenticity of Contextualization	75
5.4.4 The Issue of social interaction	78
5.4.5 What Christians should not do?.....	80
5.4.6 Handling the Muslim Converts	80
SUMMARY.....	83
END NOTES	85
REFERENCES.....	91

DECLARATION

I, Teshome Amenu, hereby declare to the Norwegian Teacher Academy that this study is my original work and all other sources are duly acknowledged and that it has not been submitted to any other university for any academic awards.

Signature -----

Supervisor: Terje Østebø

DEDICATION

In loving memory of my father Amenu W. Oda who sold all his possessions and left his comfort zone to send all of us to a better school.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people and institutions have contributed to the completion of this study. My heartfelt gratitude goes to my supervisor Terje Østebø for his excellent guidance, inputs and tireless efforts to make this work a reality. Without his guidance and support, this work would have not been possible. I thank the Norwegian Government State Loan (Lånekassen) for the financial support for my study. I am indebted to the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES) at the Addis Ababa University, the Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary (MYTS), Oromiya and Bale Zone Culture and Tourism Bureau and the Islamic Research and Culture Centre in Addis Ababa, which allowed making use of their library. I thank Chr. Michelsen Institute library staff for their kind support. I am grateful to the teaching and administrative staff of the Norwegian Teacher Academy (NLA). I specially extend my appreciation to Kristine Bech-Sørensen, Arne Tolo and Olav Myklebust for their care and hospitality.

I owe a lot to Wabe-Batu Synod of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus(WBS/EECMY) for their unreserved support during these two years. My sincere appreciation also goes to Mr. Wodajo W/Senbet for providing me with his personal notes and necessary literatures. I also owe special gratitude to my informants.

I am especially grateful to my brothers and sisters who encouraged and prayed for me throughout my study. You all deserve with much thanks. I would also thank my brother Fekadu for his assistance in the editing and proof reading the draft paper. My appreciation also extends to my friends at Agape Evangelical Church and Oromo Evangelical Christians Fellowship in Bergen who encouraged me and supported in ways too numerous to describe.

I am also grateful to Zerihun Hailu and Mulugeta Kebede who generously offered crucial support when I needed it most.

My special thanks goes to my dearly beloved Mekdes Abebayehu whose love, constant encouragement and prayer have been invaluable throughout my work. It is with immense gratitude that I acknowledge her enthusiasms in encouraging me during the two years of my study.

Above all, I would like to thank and praise the Almighty God who called me to His ministry and enable me to accomplish my two years of study.

Teshome Amenu

May 2008

ACRONYMS

- CIA- Central Intelligence Agency
CSA- Central Statistical Agency
EECMY- Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus
EOC - Ethiopian Orthodox Church
MYTS- Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary
NLA- Norsk Lærer Academy
WBS- Wabe-Batu Synod
TPLF- Tigray's People Liberation Front
EPRDF- Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
o.i. - Oral interview
TEE - Theological Education by Extension
SNNP- Southern Nation and Nationalities People Regional State
EMPD Educational Material Production and Division
PMAC Provisional Military Administrative Council
UOPLF United Oromo Liberation Front
ULFO United Liberation Forces of Oromia)

GLOSSARY

Aanaa -relative, close kin

Amhara-one of the ethnic groups in Ethiopia

Araddaa/ardaa-minimal lineage, land nearby settlement unit

Arsi-name of people (Oromo division), name of administrative region inhabited by Arsi Oromo

Balbala- door, lineage

Balabat-is an appointee at district level by the state to serve as subordinate land administrator.

Bokkuu- gadaa head (Oromo)

Burka-sub-headmen whose responsibility is mainly to oversee land administration and tax collection of specified areas in the district

Gabbar-tenant

Gabbara- marriage through paying of dowery

Gada-a generation-based indigenous Oromo socio-political system

Ganda- village

Gosa- clan

Mana- house, family

Madabaa- closer to tenants and the most influential authority for land at a given clan level.

Malkanga- literally rifle men

Minizir-head of an extended family eligible for land administration at family or extended family level and serve as messenger for Madabaa

Seenaa-history

Waaqa-God in Oromo

Waaqeffannaa- a belief in Waaqaa

Waaqefataa-a believer in Waaqaa

Walgaraa-marriage through girls exchange

Warra-extended family

1. INTRODUCTION

Islam religion is growing rapidly and has become the second largest religion in the world. In countries such as Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti and Somalia, Islam is firmly established. Islam in Ethiopia has its origin in the early seventh century with the arrival of the first batch of immigrants, to the Christian kingdom of *Najashi*. The relationships between the Islamic State and Ethiopia's Axum State were not hostile at first. According to Islamic traditions, some members of Mohammed's family and his early converts had taken refuge in Axum of Ethiopia.¹

According to Ethiopian Muslim traditions, about seventy indigenous Muslims travelled to Medina with companions who returned home after their temporary exile.²

Islam has formed constituent part of the history of the northern Ethiopia since the seventh century. The old nation of Ethiopia as "an Island of Christianity in the sea of Islam" has been abandoned; for recent scholarship has shown that the history of Islam within the Ethiopian state is impossible to avoid the influence from that outside of its (changing) borders and that influence is equally as old, as complex, and as significant.³

In the case of the history of Islam in Bale, it goes back to the thirteenth century. Since the time of its introduction until the present, Islam has a large socio-cultural and religio-political impacts in the life of the society. This is clearly seen in the life of the Oromo people of Bale of Ethiopia, who currently adhere to Islam. It is from this assumption that my focus in my study is the socio-cultural and political factors that contribute for the rise and expansion of Islam in Bale.

1.1 Objectives of the study

This study aims at looking at factors contributing for the rise and expansion of Islam among the Arsi Oromo of Bale. Bale has experienced enormous socio-economic and political changes due to the changes in the country at large. Different types of government systems have emerged in the country and as results, these continuous changes have their own contribution for the religions development in Bale.

One of the main objectives of this study is to describe and analyze the historical development of Islam and discuss relevant features in the socio-cultural and political traditions that helped in the process of conversion of the Arsi Oromo into Islam. This paper also illustrates the inter-religious relations and the Christian Ministry among Muslims in Bale.

Former researches have been made their study on the history of Islam in Bale.⁴ However, this study focuses on the factors that contributing for the rise and expansion of Islam with particular reference on the conversion of the Arsi Oromo in Bale.

In light of this general theme, this study has the following specific objectives:

First, to investigate the early religious and political settings that prevailed in Bale. Secondly, to examine the Arsi's socio-cultural and religious practices before their conversion into Islam. Thirdly, this study examines the position of Islam in relation to the political changes during the past three regimes of Ethiopian. Finally, this study identifies the inter-religious relations in Bale. The history of the Christian-Muslim relations is also included in the study. Their relationship has significant landmarks for

the Christian ministry. Therefore, I gave my suggestion how the Christian ministry should be done among Muslims.

1.2 Significance of the study

This study is an addition to the inadequate or meager but growing literature about religion in Ethiopia in general and Bale in particular. So far, scholars who published their articles such as Braukamper and Østebø have immense contribution in the study of the Islam in Bale. There are also few unpublished studies on the Islamization of the Arsi Oromo done by Abbas Haji, Ketebo Abdiyo and Temam Haji Adam.

My intention is to contribute to the understanding of religious conversion in Arsi Oromo and its historical development during different regimes of Ethiopia. Knowledge about this topic would help for further comparative studies. I therefore believe that this study intended to provide information which would pave the way for further studies on the people of Bale and their religious development.

1.3 Methods of data Collection

This study based on findings from both primary and secondary sources.⁵ The study followed specific techniques of unstructured interviewing of focus groups, religious leaders, selected elders who were knowledgeable of the culture and history of the area. The information was also collected through participant observation. In addition, the primary data were also collected from Ethiopian government reports and documents. The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia office of population and housing census commission of the 1994, 2006, and various relevant publications of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia office of the Central statistical authority were consulted. The gathering of information from secondary data constituted of reviews of books, journals, study thesis.

This was done using libraries of the Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary (MYTS) and the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES) Addis Ababa University, Oromiya and Bale Zone culture and tourism Bureau and Islamic Research and Culture Center in Addis Ababa.

The fieldwork was carried out from September 15, 2007 to November 15, 2007. From September 15-25, I consulted literature at the Institute of Ethiopian studies of Addis Ababa University and the Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary. From September 26 to October 8, 2007, I sought to achieve an overview general setting of the study area through recording demographic patterns from regional, zonal, and districts administrative offices. From October 9-20, 2007, I talked to the selected elders and religious leaders in the study area. I spent few days with these informants and had been holding informal talks and posing few general questions to them. Especially, this was carried out in Kokossa, Dodola, and Adaba administrative districts. Participant observations and an interviewing were also conducted from October 25 to November 15, 2007. Finally, the study has been framed by the debate of religious change in Africa, which was done by Robin Horton and H. Fisher. In addition, Woodberry's discussion on conversion has also been included in the theoretical framework.

1.4 The study Area and the people

Ethiopia is located in the Horn of Africa. The country covers approximately 1,221,900 square kilometers' and on the boundaries of Eritrea, Sudan, Kenya, Somalia and Djibouti. Ethiopia is home to over eighty nations and nationalities with diverse socio-cultural, linguistics and religious features. Unique among African countries, Liberia and the ancient Ethiopian monarchy maintained its freedom from colonial rule with the exception of the 1936-41 Italian occupation during World War II. In 1974, a military junta, the Dergue, deposed Emperor Haile Selassie

(who had ruled since 1930) and established a socialist state. The regime was toppled in 1991 by Tigray Liberation Front (TPLF), later developed into the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). A constitution was adopted in 1994, and Ethiopia's first multiparty elections were held in 1995. The country had by then become the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia⁶. The country has a tiered government system consisting of a federal government ethnically-based regional states, two chartered cities, zones, districts (*woredas*) and neighbourhoods (*kebele*). Ethiopia's population is rapidly growing. At present, the country has an estimated population of about 80 million.⁷

The major physiographic features are a massive highland complex of mountains and plateaus' divided by the Great Rift Valley and surrounded by lowlands along the peripheries. The diversity of the terrain is fundamental to regional variations in climate, natural vegetation, soil composition, and settlement patterns. Diverse rainfall and temperature patterns are largely the result of Ethiopia's location in Africa's tropical zone and the country has varied topography⁸. Altitude-induced climatic conditions form the basis for three environmental zones; cool, temperate, and hot, which have been known to Ethiopians since antiquity as the highland, the semi-highland, and the lowland, respectively.

The Oromiya⁹ regional state where the research area is located, is the most populous region in Ethiopia. The population of Oromiya was well over 18 million according to 1994 census report.¹⁰

With regard to religion, 48.4% Muslims, 37% Ethiopian Orthodox Christians, 8.7% Protestants, 0.5 Catholics, 4.4% traditional Religion followers.¹¹ Bale is located south East of Addis Ababa at the range of 320-450 kilometres. It is one of the 12 Zones (provinces) in the Oromiya Region of Ethiopia. Regarding settlement, over 90% of the total

population resides in rural areas, where crop production and livestock rearing is the major means of livelihood. It has an estimated total population of 1,727,306 of which 13.5% are urban dwellers. With an estimated area of 63,917.49 square kilometres, Bale has an estimated population density of 27.02 people per square kilometre. The major ethnic groups are the Oromo who are estimated at more than 90%, Amhara is 8%. With regard to religion, 78% are Muslims and 19% are Orthodox Christians. In addition, the rest are Protestants, Catholics and followers of indigenous Oromo religion. Bale is gifted with wide range of climatic zones i.e. from the highest peak of 4370m .a.s.l at mount Tulu Dimitu (the second highest in Ethiopia) to the lowest 300m asl at the border of Somalia regional state.¹²

The inhabitants of Bale are Arsi Oromo people who follow a patrilineal descent system and a patrilocal settlement pattern. The society has been organized itself in the kinship system. The Arsi kinship system has different layers of structure that are genealogically interwoven. Accordingly, the major layer of the social organization is *gosa*, which means clan and the smallest unit of the social structure is called *mana or warra*, literally meaning house or family.¹³ Each level of social structure has its own system of administration as well as interrelated functions. For the detail discussion, (See chapter 4)

1.5 Theoretical Framework

The history of religious conversion in Africa to Christianity and Islam has brought both social and cultural changes in the society. It is therefore, important to define what conversion means for the fact that it has multiple meanings for different disciplines.

According to American Heritage talking Dictionary, conversion is “the act of adopting religious beliefs or receiving their benefits:”¹⁴ It refers to change in the religious life and behaviour of people. It involves an interior change in one’s religious conviction, moral and spiritual fervour. Conversion, therefore, implies a change from one religious state to another religious state. The change could be a permanent one or it could be only a period. Conversion could take place within the same religious system to which an individual or group already belongs or professes, or it could involve a change or a shift away from a religion to which one was previously affiliated to another one all together.

Individual conversion from traditional indigenous religion to Christianity or Islam could be referred as shifting from a state of traditional belief or worldview to a new religious worldview. As for the process of conversion to Islam many factors were definitely involved. A number of recent studies¹⁵ have investigated both the process and reasons for conversion of this kind, and it is clear that conversion to Islam involves contact between several groups of people. Conversion to Islam requires the carriers of new messages and readiness of the recipients.

Conversion to Islam and Christianity in Africa has been the focus of a number of interesting academic scholarships in recent years. For instance, the debate between Humphrey J. Fisher and Robin Horton has given an opinion about the religious conversion in Africa.¹⁶ Their opinions have a contribution for understanding the process of religious changes in different context. In this paper, their views have been related to the religious changes among the Arsi Oromo in Bale.

For the sake of explanation, I briefly present the discussion and views of both scholars.

According to intellectualist theory of Robin Horton, African cosmology consists of two layers: the microcosm and the macrocosm which correspond to the macro and micro- society. The microcosms are concerned with the local affairs of the community and well-being of the community, whereas religious life is focused on the ancestral spirits. This microcosm is to be in control of local setting. Whereas, the macrocosm encompasses the world as the whole, i.e. the high God is the ultimate controller and existential ground of the lesser spirits.

The Supreme Being recognized but remained distant from everyday's concerns. When major social change took place, the boundaries between the macro- and the microcosm began to disintegrate and macrocosmic religious forces came into operation. This meant that veneration of the lesser spirits began to be replaced with the belief/veneration of the high God. "In this situation, the importance of the Supreme Being, which is concerned with the macrocosm, increased tremendously. The spiritual crisis, created under such circumstances, resulted in the conversion to new religions like Christianity or Islam."¹⁷ In this case, Horton argues, the missionaries act simply as "catalysts for changes that were in the air" way."¹⁸ For Horton, the progression is almost linear.

However, Humphrey J. fisher did not accept Horton's thesis. He, on the other hand, believes that external factors are crucial for conversion to Islam. Fisher emphasizes the role of Muslim merchants, cleric and refuges in the Islamization of West Africa. He questioned why Africans bothered to become Christians if the new belief system was so similar to the traditional one.

He also criticized weaknesses of Horton's discussion for not defining conversion. Nevertheless, Humphrey fisher identified three stages of

“quarantine” “mixing”, and then “reform” in the process of conversion from non-prophetic to a prophetic religion. In his study of conversion Africa’s from traditional religion to Islam and Christianity, he had noted that people could pass through the stage of “quarantine” during which they stood with one foot on either side of the fence adopting their new worship as useful supplements to the old. There could be a lapse from the orthodoxy and religious ardor of the first converts to a mixing stage and people could later regain their fervency after a reform movement.

Reformists who are determined to eliminate non-Islamic practices played a crucial role during the last stage of this process. Fisher tends to suggest that, though, ‘least interesting”, the quarantine stage is essential to initiate the process of Islamization.

It appears that Horton and Fisher are emphasizing different aspects of the process of conversion. In this regard, their conclusions are complementary.

I would like to give some comments on Horton’s hypothesis on conversion. First, as far as the African context concerned, such dualistic view between the Supreme Being and the lesser spirits or microcosms and macrocosms do not fit to the African worldview of cosmology. African religion embodies the interconnectedness of the total conditions of human life. That is a sense of holistic approach to reality. There is no dichotomy between the visible and the invisible world¹⁹.

J. Dudley Woodberry, in his book “*Muslims and Christians on the Emmaus Road*”²⁰ mentioned three levels or combination of levels of conversion.

1. External-changes at this level are nothing more than external. The changes are shallow and superficial
2. Adaptation-changes at this level are a bit deeper than the first. It is a value level.
3. Ontological-changes at this level take place at the very tenor of one's being, right at the central core. It is a question of essence. This level is called transformation.

The opinions of the scholars mentioned above could not be taken as a general model for all contexts of religious groups. One feature of conversion make clear is that it took place at different rates and different stages and different settings, so that there was a considerable regional variation. In this paper, I will discuss how these theories on conversion relate to the religious change in Bale. Detail explanation and comparison is made in chapter four, emphasising of the roles of political, social and cultural system in the conversion. However, I would like to give a brief explanation of the process of conversion in the life of the Arsi Oromo who accepted Islam rather than other religions, for instance, Christianity.

I would like to see the process of conversion of Arsi Oromo from their indigenous Oromo religion to Islam in relation to the transformation of worldview. Thus, I have to first define what worldview mean. According to the dictionary meaning, "worldview is a collection of beliefs about life and the universe held by an individual or a group.²¹ "It is a concept fundamental to German Philosophy and epistemology and refers to a *wide world perception*. Additionally, it refers to the framework of ideas and beliefs through which an individual interprets the world and interacts in it" ²²

From the above two definitions, I can say that conversion is a transformation of worldview or the change involves change in worldview,

ritual practices etc. These changes happen in the daily life of a person to perceive or interpret the world and interact in it. In the life of the Arsi Oromo, I see the transformation of views in their religious philosophy, perception and values after their conversion into Islam not at once but it has been an ongoing process. Therefore, with regard to the transformation of views, the internal perceptions and the role of agents in faith should not be ignored but must be taken into consideration.

1.6 Structure of the research

This research paper comprises five chapters including conclusion of the study. The first Chapter has description about objectives of the study, methods of data collection, significance of the study and the study area and the people. It also contains the theoretical framework on the study of religious conversion.

The second chapter concerns itself with the discussion of the early religious and political settings before the introduction of Islam in Bale of Ethiopia. In this section, an endeavour has been made to reflect on important concepts of the relationship between the Oromo movement and the religious pilgrimage with the spread of Islam.

The third chapter constitutes a synopsis on the history of Islam's position during the past three regimes of Ethiopia. Under this chapter, three periods have been discussed: the Imperial government(monarchy state) (1855-1974), the Dergue regime (1974-1991), and the Post-Dergue period (1991 until now).

The fourth chapter deals with factors contributing for the spread of Islam in Bale Ethiopia. In this chapter, I have discussed the literature on the study of religious conversion in Africa. I also analyse how the socio-

cultural and religio-political systems have played a big role for the spread of Islam.

The fifth chapter examines the inter-religious relations in Bale. In this part, Christian- Muslim relations, the Islamic beliefs and practices and theological controversies between Islam and Christianity are stated. This part also contains how to do Christian ministry among Muslims. The particular emphasis here is given on the appropriate ways that may help in witnessing among Muslims.

2. EARLY RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL SETTINGS OF THE ARSI OROMO OF BALE

2.1 The Islamic Sultanate of Bale

Since the rise of Islam at Mecca in the 7th century, the Aksumites had been losing their ancient ports and Islands to the increasingly dominant Muslim merchants of the Red sea. They gradually made a number of local converts to Islam. Until the tenth century, it is very clear that these local Muslims were few in number and their activities in the Ethiopian²³ region were purely commercial in character. After the tenth century, however, their number began to grow and many Muslim settlements were established. This historical development was particularly true of the port of Zeila, which was becoming the most important commercial outlet for the Ethiopian region.²⁴ The Arabic written sources give us the clue that Islam was introduced as early as 13th Century appears to be a time of pioneer phase in the Islamization in Bale.²⁵

The Arabic geographers Abul-Fida and Ibin Fadl Allah al-umari reported the existence of seven Islamic states²⁶ that occupied an area from the northern Somali coast up to the rift valley of central south Ethiopia. The most important among these Sultanates were Shakara, Arababni, Bali, Dawaro, Hadiya, Ifat, and Dara.

Braukamper mentioned that the name of Dawaro's neighbor Bale appears for the first time in a description of Ethiopia under the Zagwe, the pre-Salomonid dynasty, which ruled the Christian kingdom from 1137-1269. Bale was situated east of Shoa and Yifat. The first reference was mentioned in the Amda Tsion's chronicles.²⁷ The Islamic principalities of Dawaro and Sharka in the north, Hadiya in the west, Adal in the east and

in the south by unidentified regions, bordered Bale.²⁸ “The length of this “kingdom”, which was adjacent to Hadiya, was twenty days and its breadth six days. Its lands were more fertile, well watered and with a better climate than its Muslim neighbors. Unlike the neighboring states, the Bale people did not use any type of money but exchanged various goods and products, such as sheep, cattle and clothes.”²⁹

It is very difficult to locate the exact location of the area. However, since the frequent mention of Wabi that can be clearly identified as the Wabe Shaballe River. However, its territory stretched a certain distance beyond the Wabi to north. According to the Arabic authors’, Bale was described characterizing as a mountainous country with rich vegetation and a population known for their trading activities.³⁰

While Bale was the first Ethiopian province, Imam Ahmad Gragh³¹ conquered after the Battle of Shimbura Kure 1529³², Emperor Geladewos quickly recovered it after the Imam’s death. However, the territory eventually became the possession of the Oromo people that had begun settling there as early as the *Mudana gadaa* (1530-1538), and Bale disappeared as a distinct entity by the middle of the next century.³³ The peoples of Hadiya-Sidama who was already Muslims predominantly occupied the ancient state of Bale.³⁴ One of my informants (himself an Arsi Oromo) completely disagrees with this saying.³⁵ Yet, Braukamper mentioned that the region of Gadab, which is located in the western Bale, belonged to Hadiyya and was occupied by various subgroups of this people, whose Oromized descendants (for instances, the clans *Doodaa*, *Weegee*, *Caatimannaa*, *Adamoonyee*, *Wosharminaa*, and many others) still live there.³⁶

2.2 The history of the Oromo

2.2.1 The Oromo Socio-Political Institutions

Before and during the period of their movement, the Oromo had their own political, economic, social and religious institutions. For political, economic and social purposes, the Oromo were organized into the *Gada* system. “The Gada system is a system in which *Gada* classes succeed each other every eight years providing military political, social and cultural leaderships for the Oromo nation.³⁷ In Arsi, the Gada has five grades namely; *Birmaji*, *Bultuma*, *Horaataa*, *Baharaa*, and *Roballe*.³⁸ A special feature of the Arsi *Gadaa* practice was that each clan was autonomous and independent. Hence, it had its own *Gadaa* area and a community form of the *Gadaa* government under *Abbaa Boku*.³⁹

The male members of the society would join *Gada* classes and pass through a number of age-grades that lasted for a period of eight years. People moved from one age-grade to the next as they advanced in age. The first five age-grades which had a total period of 40 years, mainly served as schools for the young Oromo people. It was the time when they obtained different training which qualified them for war as well as community leadership. The sixth age-grade (41-48 years) is called *Gada*. This was the stage of political, social, military and ritual leadership. The *Gada* assembly, known as the *Chaffe*, was the main decision making body in the *Gada* system. The *Gada* system was quite egalitarian and the head of the *Chaffe* was elected democratically from among the *Gada* age-grade. He had the title of *Abba Bokku or Abba Gada*. For eight years, he would serve as the spokesperson of the assembly.⁴⁰

There were other *Gada* officials. The *Abba Dula* was the commander of the army. The *Abba Sera*⁴¹ was in charge of the traditional Oromo laws.

These and other officials worked closely together for one *Gada* period (8 years), and when their term of office ends, they will hand over the power to next *Gada* class, which will elect new officials for the next eight years. Therefore, in the *Gada* system, a group of elders held political power, and there was peaceful transfer of political power from one *Gada* class to the other every eight years. Those who left office would serve as advisors to the new *Gada* class.

2.2.2 Waaqeffannaa (the religion of the Oromo)

The Oromo is the single largest ethnic group in the east and northeast Africa, adherent to its traditional beliefs (*Waaqeffannaa*).⁴² This traditional system of thought and values still today has great impact not only on the way Oromo organize themselves but also on the way they interact among themselves and others. Hence, the Oromo engage in the exploration of worldviews and religious tradition of their ancestors. Even after their expansion, the Oromo followed this traditional religion of their own in which they worshipped one chief God called *Waaqaa* (God).

In this religion, the *Qallus*⁴³ served as high priests or mediators between the Oromo people and the *Waaqaa*. These *Qallus* were highly respected and they could even involve in the non-religious affairs of the society. Although the traditional belief of the Oromo lacked an organized, structured and written doctrine, the *Qallus* were responsible in leading religious ceremonies and worships.

However, the intention of this study is not to substantively discuss all aspects of Oromo religion but rather attempt to show that the declining of the ritual practices of the Oromo religion had contributed and facilitated the expansion of Islam in Bale.

2.2.3 The Oromo movement and expansion

According to oral traditions, wars and population movements marked the sixteenth century of the history of the Horn of Africa. The largest population movement and expansion of the period was, however, that of the Oromo.⁴⁴ It had great consequences, which fundamentally changed the pre-existing social conditions in the Horn. In this section, we shall mainly deal with the Oromo population movement and expansion in the sixteenth century.

Mohammed Hassen mentioned, “according to the chronology given by Bahrey, the Oromo migration was during the period of the *Melbah Gada*(1522-1530).”⁴⁵ During the time when the *Mudana Gada* was in power (1530-1538), the Oromo crossed the Wabi-Shebele River, northern of Bale.

According to the Oromo oral traditions, the original homeland of the Oromo was the south central parts of the Ethiopia highlands, around the upper course of the Genale River.

According to the informants⁴⁶, the present Oromo settlers migrated from a place called Madda Wolabu in Bale. The place is located in southern most tip of Bale Zone at a distance of about 640km from Addis Ababa. It is believed to be the centre of the spiritual, cultural and political systems and again for a century it was the centre of Oromo’s council of Assembly.⁴⁷

Different suggestions have been made on the causes of the Oromo population movement and expansion. Nevertheless, it is believed that human, natural and demographic factors must have combined to effect the movement.⁴⁸ The wars and disturbances of the second half of the

fifteenth and the early years of the sixteenth centuries, in the Horn must have put pressures on the Oromo.

The growth in the number of their cattle might have led them to seek for grazing lands in different directions. The search of grazing land for their cattle could be a factor for the movement. Therefore, the combination of the factors resulted in a dramatic and large-scale population movement of the Oromo people in the sixteenth century.

Long before their expansion, the Oromo people divided into two major confederacies: the *Borana* and the *Barentu*. Each confederacy was composed of smaller divisions and clans. The *Borana* confederacy consisted of *Maccaa*, *Tuulamaa*, southern *Boraanaa* and *Gujii* clans. The *Berentu* composed of the *Karayu*, *Marawa*, *Ittu*, *Humbana*, *Akachu*, *Wollo and Arsi* clans.⁴⁹

The movement and expansion largely took place from around 1522 to 1618. The movement was set on two major directions in today's Ethiopian region. The Barentu moved out in a north and north central and eastern direction. These are Hararge, Wollo, North and East Shewa and Arsi. The Borana followed a northwestern direction. These are Western Keffa, Illubabor, Wollega and The Gibe Basin. They also moved out in the directions of Kenya and Somalia outside the Ethiopian region. The movement took place in two stages. The first stage was the period of small and slow movement in the first half of the sixteenth century. The second stage started around mid-sixteenth century and lasted up to 1618. This was when the large-scale movement was carried out.⁵⁰ The Oromo occupied and settled on lands as far north as southern Tigray, southeastern Gondar and parts of Gojjam. They gave Oromo settled in

Somalia, and in Kenya. In Kenya, the Borana Oromo permanently settled in the northern parts of that country.

When Mohammed Hassan stated one of the consequences of the Oromo migrations, he said, during their migration, they moved across land where there were Muslim populations, such as Hadiya, whom they adopted and who were eventually assimilated. In this movement, the Hadiyas, and perhaps some Muslim Oromo, lost their Islamic religion, but retained their Muslim names. It was because of this phenomenon that we find Muslim names in the genealogies of the various Oromo groups.⁵¹

The Oromo population movement and expansion was successful for several reasons. In the first place, the *Gada* system provided training and military organization, which contributed much to the success of the movement. Besides, almost all members of the society participated in war. Therefore, it was a large-scale expansion so difficult to stop. One important Oromo institution, which seems to have facilitated the process of the expansion and a steady increase in number of the population, was the process of adaptation called *Moggaassa*.⁵² One form of adoption was *Guddifacha*.⁵³ The adopted individual or group was non-Oromo.

The adopted community or individual shares everything equally with the Oromo and becomes an Oromo. *Moggaassa* culture allowed other peoples to mix up with the Oromo and live together in peace. Therefore, in the process of their expansion, the Oromo were able to adopt much of the population. The movement took place when the two major states in the Horn the kingdom and the sultanate of Adal were exhausted and weakened as the wars of the first half of the sixteenth century. In the course of their movement, the Oromo might have assimilated parts of the Islamic practices into the cultural mainstream too. The Christian

kingdom⁵⁴ was greatly disturbed by the Oromo movement. The sultanate was reduced to the walled town of *Harar* as the result of the Oromo expansion was mainly because after the death of *Iman Ahmad*.

Nevertheless, he could not pursue his victory Christian forces because the Oromo forces had already reached the Hararge the time. Therefore, he decided to return to Adal to defend it from the Oromo. However, since the Oromo occupied most of the Harar plateau, which is known as the *Jegol Gimb*. The defeat of Ahmed Gragh brought an end to Islam as a political power.⁵⁵

2.2.4 The Story and settlements of the Arsi Oromo

Oral traditions provide different explanations about the origin of the name Arsi. Some oral traditions say that Arsi is the name of the founding father of the main tribe. Arsi Oromo is one of the major divisions of the Oromo nations. As *Borana* are divided as *Sabbo* and the *Gona* moieties, the Arsi are divided into the *Mando* and *Siko* moieties. The *Siko* has five sub-moieties collectively called *Shanan Siko*(the five ones of *Siko*). They are *Bullallaa*, *Wacaalee*, *Jaawii*, *Waajii* and *Ilaannii*.

The *Mando* has seven sub-moieties collectively called *Torban Mandoo*(the seven ones of *Mando*). They are *Raayyaa*, *Kajawaa*, *Hawaxaa*, *Utaa*, *Waayyuu*, *Harawaa* and *Biiltuu*.

The Arsi identify their relationships in three other principal ways. The first is *aanooma*(relation through descent or parentage). The second is relation through *Soddooma*(relation through affinity or marriage. These two types of identifying relations together indicate the people's system of classifying *Worrooma*(family relationship).

The third and the broadest form of relationship is *Arsoomaa*(Arsihood), and it refers to the cultural homogeneity and the *aaloo* (the customary code) of the people. Arsihood provides the people with an identity that cuts across allegiances base on moiety and from explanation of patrilineal⁵⁶ relationship of the Arsi Oromo, I can mention that this strong relationship among the Arsi is serving, as a pivotal for any decision of an individual be a religion or other socio-cultural aspects.

The Arsi Oromo that are divided into the two main branches of *Sikko* and *Mando* inhabits the present Arsi zone, West Arsi Zone, Bale, Southeast Shewa , extending up to the border of the Southern Nation and Nationalities People Regional State(SNNPRS). Arsi settlements also extend up to the Sidama and Guji and Borana in the south. Accordingly, the Arsi Oromo have settled over a larger area than any other settlement of the Oromo main tribes.

The incorporation of Arsi into the Ethiopian kingdom was started with a series of campaigns that Menelik undertook from 1892, apparently aimed at acquiring control over land, and the trade resources he needed to consolidate his power and expand his sovereignty. Once Menelik succeeded to subdue the Arsi, he established the feudalist system called *melkenya system* in which, Menelik's soldiers were given the authority over the people and that each clan was required to provide annual taxes (in kind) that were paid to the different landlords. However, a number of clan leaders had run away in revolt against the system.

The central government of Menelik in Addis Ababa did not have sufficient resource to collect taxes from the vast Arsi territory it conquered. To redeem this, the government introduced a form of indirect rule in which clan chiefs were given the title of *balabat* and entrusted

with the responsibility of collecting taxes, and settle disputes although land remained under ownership of the clan. In return, the *balbat* were given vacant land.

At the same time the wider Arsi population embraced Islam more readily during this period. It is argued that this was as a reaction against the attempt of the Showa Amhara to forcefully convert its subjects to Christianity, as an institutionalized channel for expressing opposition to the system of Amhara rule. The alienation of a very large portion of land by the central government forced the movement of the inhabitants which made possible frequent contact with Muslim pilgrims coming from Arsi zone, Wollo and Jimma who crossed the area on their way to the Shrine of Sheik Hussein. The people called these persons *Woliyi*. They usually prophesized and foretold about material possessions or financial wealth of their host.⁵⁷

In time, the blessings of the *Woliyi* came to be believed by the people as effective and their prophecies true. As a result, they came to be regarded as possessing spiritual power and hence began to be revered in the same way as they revered religious figures like the *qallu*⁵⁸ of their own religion *Waaqeffannaa*. The *Woliyyis* intimate association with and influence on the inhabitants prepared the ground for a direct preaching undertaken later by the Sheiks from the central highlands of Bale who regularly visited the Gedeb area. The latter were mainly responsible for the conversion of the inhabitants to Islam and for the gradual abandonment of rituals associated with the indigenous religion.

2.3 Religious Pilgrimage

2.3.1 Dirre Sheik Hussein (Sheik Hussein Shrine)

The shrine is situated on Northeast direction from Zone's capital Robe in Gololcha district at 610 kilo metres from Addis Ababa. Islamic holiday is

celebrated twice a year. In August, “Zahara” is celebrated in connection with the Islamic holiday “Arafah” which is celebrated worldwide. The shrine is more than 900 years old. *Zukutum* mosque, Lake *Lukku* (holly water) *Gamo*, which means the sacred space of Sheik Hussein, a mount *Dadala* and *Kacham Sare* are the main sites.⁵⁹

As far as all available oral traditions are concerned, a man by the name Sheik Hussein is the one who played outstanding role in spreading to propagate Islam in the region.

My informants have confirmed this opinion:

“Amantiin Islaamummaa Kebab Itiyoophiyaa keessaanuu kutaa Balee keessatti akka babadhatuu kan taasisan keessaa Sheik Huseen akka ta’an maanguddoo irraa dhageenneerra. Namni kun maqaa gara garaatiin waamamu. Kanneen keessaa, Nur Huseen, Dheeraa Baalee, Aabbiyyoo Baalee...” Haata’u maalee biyyaa fi lammummaa isaa ifaa ifatti beekkamuu baatulee Sheik Hussein aanaa Gololcha keessatti lafa kaarra milkii jedhamut akka taa’ee dhageenneerra. Abbaan isaa ammo biyyaa Araabaa irraa akka dhufe dhageennee jirra.”⁶⁰

“According to the oral traditions from our forefathers, Sheik Hussein was one of the figures who contributed for the spread of Islam in the southeast Ethiopia, particularly, in Bale. This man has been given different names, such as Nur Huseen, Dheeraa Baalee, Aabbiyyoo Baalee. Although his birth place and ethnic background has not been clearly known, some people say that Sheik Hussein was born in Gasera-Gololcha woreda at the place called “kaarra milkii” and his father emigrated from one of the Arab countries.”

Some studies also confirmed the above sayings that it was 800 years ago Sheik Hussein’s grandfather, Sayid Abdallah is said to have emigrated from Arabia to south of the present Somalia. From there he moved to Bale.⁶¹ His son Ibrahim started to teach Islam among the native people of Dire. Before the settlement of Sheik Ibrahim at Dire, Dire had functioned

as a traditional religious centre and place for meeting. It was inhabited by pastoralists.⁶² Then Sheikh Ibrahim married to an Oromo girl Makida and begot sons. One of those sons was Sheik Hussein. Until he reached forty years, he learned Islam very well. He started preaching Islam better than his father did. No clan among the Oromo in Bale is directly linked with his name and none of the genealogies contains his name.⁶³

Sheik Hussein had a relationship with the Arabs. He brought different goods from the Arab for trading. This gave him the opportunity to meet people. Through this opportunity, he preached Islam. After Sheik Hussein died, his followers strengthened the Islam mission because the people venerated him highly and preserved the shrine.⁶⁴ The renewal of the pilgrimage of Sheik Hussein was by sheik Muhammad Tilma Tilmo in the early 19th century. After the renewal of the pilgrimage, most of regular pilgrimages were made to the shrine from different parts of Ethiopia and even outside of the country like Somalia. The pilgrims have singing of hymns to praise him that is called '*baro*'. This way of singing is mostly done by every pilgrim and the *baro are composed by the ulee baro*. This gathering contributed for the expansion of Islam not only in Bale but also through the country.⁶⁵

2.3.2 The caves of Sof-Umar

It is found in Oromiya Regional State, Bale zone Dawe Kachan district at a distance of 540km from Addis Ababa, 102km from the zonal capital Robe. The caves are located on 16.5 square kilometers with about 42 gates, which is one of the world's biggest and Africa's largest cave. It is also characterized by flat topography and by a deep gorge cut by river Web, where the gate (entrance) of river is Ayyo-Mako and the exit Huluka.

Rituals are performed twice a year, *Safara* in September and *Rajaba* in August.⁶⁶ The 'Darga' people are those who permanently reside in Sof Omar worshipping centre. They are the one who lead the pilgrimage. Additionally, certain people are regarded as the *Wambaraa*, who are the leaders of the Darga people, the devotees of Sof Omar. Pilgrims from all over and often from Somalia would travel to Sof Omar to attend the '*muudaa*' ceremony.⁶⁷

After the concealment (*Ijaabbata*) of Sof Omar, the religious and cultural ceremony which was called '*lillata*'⁶⁸ with small gathering was under taking place. At the shrines, it was also called "*sileta*" the presenting of gifts or vows for God's sake.

The ceremony was run by successive Abba Karras (successive leaders of the ceremony) after Sof Omar. The current spiritual leader is Abdul-Jabbar Sheikh Ahmad Mame from Aymero clan.⁶⁹

In conclusion, I have discussed the religious settings before the Islamization of the Arsi Oromo in Bale. The renewal of the pilgrimage of Sheik Hussein in the early 19th century and of Sof Umar by Haji Ali Wale and Sayid Roba Garbicha in the late 19th century was the most important instrument in the spread of Islam among the Arsi Oromo of Bale. After the renewal of the pilgrimages, the group who were performing the ritual were all from Arsi Oromo clans:

1. Sheik Mohammed Alga(the legitimate descendant of Sof Omar who was the father of Aymero clan of Arsi)
2. Yaba Mudana(the legitimate descendant of Sof Omar and father of Ilani clan of Arsi)
3. Wayou Sole(the father of Hawaxxu clan of Arsi Oromo)
4. Roba Kontom(the father of Karara clan of the Arsi Oromo)

5. Sheik Seid Haloye (the father of Gerjeda clan of Arsi Oromo) He was also the legitimate spiritual leader (Abbaa Karraa).

The *muudaa* to Sheik Hussein created contact among the various peoples of Ethiopia, regardless of their ethnic and cultural differences. Since then Bale was under a considerable influence of Islam even if the majority of the Arsi Oromo remained as *Waaqeffata* up until the second half of the nineteenth century.

Abbas mentioned, "For the Oromo, this pilgrimage (*muudaa*) represented a sort of continuity between the past and the present. In effect, when they abandoned their former religion, *Waaqeffanna*, the cult of the sheikh became a rallying point and an important factor in their spiritual life and worldview."⁷⁰ From the second half of the nineteenth century, however, Islam made remarkable breakthrough among Arsi Oromo in Bale.

3. ISLAM'S POSITION IN THE PAST THREE REGIMES OF ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia's political history in the last decades has been one of upheaval and radical change. In this period, the country has had three radically different political regimes involving in each case economic, legal and administrative re-organization, which led to great deal of institutional instability.⁷¹

Until the mid-1970s, the country was ruled through an absolute monarchy state, with political power concentrated in the hands of Emperors, and economic power in the hands of a class of landed nobility and local gentry, which between them owned a dominant share of the country's productive resources.

Having said, it is important to give an historical overview of the different regimes in Ethiopia as a background pattern before dealing with Islam's position in Bale during the three regimes.

3.1. Conquest and expansion of the Imperial Government of Ethiopia (1855-1974)

There are many controversial issues around Ethiopian history. There is a question whether Ethiopia had been a single political entity for the several thousands of Empire's history. Some scholars argue that Emperor Menelik II created the Ethiopian Empire through the expansion in the middle of the nineteenth century towards the south.⁷²

The present northern Ethiopia was referred to as Abyssinia for a distinct period. It comprises Gonder, Tigre, Gojam and Shoa. Gonder was the capital city of these areas for a distinct period.

During this period, the ancient town of Harar, independent from the Abyssinian control, was the centre of Islamic learning and Islam was expanding slowly and steadily in the east. In the meantime, we have the era of princes (1755-1850) where regional lords ruled in their own small territories in many places.

The reunification of Ethiopia came with Emperor Tewodros, who reigned from 1855-68. He tried to reduce the power of the regional lords and attempted to unite Christian kingdom again. With regard to his perception of Islam and Muslims, he threatened them with expulsion and attempted to convert the Muslims to Orthodox faith. He also wanted to convert the Oromo in Wollo to Christianity or expel them. However, he never accomplished his goals.

In 1878, Emperor Yohannes IV became the successor of Tewodros. His reign was marked by doctrinal disagreements within the Orthodox Church. He was a strong believer of the Orthodox faith and wanted to maintain the faith through military means. He also adopted the same policy of his predecessor subjugating the Oromo. He initiated campaign against the Muslims of Wollo, issuing an edict to force all Muslims to embrace Christianity. A rebellion started against him. In 1886, some 20,000 Muslims who refused to become Christians were killed. Some who fled from him and even encouraged Islamic revival in the East and South of the country.⁷³

3.1.1 The Reign of Menelik (1889-1913)

On the death of Yohannes IV in 1889, Menelik crowned himself “Menelik II, Elect of God, and King of king of Ethiopia.”⁷⁴ The last quarter of the nineteenth century was a shift of paradigm because before that period, the present Ethiopian region did not constitute a unified political entity. Several peoples and states remained an autonomous. Consequently, Ethiopia is a nation made up of many different ethnic groups because of the dreams of Emperor Tewedros.⁷⁵ Then Menelik II became the one who accomplished unifying Ethiopia, which meant the regions in the north, and his own aspiration going south.

Ever since Emperor Menelik II used European weapons and tactics to conquer the Oromo in eastern and southern Ethiopia. His military campaign in the south had the purpose to subjugate and take over territory and incorporate it into its political entity to the Empire. The army of the Emperor was in possession of firearms obtained from some of the European powers, which the local population did not have, and this gave him the upper hand to subjugate the local communities. Menelik fought to subjugate the Muslims and non-Muslims and to bring them under the Abyssinian Empire.

Within 1867-1897, Menelik conquered the Oromo, Sidama, Afar, Somali and the Nilotic groups.⁷⁶ That was the period for the emergence of the modern Ethiopia.

What followed was an opposition to the expansion of the Christian Empire. The Arsi Oromo in today’s Arsi resisted the subjugating forces of emperor Menelik. It took a solid six years to conquer the spear-throwing Arsi.⁷⁷ The last decisive battle between Arsi Oromo and the Abyssinian

took place in 1886.⁷⁸ Therefore, the incorporation of Bale started as the result of the series of campaigns that Menelik undertook from 1882-1886⁷⁹. The conquest of Bale was between 1891 and 1892. We often hear that the Arsi Oromo in Bale still tell their children about the mistreatment of their fore fathers by the Abyssinian subjugators.⁸⁰

Menelik was more tolerant toward Muslim subjects. “During the reign of Menelik II special courts were instituted to take care of litigation arising in Ethiopia’s Muslim population.”⁸¹ Some people quoted this and said Muslims were granted freedom of worship during the reign of Menelik. He made the religious policy in the Ethiopian Empire to be flexible and accepted the Muslims with a guarded tolerance. My informants disagree with this opinion as the idea of the Amharas. “We had no any rights and recognition from the Menelik and his successors.”⁸²

The reign of Lij Iyasu(1913-1916) He was the designated but uncrowned Emperor of Ethiopia. He wasn’t anti-Muslim like the preceding rulers (his father, Ras Mikael, was a convert from Islam). He tried to accommodate both followers of Christianity and Islam. He married into families of both religions. He founded Churches and built mosques. Nevertheless, Lij Iyasu in 1909 leaned towards Islam and accepted the Arabic language as an official language in the Empire. He also support from Muslim countries.⁸³

However, the Church resented his toleration towards Muslims and the clergy would use it as one of the main reasons to reject him from the position in 1916. Menelik daughter, Zewditu, came to power in 1917. At the same time, Dajazmach Tafari Mekonnen was named Heir to the Throne.⁸⁴

3.1.2 The Reign of Haile Sellassie (1913-1974)

Upon Empress Zewditu's death on 2 April 1930, Tafari Mekonnen was crowned Haile Selassie I on 2 November of that same year.⁸⁵ The name Haile Selassie means 'the Power of the Trinity' in Amharic, and the official titles included 'King of Kings' and the 'Lion of Judah.'

The year 1930-35 saw the reconstruction of the government and modernization before the Italians attacked in 1935. In 1931, Haile Sellassie introduced Ethiopia's first constitution. Ministries, such as education and public works, were established.⁸⁶

The land tenure structure was held under various forms of customary ownership. Land under the Arsi Oromo tradition was a communal property. Thus, certain clan and their individual households occupied a given area of land. During the reign of Haile Sellassie, clan ownership of land was abandoned and a new tenure system was introduced. According to the new tenure system, four hierarchical levels of land administration were formed at the local community levels namely: *Balabat*, *Burka*, *Madabaa*, and *Minizir* that shaped the land tenure system.⁸⁷

Another feature of Haile Sellassie's rule was the effort he made to Christianize the population. Menelik had already started the process by attempting, with some success, to Christianize the *balabat*. Some *balabats* of Bale and inhabitants of the area accepted Christianity presumably as a strategy to establish connection with the Amhara elite in order to secure political and economic advantages. For example, Fiwterari Wolde Michael Bui of Dodola was one of the influential persons who were appointed a *balabat* to serve Haile Sellassie's administrative structure. He governed the former Genale Awraja.⁸⁸

In May of 1936, Haile Selassie fled to England in exile after the Italians invaded his country half a year ago. With the aid of British troops, Haile Selassie was able to repossess Ethiopia in 1941.

With regard to his position to religion, I would like to cite from his speech of November 1945, "Religion is personal the State is for all."⁸⁹ Emperor Haile Sellassie appeared as Menelik II, he followed similar policy of tolerance to the Muslims but the Muslims had no equal rights with the Ethiopian Orthodox Christians.

The 1955 constitution stated, "*The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, founded in the fourth century on the doctrines of Saint Mark, is the established church of the Empire and is, as such, supported by the state.*" The Church was under the protection for the state and became an element in the ethnic identity of the dominant Amhara and Tigray. By contrast, Islam spread among other ethnic groups and therefore, the above policy failed to provide the same degree of political unity to its adherents.⁹⁰ Islam was strong in Arsi, Hararge, Jimma, Somali-region, Beni-Shangul, among the Gurage and in Wollo of Ethiopia.

As far as Haile Sellassie's government concerned, he retained Muslim courts, which dealt with family and personal law according to Islamic law. Muslims were allowed to celebrate some of the holidays like Arafa. The Emperor himself addressed the faithful on Arafa on April 12, 1965. However, Muslims holiday were not recognized as public holidays. They were also allowed to go to their pilgrimage to Mecca.⁹¹

Additionally, the behavior of Amhara administrators among the local communities of Bale and the general pattern of Christian dominance in the country, tended to alienate Muslims. One of my informants says, "*I do*

not forget how the Amhara administrators treated us not as a citizens' of Ethiopia but treated as strangers. This is an unforgettable experience in my life.”⁹²

Haile Sellassie’s policy of national integration meant that the various ethnic and religious groups of Ethiopia should be loyal from the local to the national level. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church has played a pivotal role in this policy process: together with the language policies and educational efforts. According to Haile Sellassie I, *“Claiming to be Ethiopian without a thorough knowledge of Amharic is tantamount to having no country and to not knowing one’s parents.”⁹³* The Ethiopian nationality, therefore, intermingled with the language, religion and a certain ethnic group.

Thus, the Church and the religion belonged to the most central aspect of the political identity of the nation. As the EOC played a vital role in the process of integration, this had the effect of forcing the Muslims towards the periphery.⁹⁴

From the following passage, we understand the Oromo perception of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church:

“The Orthodox Church can hardly be proud of its past relations with the Oromo people. Abyssinian priests never came to Oromia as the messengers of God and peace. They (priests) came as conquerors with Menelik’s generals, ‘blessing’ the massacre that the latter and their soldiers inflicted upon the Oromo People. They shared with the emperor, his generals and soldiers booties plundered from the Oromo. The clergy were given land that was confiscated from the Oromo peasants and became landlords; they owned Oromo peasants as Gabbars (serfs) and thrived upon their labor.”⁹⁵

Trimingham argues that Islam's force of expansion amongst pagans in Ethiopia was held by the fact it was the religion hostile to that of the Amhara race that lorded it over them.⁹⁶ Then Islam was welcomed by the Arsi Oromo as a religion of the oppressed by the Amhara subjugators. Even today, large numbers of the Arsi Oromo preferred to be Muslim rather than Christian. The Oromo never became priests because the Amharas said the pagan cannot preserve the secret of the Church and that they do not understand the liturgy and the secret of the Church. A proverb can confirm this saying "*Galla*⁹⁷ can never be a priest and *Tigre* can never be a king."⁹⁸

3.1.2.1 The Period of the Italian Occupation (1936-1941)

In 1935 a mobilization call was addressed to all landowners in the south that ordered them to show up for the Italo-Ethiopian war 1935-36), while the *gabbars* were seemingly ignored.⁹⁹

The Italian told the Arsi Oromo that they came to "*liberate*" them from Amhara domination. The Arsi like the Italians because they ended the subjugation of the Amhara for them. Above all, the *gabbar-naftagna* system was abolished with all its repression and cruelties. There was no labour nor the other excessive exactions and impositions. The Arsi peasants became free to cultivate their own land and harvest for their own benefits. The Italians made many promises, though most of these promises were not turned into action. They also encouraged Islamic expansion into areas untouched by Islam before, or where Islamic presence had been superficial.¹⁰⁰

Mussolini declared in a speech "*Facist Italy intends to guarantee the Muslim peoples of Libya and Ethiopia peace, justice, prosperity, respect for*

the laws of the prophet, and wishes moreover to manifest its sympathy with Islam and Muslims of the entire world."¹⁰¹

During the Ethio-Italian War of 1936-40, Muslims were tolerated -the Highest *Shariat* Court was officially established in Addis Ababa. Mosques were also built and the Arabic language was used. This period was a relief time for Ethiopian Muslims.¹⁰²

With the help of the British, Haile Sellassie resumed in control of Ethiopia in 1941. After his return from exile, this period was the worst for the Arsi Oromo. There were the harsh reaction against the Muslims by Haile Sellassie because the Arsi Oromo Muslims was said to have sided with the Italians. Ethiopian Muslims were described as aliens and a threat to Ethiopian peace. The political participation of Muslims during the Imperial era has been low or almost none.

As a result, Muslims were considered unfit for any public office. As a result, Muslims apparently doubled their efforts in trade. This was the only sector available for them. As John Markakis has noted, the Ethiopian Christian despised trade as a profession unbecoming of a Christian.¹⁰³ Due to the above reasons, the self-image of the Muslims as citizens of Ethiopia was distorted for a long period. In the view of the government, they were not as loyal as their Christian counterparts were.¹⁰⁴

In Conclusion, during the Imperial government, there was a degree of tolerance; yet, Muslims in Ethiopia never enjoyed the same status as their Christian counterparts. Muslims were never treated as equals during this period of regime. No Muslim held a high office or position either in the army or in the public administration. There was no full recognition of Muslim holidays up to the coming of the Dergue regime. The government

supported Church education indirectly with land grants and freeing of the Church owned property from taxation.¹⁰⁵ The Imperial era deprived the Ethiopian Muslims civil rights and described as “*Muslims residing in Ethiopia.*” The measure of nationality tended to be Orthodox Christianity.¹⁰⁶

3.1.2.2 The Bale Peasant Rebellion

The Bale peasant revolt had deep-rooted social, religious and political causes. One of the major problems was the land policy and heavy taxation. This had led to serious land shortage in the region.¹⁰⁷

Moreover, it was the 1963 land re-measurement and tax-reform in the region that precipitated the upheaval. When they were compelled to pay tax arrears on the extra lands, the landlords put the burden of extra tax on the cultivators. Under the pretext of tax default, the bureaucrats began to expropriate the peasants, turning them into tenants.

The Orthodox Church leaders leased clan or tribal lands to outsiders, claiming that it was church lands. Because of the oppositions of the Arsi Oromo in Bale against successive Abyssinian emperors, the Amhara called Bale “*ya shefta Ager*”, which literally means “region of rebels.”¹⁰⁸ The animosity between the Christian central government and the local Muslim pastoralists continued.

The Oromo and the Somali of the province had by now embraced Islam completely. Externally, the Somali republic’s expansionist policy that considered Bale as part of its unredeemed territory, for Somalia provided all sorts of encouragement to the already discontented Muslims to stand firmly against the Haile Selassie regime. To combat the Somali Republic’s propaganda, the government took a bold initiative in appointing Muslim

local gentry in government office at lower levels of the hierarchy. This policy was completely opposed by Christian settlers.

Until about the end of 1963 and the beginning of 1964, the Oromo struggle for liberation from the Amhara dominancy was, however uncoordinated. Yet, in the early of 1965, Bale became under the leadership of General Waqo Gutu started his organized resistance against Haile Sellassie's regime. The first rebel action took place on 8 February 1965, when a small force overran the town of Oberso(Mana Hangetu district), destroying the only Orthodox Church and burning official documents. The Orthodox Christian settlers fled to Mena and Negele-Borana. Three days later, Waqo Gutu with 250 rebels besieged the town of Bidre. The resistance continued for three years. Through the mediation of some people, Waqo Gutu submitted on 28 March 1970.¹⁰⁹

Waqo's submission brought to an end the five years of fighting that had cost a great number of lives and resources. On his arrival at Goba airstrip in April, the Governor, General Jagama Kello, personally welcomed Waqo. Three months later, he met the Emperor who granted him a new title and some land grants. Waqo Gutu was bestowed the title of *Grazmach* and land grants commensurate with his title. He became a wealthy man owing much livestock and plenty of land in his village of Mada Wolabu.¹¹⁰

Waqo returned to Somalia in 1975. In 1989, he founded the United Oromo Liberation Front (UOPLF) to fight against the Dergue regime. He joined the transitional government of Ethiopia in 1991 but Waqo left it talks in 1992, claiming he had been betrayed by TPLF. In 2000, he formed the United Liberation Forces of Oromia(ULFO) fighting for the right to self-determination of the Oromo and led as chairperson until he was

taken ill. Waqo Gutu died while he was on exile and buried in his village Mada Wolabu in 2006.

3.2 The Dergue regime (1974-1991)

Dergue was a military junta that came to power in Ethiopia following the ousting of Haile Sellasie. Dergue is the short name of the Coordinating committee as a provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC) who seized the country after overthrew of Haile Sellasie autocratic feudal rule in 1974.¹¹¹ After the upsurge of the revolution, the Dergue Socialist ideology separated church and State.

In December 1974, Ethiopia declared itself as a Socialist State with a program of revolutionary reform called, “ETHIOPIA TIKDEM” (Ethiopia First) as a slogan and creed.¹¹² During the Dergue period, thousands of innocent people were either tortured or killed as anti-revolutionary elements.

In the year 1975, a land reform policy effectively ended landlordism in the country and emancipated millions of peasants from the control of the propertied classes. The southern people in general and the Arsi Oromo in Bale in particular welcomed this policy because land was confiscated from the *balabats* and declared to be the ownership of the public, in which the size of the land owned by the government was greatly reduced and was redistributed to the households.

With the coming of the Dergue, both the traditional and the monarchical social and economic structures of the community underwent serious transformations. It brought to an end the domination of the Orthodox Church and declared that all religions were equal. As the result of this declaration number of Muslim holidays became official holidays. From

this situation, we can see that Islam and Ethiopian Muslims got official recognition, where religious diversity would be acknowledged.¹¹³

On 20 April 1974 there was a huge Muslim demonstration where about 100,000 Muslims took part. In the demonstration, they achieved the rights to exercise certain privileges.¹¹⁴

Three of Muslims holidays got official recognition for the first time and they have been held as national holidays since then. The first, Id al-fitr, the second, Id al-Adha(called Arafa in Ethiopia)marks the end of the hajj, the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. The third national Islamic holiday is Mawlid, the birth of Mohammed. On this day Ethiopian Muslims join street processions that include songs recounting the life of Mohammed

Before this time, they were called Muslims residing in Ethiopia and from that time on, they have been recognized as Ethiopian Muslim. Then the Ethiopian Muslims Affairs Supreme Council was established.

Although their situation improved in comparison with the Imperial government, there were certain restrictions on constructions of mosques, and censorship on religious literatures. At the end of the period, particularly after the 1987 constitution, things became better. In general, the Dergue discouraged the practical exercise of religion.¹¹⁵

3.3 Post Dergue period (1991 until now)

In 1991, after a long civil war, the Dergue was overthrown by Tigray Liberation Front (TPLF), which later became Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) coalition, which has remained in power until the present day. The TPLF, led by Meles Zenawi, Ethiopia's current prime minister, gained control over Addis Ababa in May 1991.

After the EPRDP seized control of political power in the country, the policy of ethnic federalism promised, for the first time in Ethiopia's long history, to respect the country's incredible cultural diversity and give real autonomy to its different ethnic groups. A new constitution was adopted in 1994 that divided Ethiopia into regions drawn roughly along ethnic lines. Then Bale became one of the zones of the Oromiya Regional State. This period is regarded commonly as the period of religious freedom in Ethiopia since the government announced that it accepted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations in its Charter.

The Constitution of 1994 Articles 14-28 explicitly enumerated the basic and fundamental rights of citizens.¹¹⁶ The people were granted the right to exercise their religions. The Muslims in Bale also enjoyed benefits granted to the Muslims in Ethiopia.

One of my informants says, "*I had been serving the Muslim community as Kadi during the reign of Haile Sellasie and Mengistu Haile Mariam, but I have not seen such freedom during EPRDF.*"¹¹⁷

As the result of this, we see many changes among the Muslim communities. This government gave the possibility to organize all activities of Muslims. The EPRDF Regime has given the following freedom for the Muslim community in Ethiopia.¹¹⁸

The restriction on *hajj* -pilgrimage to Macca, which was restricted during the Dergue, has been lifted by EPRDF. Thus, any Muslim who is able to fulfil the required criterion according to the Islamic law has the right to go on a pilgrimage. Dergue restricted the distribution of religious literature in the country. Nevertheless, EPRDF has ended censorship on

religious literature. As a result, much literature is printed in the country and imported from outside. This helped the Muslims to distributed literature written in the country. We have the establishment of printing presses for promotion of Islamic literature. Various magazines, audio and video production have been produced and sold especially in the cities.

We have also seen the establishment of Muslim organizations at country level, like the Ethiopian Youth Muslim Association and others.

The other new phenomenon is that the construction of mosques has greatly increased in many places at the country level. The Ethiopian government accepts the Islamic Affairs Supreme Council as the representative for Muslim community. However, almost every Muslim in Ethiopia suspects that the government controls the organization indirectly.

On 28 November 1995, a Muslim demonstration demanding that the *Sharia law* should be one of the bases of the Ethiopian Constitution. This is a major trend and it tells us that Ethiopian Muslims are feeling more confident to change even the policy direction of the country, and to influence the Government.

4. FACTORS FOR EXPANSION OF ISLAM IN BALE

Before I discuss about the factors which facilitated the expansion of Islam, I would like to describe the religious changes of the Arsi Oromo in Bale.

When Bartels mentioned the exposition of the Oromo Worldview, Islam has transformed some fundamental concepts associated with the traditional religion.¹¹⁹ Some of the fundamental changes in the core of the Oromo culture or perception of the people have taken place. Before their conversion to Islam, the Arsi Oromo believed in *Waaqaa* (God in Oromo) who created and sustained everything in the heavens and the earth. Then, the term '*Waaqaa*' has now become synonymous with *Allah* who refers to the creator. The concept of *Waaqaa* originally 'includes countless particular manifestations of *Waaqaa* in this world, particularization of his creative work which are conceived as beings.

With establishment of the mosques, prayers in traditional 'sacred places' are replaced by (*salat*) prayers at the mosque and got new Islamic orientations. People began to label the traditional religious practices as 'backward' and something, which 'contradict the commandments of Allah'.

In the process of change, traditional prayers were Islamized and were re-named as Islamic (Sheik Hussein, Sof Umar, etc). As part of the traditional religious practices, prayers were held for rain, fertility and well-being of cattle, for the well-being of the family and the general community (*gosa*), either on a mountain, riverside or under a tree. On such occasions, the *Qallu* of the Oromo (the traditional religious leader) led prayers. Now, imams or sheikh' at Mosques replace the traditional religious leaders-the

Qallus.¹²⁰ As an example in Bale, the Muslim sheiks are now often called *Qalluu*. Additionally, the weakening of the *Gada*¹²¹ System is consequently the result of the change in faith or the process of conversion.

The given Oromo name has been changed to the Arabic names, such as Mohammed, Abdulkadir, and Abdurrahman etc. Such Arabic names were given to their children by the first generation of Muslims. The converts themselves did not change their names but they gave Islamic names to their children. According to my informants, this indicates that the Oromo is losing his or her given name, which signifies his or her own identity.¹²²

Different stages can be discerned: First, a few innovators converted, and then the process accelerate so that the majority of the population joins the process and there were few who remained in their indigenous religion of the Oromo. To give an example, the rate of conversion among the population in lowland, central that began early and highlands of Bale (recent phenomena) is different. If we compare the conversion process between the lowland and the highland of Bale, especially the *Kokossa* area, the process is so slow to the recent years.¹²³

As Trimingham noted, “Islam’s force of expansion amongst pagans in Ethiopia was helped by the fact that was the religion hostile to the Amharic race that lorded it over them.”¹²⁴ This opinion is only true after the expansion of the Amhara in nineteenth Century. However, the conversion of the Arsi Oromo to Islam was before the Amhara conquest. Therefore, I would like to suggest the point of contact for their conversion:

The Oromo idea of Supreme God is monotheistic. Of course, the monotheistic nature of Oromo religious tradition was cause for

speculation and debate among researchers. As far as, oral traditions concerned the Oromo idea of a Supreme God was borrowed neither from Christianity nor from Islam.¹²⁵ It was an indigenous Oromo concept. The notion of God in the traditional Oromo religion had a history that predated Islam. Of course, the Oromo religion contained a concept similar in meaning to Islam prior to their contact with it. In fact, it was this similarity of notion and understanding of God that accounts for the easiness transformation of worldview from their traditional religion to Islam. In my opinion, between the traditional Oromo religion and Islam can be a condition for conversion of Arsi Oromo in to Islam. Islam had the advantage of contact with the Oromo monotheistic view of God.

For the fact that conversion is a continual change among the society, I do not only stop the changes that happened in a traditional society (Arsi Oromo) but there is still a change in faith in a contemporary situation. As Terje Østebø have argued in his coming dissertation: - “a discussion on religious change in contemporary setting needs to be related to issues of modernity and modernization.”¹²⁶ These days, Globalization¹²⁷ has a lot of impact on the societal life.

In the next section, I would like to discuss factors that played a pivotal role for the expansion of Islam in among the Arsi Oromo of Bale.

4.1 Trade and Outside influence

The Red Sea trade revived in the beginning of 18th century along which Islam was gradually expanding expanding similarly trade also flourished along the sea port of Mobassa. Zeila became a trading post that brought a strong Islamic expansion was through trade.

Another reason for the expansion was that Bale was bordered by strong Muslim areas. In the early time, Harar was the permanent centre from which Islamic propaganda radiated over southern Ethiopia.¹²⁸ This showed that there was a socio-political interrelation between the two regions, which contributed for the expansion of Islam.

Another peculiar feature of the Islamization of the Arsi Oromo in Bale is the coming of the Somali population to the lowland of Bale. Of course, there was indeed many years socio-cultural interaction between the Muslim Somali and the Arsi Oromo in Bale inhabiting the eastern lowland of Bale. These demographic changes in the lowland area of Bale allowed the Somali, who were already Muslims, to settle and share their faith.¹²⁹

The muudaa made Anajina an important pilgrimage centre, where many people from a wide area, cutting across political, religious and linguistic boundaries, come and participate in a common ceremony. The interaction between people has been regardless of their ethnic and cultural differences. For instance, the pilgrims were from different parts of Ethiopia, especially from Muslim predominantly areas like Jimma Abba Jifar, Gurage, Silxi tribes came for the pilgrimage, providing for sharing their beliefs.¹³⁰

The phenomenon of globalization in the world has also brought changes in the areas of communications, culture, politics and religion. The media has played a pivotal role and brought a great impact in the local culture. Ethiopia is not free of these influences.

4.2 Socio-cultural factors

Regarding, socio-cultural factors I would like to mention the following:

4.2.1 Kinship-Gosa (clanship)

Before dealing how was the Arsi Oromo socio-cultural reality contributed to the rise and expansion of Islam, I would like to describe what the subjects itself comprise. The Arsi Oromo, like other Oromo divisions, is patrilineal society.

The kinship structure ranges from *mana/Warra*(family/extended family)-*Ardaa*(minor lineage)-*Balbala*(lineage)- to *Gosa*(clan).¹³¹

The *gosa* is a partlineal group whose members may not be able to articulate exact genealogical connections although they believe to have common descent from a founding ancestor. Each of these clans is divided into less inclusive segments called the *balbala*, which literary means 'door'.

A *balbala* is a group of lineage kin in which the members can demonstrate genealogical links with other members from one of the descendants of the founder of the clan they belong. The founder of a *balbala* is one of the son or siblings of the founder of a clan. It is generally believed that a *balbala* that have surpassed that depth. Further divisions within the *balbala* are called *aanaa*, which literally means "my closest, nearest." *Aanaa* consists of smaller descent units whose genealogical links can be traced to three generations i.e. to grandfather.

Mana/Warraa is another level of kin organization lower than but shares common features with *aanaa*. It refers to the extended family, which comprises the household head, his wives, his married children and their wives and their wives' children. *Warra* consists of those members of the

aanaa that make up coherent settlement group. Other members of the *aanaa* who live in more distant but are still considered for consultation in case of problems, conflicts and rituals are not members of the *Warraa*

The lowest kinship unit is *Manaa*, which literary means 'house.' Mana refers to the immediate or nuclear family. It refers to a husband, his wives and children in which the husband is the head of the *mana*. It refers to the dwelling place of a husband, a wife and children.

The closer the kinship links, the more influence in any aspects of life. For instance, a husband is in charge. He has the authority to influence his lowest kin, that is, his home. If a husband is converted to Islam, a wife and children follow his footsteps. They have no option to say no because the system has given him authority. The kin system gives him relational authority.

Another issue is that the conversion of the traditional clan or religious leaders had a great impact on the common people because the common people see clan or religious authorities among the Oromo as role model. What they accept was right and what they reject was something unacceptable. The area of influence of the clan leaders is wide. Therefore, their conversion into Islam accelerates the conversion of others in the lower kin's.

I asked one of my informants, a former clan leader who was converted from *Waaqeeffanna* to Islam, "what was the impression of your *gosa*?" He answered, "In the day of my conversion many people got surprised and from that day onwards many people came to accept Islam."¹³² I can say that the conversion of an influential person has contributed for the conversion of the other people in the lower kinship levels.

4.2.2 Marriage relationship

Under this subtitle, I discuss how marital relationships contributed for the expansion of Islam. I would discuss the types of marriages that have been practiced by the Arsi Oromo and relate this social interaction with the expansion of Islam. Marriage has a remarkable place in the life of the Arsi Oromo. It is a means of creating social interrelation. It is also considered as a way of getting a significant place in a social responsibility among the community for a married person considered as having reached full development or a mature age.

One type of marriage is infant betrothal. In the past, infant betrothal was an alternative marriage arrangement where close friends from different clans would promise their infants sons and daughters for future marriage. The promise is sealed by blood of small lamb, which is called *rakoo*. When the girl reaches maturity, however, her family arranges her marriage. This type of marriage negotiations are initiated and concluded without the knowledge and consent of the boy and the girl

A second type of marriages is called *gabbara*. Parents decide for their children the time of marriage and choose marriage partner for them because children were not regarded as mature enough at making informed decisions on such vital matters. The ideal *gabbara* marriage takes place when a man or his parents transfer an agreed number (usually negotiated) of cattle, to a woman's family and take a wife in exchange. Livestock however, are not the only property to be transferred to a woman's family. Money, honey, and garments are among other kinds of items a woman's parents usually demand as part of *gabbara*.¹³³

A third type of marriage is called *walgara* (or exchange marriage). In *walgara* or exchange marriage, two men exchange their younger sisters.

Sometimes, fathers themselves exchange their own daughter for additional wives.

There are also other forms of marriages. *Aseennaa*, in which a young girl takes the initiative to join a man she fallen in love with. The other form of marriage is known as *buttaa*, taking a bride by force. A marriage, which is conducted by common consent of a boy and a girl without the prior approval of their family, is called *hawata*. *Bimbatoo* is also another form of marriage arrangement upon the death of someone's wife; her kin group gives the wife's sister as a wife to the widower in the form of replacement. *Dhaala* is also a marriage arrangement by inheritance in which one of the brothers of a deceased husband inherits the widow as his wife. This is to take care of the family of the deceased brother and to perpetuate his descendants.

It is a fact that marriage plays key role in bringing together people living in far places with different descent groups and religious background.

Among the Arsi Oromo, one marries not just an individual but also an agreement with an entire kin group. This creates a social, emotional connection between different groups of the society. Marriage converts strangers into friends and creates strong group and personal alliances.

Another issue with regard to marriage relationship is that the marriage relationship between the early converted Arsi Oromo and non-Muslim Arsi Oromo played a great role in the spread of Islam.

According to one of my informants, the expansion of Islam around *Kokossa* area was caused by marriage relation with the Muslim Arsi Oromo living around *Gedeb* and in the Robe areas.¹³⁴ This can increase

number of adherents of Islam because wives and children born to Muslims were regarded as Muslims.

Polygamous marriage has been a common practice among the Arsi Oromo. In the early days, having many wives was seen as prestigious phenomenon among the Oromo community. One wife may look after the cattle properly, while the other wife takes care of the family. It is a fact that Islamic teachings allow Muslim men to marry more than one wife, which has been similar to the Arsi Oromo culture. As a result, a person may have large number of children and all children become Muslims automatically. Thus, polygamy was one of the contributing factors that encouraged the Arsi Oromo in Bale to embrace Islam.

4. 3 Religio-political Factors:

As it has been mentioned in the first Chapter of this paper, the Oromo Nation had an elaborate system of governance known as the *gada System*. The *gada* system is an all-encompassing system defining political, social and religious beliefs and practices.

Following the conquest of the Arsi Oromo by the Abyssinia, inhuman treatment of the Oromo created deep animosity and hatred towards them (see chapter 3). The Bale and Arsi Oromo developed also hatred for the religion and language of the Amhara. The deep memory of inhumanity was passed on to posterity (next generation).¹³⁵ The sad phenomenon that stated in previous chapters and the weakening of the *Gada* system became the main reason, in reaction to anything Abyssinian, to embrace Islam as a better alternative.¹³⁶

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church priests took part in “blessing” the forceful subjugation of the Oromo and other nationalities, with such

cruelty, in the name of “*hager maqinat*” (the Amharic expression with equivalent meaning of expanding the country).¹³⁷ Islam religion spread in Bale as a reaction to the Ethiopian colonization. The Bale people accepted en-masse or in general because they identified Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity with the oppressor and to assert their identity vis-a-vis Abyssinians. The Amhara spy monk, Atseme wrote: “The Galla became Muslim for his hatred of Amhara priests.” Bereket(1980) also noted, “...Oromos in Bale province accepted Islam in large number as a demonstration of anti-Amhara sentiment and rejection of all values associated with imperial conquerors.”¹³⁸ Another reason that encouraged the Arsi Oromo to embrace Islam and not to accept Christianity was that the dietary practices required by the Orthodox Church. The Church demanded its believers to abstain from non-vegetarian food for more than 150 days a year. That would be extremely difficult for the Arsi Oromo whose subsistence depended on meat and cow milk¹³⁹.

The religious freedom since 1991 has contributed much for the expansion of Islam.

4.4 The contribution of the Salafi movement

The history of *Salafism* goes back to the 18th century figure Muhammad ibn Abd-al-Wahhab who was from Saudi Arabia that called for a return to the religious practices of the *salaf as-sali* or “the righteous predecessors’.”¹⁴⁰ As Terje Ostebo has mentioned the movement is affiliated ideologically and financially to the Saudi Arabia.¹⁴¹ He has mentioned that the *Salafi*¹⁴² movement has the longest history back to 1940s.

Jon Abbik also argues that Ethiopian Muslims in recent years have gone through a phase of revivalism and self-ascertain.¹⁴³ The Islamic movement

in Bale area is also a kind of this religious revival, which has been a vivid image since 1991. In Bale, the movement is commonly known as *Salafi*. This Islamic movement wanted to revive Islamic practices.

These days, they have the strongest supporters of from the local community, especially among the young generation and those who are in the middle-aged. Even they got a support from some prominent community leaders. The main agenda of the leaders of the movement is to propagate Islam by conducting *da'wa*, which means an assembly of large number of people in an open area for propagating Islam. It is to call people to Islam in general. Their major purpose is to purify Islam in reaching the followers of traditional Islam and the followers of the Oromo religion (*Waaqefannaa*).

Geographically, the *Salafi* focus areas are both in towns and in countryside of the Bale zone. As an example, Kokossa and Nansebo districts, which are predominantly followers of the Oromo religion, *Waaqefannaa*, are the major target areas.¹⁴⁴

According to my informant, the movement has its strong followers and influence in Robe, and in southwest Bale and in the Gedeb area. For some reason the people in Kokossa area are a bit slow in adopting the new movement in comparison with the lowland.¹⁴⁵ The movement has relations with the international Islamic movement in Arab countries.¹⁴⁶

The *Salafi* movement promotes Islamic doctrine and pure Islam as its main goal. They strictly emphasize the “*sunnah*” of the prophet Mohammed, that is, prophet’s customs and his way of living. For instance, black mark scar on the forehead (as a result of prayer), the growing of beard, trousers above ankles, a complete cover for the women,

etc. It is easy to identify them by such outward appearances. The movement seems to have achieved some of its objectives.

The discovery of oil in the Arab world has also brought much wealth and the opportunity to use that wealth to spread Islam in other parts of the world. This has enabled young people get scholarship go to Arab countries and to get better knowledge on Islamic teachings and doctrines. Besides, they make much amount of money during their stay in Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries. When they come back to their homeland, they become strong teachers and preachers of their faith. They also encourage in building of mosques and *madrasa* schools in the rural areas. This is what we see in vast areas of Bale.¹⁴⁷

We see the constructions of several mosques in the countryside where there were no mosques before, especially along the main roads of Bale areas. According to my observation, there are 12 mosques in Robe, 4 mosques in Dodola, 4 mosques in Adaba. The other strategy is that they send well-trained preachers to different areas of Bale. According to my informants, several sheiks were sent from Asasa town.¹⁴⁸

In Conclusion, since 1991 that brought the religious freedom in the country, Islam got an opportunity to spread. It was also because of the broad socio-cultural and political changes in the country and the influence of Islamic movements of revivalism on global arena.

5. INTER-RELIGIOUS RELATIONS IN BALE

5.1 Christian-Muslim relations

Religion has repeatedly been causes for conflict and war. A Christian-Muslim relations are marked by a history confrontation and war. With regard to Christian-Muslim relations in Ethiopia, it is believed to be the first host country for Muslims refugees fleeing Mecca in the Prophet time.¹⁴⁹ Since then this was taken as a recognized attitude of the coexistence of the Christians and the Muslims in Ethiopia.

However, there was remarkable conflict staged by Imam Ibn Ibrahim al-Ghazi (1506-43) called by the Ethiopians Ahmed Gagn. The campaign was so intense that King Lebna Dengel sought help from Portugal that came too late. For when the King of Portugal eventually sent ships with four hundred soldiers Lebna Dengal was dead and his son Galawdeos was reigning in his place. Subsequently, joining with the Portuguese forces, King Galadeos won a decisive battle against Ahmad Gagn at Wayna Daga near Lake Tana.

In a general speaking, many people believe and know that Islam in Ethiopia has co-existed with Christianity peacefully. There have been good social inter-action between the adherents of the two religions. Nevertheless, the religio-political factor (*see chapter 4*) in Bale has incurred a deep-rooted hatred towards the Amhara conquerors and Christianity. As it has been stated earlier, Christianity was seen as a state ideology and the faith of those who took over their political and socio-economic autonomy. This overshadowed the relation between Christian and Muslims in Bale. On other hand, some factors contributed for the religious tolerance between Christians and Muslims. These were blood relationship, friendship and neighbourhoods. This social relation binds

the relation together in spite of the religious differences. Yet, it seems that there is a changing scenario in recent years. We have witnessed violent clashes between Orthodox and Muslim communities in some places in the country. As far as I see it, however, we have not yet witnessed violence in a significant or alarming degree between Christians and Muslims in Bale and Arsi so far. However, we have observed some extremist infiltration into the traditional Muslim community and a number of violent incidents have taken place during the last few years. Especially, violent incidents have happened in the areas where Islam has been recently introduced like Kokossa and Nansabo areas of the Western Arsi zone. However, it appears that they have not yet gained much ground or accepted by the majority but it seems that there is slow changing trend.

Most of religions have the potential to lead either into conflict. Therefore, knowing each other better can help to create a good atmosphere for inter-religious relationship. I, therefore, intend to discuss two things pertaining to the inter-religious relations in the next section (the Islamic beliefs and practices, and the theological controversies between Islam and Christianity). These areas of differences between Christians and Muslims have the potential to lead into the inter-religious conflict. The understanding of these subjects are the most important for peacefully coexistence or for the positive inter-religious relationship between the two religious communities.

5.2 The Islamic beliefs and practices

There are six doctrines of Islam that every Muslim is required to believe:

1. Belief in *Allah*. There is only one true God, all seeing, all knowing and all-powerful.

2. Belief in *Angels*. The chief angel is Gabriel, who is said to have appeared to Mohammed. There is also a fallen angel named *Shaitan(Satan)*

3. Belief in Holy Books. Muslims believe in four God-inspired books: The *Tawurat* (the Torah), given to *Musa* (Moses); the *Zabur* (the Psalms), given to *Dawud* (David); the *Injil* (Gospel), given to Isa (Jesus) and the *Qur'an*, given to Mohammed. Quran is the last book or revelation and to be the preexistent and perfect word of Allah. Although the Qur'an is the main holy book, the *sunnah*¹⁵⁰ is considered the second source of religious instruction. The *sunnah* was written 250-300 years after he died by different collectors.

4. Belief in Messengers. According to Muslims belief, Allah's messengers are divided into two groups: the first groups are called "*Rasul*," apostles. They are sent with special gifts and given books; for example, *Musa* (Moses), Isa (Jesus) and Mohammed. The second groups are called "*Nabi*", prophets. These are directly inspired and have a general commission to teach and guide people but cannot sent with special books like "*Rasuls*".

5. Belief in the end times (Last day). On the "last day," the dead will be resurrected. Allah will judge, and each person will be sent to heaven or hell.

6. Belief in Predestination. Allah has determined what He pleases, and no one can change what He has decreed. Allah predestined man when creating him what thing will he do; evil or good. Therefore, man can never alter his destiny or he can not control his deeds and circumstances.

Besides the six doctrines to be believed, there are five duties (five Pillars) to be performed:

1. The statement of belief: "There is no true god but God (Allah), and Muhammad is the Messenger (Prophet) of God." This is called *Shahada*
2. Prayer: Muslims pray five times a day.
3. Giving (*alms*): one must give to the needy, as all comes from Allah.
4. Fasting (during *Ramadan*): besides occasional fasting, all Muslims must fast during the Ramadan (the ninth month of the Islamic lunar year).
5. *Hajj*: the pilgrimage to Mecca should be performed at least once in a Muslim's life.

These five practices, the framework of obedience for Muslims, are taken seriously and literally.

5.3 Theological Controversies between Christianity and Islam

The three key topics of discussion between a Christian and a Muslim are the nature of God, the deity of Jesus Christ, and salvation by grace apart from works.¹⁵¹

Like Christianity, Islam is monotheistic, but it rejects the concept of the Trinity. Islam accepts certain portions of the Bible, such as the Law and the Gospels, but rejects the majority of it as slanderous and uninspired.

Muslims have great admiration and honour for Jesus (Isa). They know that Jesus Christ is one of the greatest prophets of Allah. Muslims accepted the virgin birth of Jesus (surah 19:20-21). The Quran refers to him as the son of Mary. Again the Quran says that Jesus makes birds out

of clay, healed the blind and the leper and raises the dead (sura 3:49).¹⁵² Again, this portion of Quran says Jesus is sent as an apostle to the “children of Israel” Muslims see Injil (Gospel) as a book given to Jesus as Quran to Mohammed. Muslims honour Jesus by giving names and titles “the word of God “, “the sprit of God “and “the Messiah (al-Masihi)”. Including these, Quran gives Jesus thirteen statements, which gives him the high honour.¹⁵³

On the other hand, Muslims believe that Jesus is like the other messengers a created mortal man; he is no more than a prophet servant. He must not be called god or son of God. They do not believe that Jesus died on the cross (surah 4:157). They do not believe the doctrine of the atonement. They say that God is able to save people from hell by his will. Man cannot move God’s emotion. Even though Christ is crucified, no one can change Gods view or emotion because he is far from man. He is transcendent and He does not reveal Himself.

Rather, Islam asserts that Jesus, though born of a virgin, was created just as Adam - from the dust of the earth. On the other hand, the Trinity and Christ’s redemption on the cross are central to Christianity.

The idea of salvation in Islam and Christianity is another difference between the two religions. In Islam, salvation consists of believing in Allah and doing deeds of righteousness. The areas of good deeds advocated by Muslims are alms giving, prayers, fasting, making pilgrimage to Mecca, and the necessity of good character, whereas, in Christianity salvation is reconciliation to God through the work of Jesus Christ.

Islam teaches that the Qur'an is the final authority and the last revelation of Allah. However, Christians claim that the Bible was completed in the 1st century.

5.4. Proper approaches in witnessing among Muslims

The very purpose of choosing this topic is to inform that Christians should not repeat similar faults that had been done in the name of Christianity in the early days of Ethiopian history. As I have mentioned in Chapter 4 religio-political factor contributed for the expansion of Islam in which conversion to Islam came as a reaction against the Christians.

After having a real picture about the teaching of both Islam and Christianity, it is possible to look for a proper approach. Sharing the Gospel humbly, boldly, and passionately is part of the Christian mission.

First, it is important to define what the Christian missions mean. It is obeying Christ. After Christ's death and resurrection, He commanded the disciples to share the Gospel, the message of His redemption. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28.19-20). This Great Commission applies to Christians today. Rather than a burden, obeying His call brings joy and reward in heaven. We should fulfill our mission not out of duty but love: "For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. . . . Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not

counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.” (2Corinthians 5:14-21) Christian mission is also proclaiming Christ as the only way to abundant, eternal life. Whom do we tell? Jesus made it clear that Christians are to reach out to “all the nations” (Matthew 28:19).

Christian missions, however, is not limited to overseas ministry. While believers should faithfully support those who go to the unreached, all Christians have the mission to share Christ on the home field with family, friends, coworkers, and the community.

Christian mission is very difficult if the one who evangelizes does not know the belief, the culture, and the worldviews of those whom he is evangelizing. Thus, Christians need to find proper ways to evangelize the Muslims.

5.4.1 Dialogue

Dialogue as “the act or process of dealing with another to reach agreement, negotiation, arbitration, mediation, conciliation, bargaining, coming to terms, conference, dialogue, discussion, and parley.”¹⁵⁴

Dialogue can only exist when there are two parties with different opinion. Dialogue is the way to explain the various points of views and to illustrate the facts upon which they are based. The aim of the dialogue is also to achieve openness toward the other, to understand him or her point of view, and to be willing to understand him, and to accept him or her as he or she is and as he or she likes to be. So dialogue is the venue through which we assimilate opposing facts and information of the interlocutors and the ability to reach common understanding. Creating better understanding should not only be the purpose of dialogue. It

should also be about sharing the truth we believe in. Therefore, dialogue, in principle, is based on two fundamental notions. The first is to understand what we are dialoguing about, and the second is to understand why we are dialoguing.

Although Christians and Muslims in Ethiopia meet in schools, in work places, in business, they do not share their religious understanding openly as members of two different religious communities. They are careful and cautious about each other's religious celebrations.

As we saw in the previous chapters, social relations are very important among the people in Bale. Therefore, to build good relationships between Christians and Muslims, dialogue is quite important. What keep Christians and Muslim from engaging in religious dialogue, is the old prejudices of the two religions as opposite. Both Muslims and Christians show little interest in each other's religions.

It is precisely because people do not know one another or rejects one another that dialogue is impossible. Many groups meet to try to build bridges discuss sensitive subjects and to prevent conflicts.

In Bale, I have not seen an organized dialogue between Christians and Muslims. Mainly informal dialogue is going on in meeting places and social gatherings; yet most of the time it ends in a dispute or argument.

In dialogue, each community is allowed to define itself. A person entering into dialogue should have a firm grasp of his or her faith. Rather than insisting on our perception of the other, we must begin with the other's understanding of his or her own faith. When Christians and Muslims meet in this way, then we can move beyond the stereotypes and

misperceptions of the past and be open to the other in terms of his or her own self-understanding, his or her own faith.

In the encounter and dialogue between Muslims and Christians, the obligation is to listen to the others and attempt to understand them in their own terms. Rather than either assuming that one knows the faith of the others, or attempting to force them into the stereotypes of the past, we need to meet in a freshness and openness of spirit.

When we meet in dialogue, we need to meet as fellow human beings. Most of the time we have “demonized” those of other faiths. However, when we meet in dialogue, we quickly discover that we share a common humanity and that we are fellow brothers. We can start dialogue with points that Islam and Christianity have in common.

In dialogue between Muslims and Christians, it is essential that the depths of the respective faiths come to expression. Each has to express what they have experienced of their faith. This must be done in the spirit of love, listening profoundly and speaking truthfully. Thus, we can begin to overcome the historical and contemporary situation of hatred and enter into a new day in the relations between the two faiths.

5.4.2 Looking for points of contact

I would like to mention some similarities held by Muslims and Christians. This does not mean they have the same understanding about God.

About God: God as creator, provider, and sustainer of creation. Again, Muslims believe that God is immortal. God is living from eternity to eternity.

God is all present in all places (Omnipresence). We can see this in the Bible text, Psalm 139: 7-10 and in the Quran surah 50:15. Here we see that both Christianity and Islam have similar views on the presence of God in all places.

God's mightiness (Omnipotent). Both Christianity and Islam believe that God is all-powerful. This idea is mentioned both in the Bible, Luke 1:37 "nothing is impossible with God", Job 36:5 and in the Quran Surah 3:156.
God all knows (Omniscient). God is greater than man's heart. He knows all things past and future.

About Jesus: his virgin birth: Muslims accept the virgin birth of Jesus (Surah 19:21). Especially *Salafi's* understands you if you mention some verses from the Quran because some of them are able to read Arabic. Of course they do not believe in His divinity. They believe that He was created in Mary's womb by God's command. Only the similarities help us as a point of contact. For Christians, the virgin birth of Jesus is so important that it is by the power of the Holy Spirit for the salvation of humanity.

Doing miracles: both Christianity and Islam have similar points that Jesus has performed miracles but with different perspectives. Islam says even if He performs miracles that does not show He is divine, whereas Christianity says an ordinary person cannot do those great miracles. Therefore, Jesus Christ is divine. Again, we need to emphasize on the similarity for conversation with Muslims.

His sinless life: most Muslims consider the prophets and apostles to be sinless. The Quran mentions the sins of Adam, Noah (Surah 11: 47; 71: 26- 28), Abraham (20: 70-28), Moses, David and Muhammed (40:55) and

their need to seek forgiveness for their sins. Even Quran considers Jesus as a prophet; it does not mention that he needs to seek forgiveness for sins. Similarly, Christians believe that Jesus Christ is sinless to save humanity.

The Muslims believe Jesus as the command of Allah (Surah 3: 47; 19:36). This interpretation might have a similarity with the text in the gospel of John 1: 1 that says, "In the beginning was Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The difference is that Christians believe Jesus to be the incarnate Word of God not as created Word as Muslims believe.

Rejection of Idolatry: Christians reject idolatry. Worship only belongs to God. Similarly, the Muslims are very much against any worship except Allah. They reject the veneration of Sheik Hussein; yet, the traditional Muslims mix both the Islamic faith and the traditional beliefs.

5.4.3 The authenticity of Contextualization

Under this subtitle, I want to mention the nature, extent and importance of contextualization when working among Muslims. The models of contextualization differ from culture to culture.

Missiologist Darrell Whiteman defines contextualization as a process that involves, "*Attempts to communicate the Gospel in word and deed and to establish the Church in ways that make sense to people within their local cultural context, presenting Christianity in such a way that it meets people's deepest needs and penetrates their worldview, thus allowing them to follow Christ and remain within their own culture.*"¹⁵⁵

Contextualization, then, seeks to communicate the Gospel message to people within their indigenous language and cultural context, which means, in the way in which people live together. In the light of the above definition, I have seen how the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC)¹⁵⁶ and the Evangelical Churches of Ethiopia, which uses Geez and Amharic as the liturgy language respectively, have less contextualization in their Church services. Amharic had been the dominant language for centuries and Christianity was preached in Amharic in the areas where the Oromo language is the indigenous language. The style of worship is foreign to the indigenous culture.

Another issue is that when a person was converted to Christianity, he or she had to get a new Amharic name- “a Christian name”, had to renounce his own culture. Then his or her people considered this person as if, he or she had lost his or her identity and betrayed his or her own people. When a person become Christian, people say, “*Amaaraa ta’e*,” that means, he or she has become *Amhara*. This was a common experience for the converts among the Arsi Oromo.

The theological level of the receptors should also be taken into consideration while we do contextualization. The Muslims in Bale have a different level of understanding of their own faith and they could not read Quran. Therefore, it is very important to find the most acceptable method of communication for the receptors. Christians are accustomed to use certain words and phrases, which Muslims could not understand when they talk about spiritual things.

In Bale, I have observed that some Christians invite their Muslim friend to Christian meetings or conferences. Christians might unaware that their teaching might give different connotations for their Muslim friend. One

of the mistakes is to assume that Muslims know what the Christians speak about. For example, words such as “sin”, “saved”, “saviour” have different meanings in Islam. When you say Jesus is the Son of God, they think you mean he is God’s physical Son and not eternal. You must clearly define what you mean when you talk to Muslims about God.

“The gospel is a life-changing force. However, it does not necessarily have to be a foreign element within the culture of their Christian communicator.”¹⁵⁷

The Gospel needs to be related much more through the Islamic context. You may use some Quranic texts, which help as points of contacts. Especially names in the Bible, which are transliterated into Arabic. Moreover, all Muslims in Bale understand you if you use the local language, that is, ‘*Afan Oromo*.’ In this respect, translation of the Bible into the vernacular language is indispensable.

The methods of Jesus could be an example for Christian mission. Jesus, in his ministry in Palestine, used the method that led men from the known to unknown.¹⁵⁸ One of his methods is the dialogue with the woman at the well (John 4: 5ff). When Jesus called his disciples, they had much to learn. They were full of Jewish traditions. They were slow to learn. Nevertheless, Jesus accepted them and clarified everything to them. He started with the subject they knew.

One of the methods, which are helpful to present the Gospel to the Muslims in Bale, is telling stories from the Bible using indigenous language and cultural forms. Telling a story is part of the oral traditions of the Arsi Oromo. When you start to tell a story, everybody is ready to listen to you. Since many people are illiterate, they teach their children by telling story. By telling stories, the culture preserves its long traditions.

This is a powerful way to present the gospel. The stories of Jesus, his doing miracles can be presented clearly in a drama form or a film. For example, one of the methods that a Christian Organization in Ethiopia called the Great Commission is using is the "Jesus film". It is interesting because it has been translated into the vernacular languages of the people.

In contextualization of the gospel, identifying yourself with the people is indispensable. If the Christian communicator does not identify himself with the culture of the people, particularly with the Muslims, he will not be an effective instrument for the gospel. First, know the Muslims and their belief and know what you believe and how you can communicate what you believe. You need to be careful in contextualizing as to not mix the Christian teaching with the Muslims belief. Nevertheless, you should always focus on the centrality of the message of Christ. As a conclusion, in contextualization, the message of the gospel could be the same but the approach varies in every culture.

5.4.4 The Issue of social interaction

In chapter 4, I have already discussed the people's social relationship based on kinship tribal and clan background. The first way of ministering to such people is to develop personal relationships. To develop a relationship you need to participate in the social life of the society. Every day Muslims and Christians are meeting each other in many different places. Many opportunities for Christians to witness to Christ arise out of these meetings. For example, at the time of sorrow you need to show care and sympathy. This may indicate your concern for them. Today some Christians isolate themselves from any relations with Muslims. You cannot share the gospel from a distance. Christianity is not a life of isolation but engaging in a community's life and showing who Christ is.

Muslims rarely come to Christ through street preaching or Crusades. Therefore, Christian's highest priority should be to develop relationship. There are many ways to create friendships and relationship: eating meals together, participating on weddings and any of their festivals, and inviting them to Christian holidays like Christmas, Easter etc. Jesus Christ said, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." (Mark 12: 31). This commandment tells us to love anybody without condition. Showing love for Muslims breaks the barriers between Muslims and Christians.

Another point is that family evangelism is a good approach to reach Muslims in Bale. The reason is that according to the culture, most of decisions are made by the family or by the group. If the converts were the whole family, they would be able to stay in their community and be a witness to their own people.

Christian presence is another way of witnessing Christ. Christianity is not primarily a way of mere talking, but a way of living. The most convincing demonstration of the Christian faith is a life motivated by visible service. For example, if you distribute a tract for an illiterate Muslim, it is meaningless for him since he cannot read. However, he can watch and see your way of living. Living a true Christian life speaks a lot more than our speech. If a Christian is faithful at his home, at work place, at business area etc that attracts Muslims more than speech. The Muslims want a religion that shows good deeds.

All the above-mentioned approaches are fruitful if there is spiritual preparedness, that is, prayer. It is the essential element in evangelism. Christians need to ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit to reach Muslims with the gospel. The weakness of the Church is that it does not

pray regularly to evangelize Muslims. The power of prayer is very evident in evangelistic ministry.

5.4.5 What Christians should not do?

Hasselblatt mentioned," In approaching people of other faith, there are three mistakes made by Christians: being hostile, aggressive, and compromising."¹⁵⁹ Jesus forbade being hostile and aggressive towards other. The opposite mistake is that to make compromise on the truth or keeping silent about the truth of our faith. As far as I see, these are the two mistakes, which are commonly seen in Evangelical Churches in Ethiopia. Most of the time, Christians in their witness has ended up in useless argument.

Therefore, Christians should avoid disputes about words, which ruin their conversation. As Paul wrote to Timothy, 2Timothy 2:14b, "Warn them before God against quarrelling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen."

Never attack the person of Mohammed or Sheik Hussein whom Muslims respect them. If you do, this hardens Muslims against your message of the Gospel. Some Christians thought they could preach the gospel by attacking the Muslims beliefs and practices. This is the wrong approach.

5.4.6 Handling the Muslim Converts

When a Muslim becomes a Christian, he is usually cut off from his family, his friends, clan or tribe. Therefore, the Church should create a place for him to feel at home.¹⁶⁰ The responsibility of the church is not only to proclaim the gospel and make converts but to handle the convert and nurture him or her to Christian maturity. Christians should love and accept them and allow them into the fellowship. One of the marks of the

early Church was a real fellowship and concern for each other. They lived, worked and worshiped together, and then the glory of the Lord and their love became visible in the society around them. We need to have similar love, care and concern for our brothers and sisters who are converted to Christianity.

In addition to this, we should prepare a very clear teaching that helps him to understand the Christian faith. One of the weaknesses of the Church is that it does not have a proper teaching material for a Muslim convert. In my opinion, the Church needs to have separate teaching material for the Muslim converts. Finally, we should encourage him or her to be witnesses for their Muslim friend or family, because they are better in witnessing; meaning that they understand them better.

SUMMARY

Major findings in this study showed that the conversion of the Arsi Oromo in Bale into Islam goes back to the 19th century. Their conversion into Islam was facilitated by both the internal and external factors prevailing in the country. As indicated, Islam was already the religion of Bale kingdom in the medieval age before it was declined during the Oromo movement and expansion in the 16th century. Since the second half the nineteenth century, the renewal of the shrine of Sheik Hussein at anajina, northeast Bale was also a prominent for the history of the Islamization of the Arsi Oromo. Above all, the declining of the *Gada* of the Oromo, the Amhara conquest at the half of the nineteenth century has brought socio-cultural, religio-political changes. Those changes have contributed the process of conversion of the Arsi Oromo in Bale.

Furthermore, the *Salafi* movement has contributed for the recent Islamic expansion and revivalism in Bale. As a result, we have seen divisions and inter-religious intolerances in the area since 1991.

This study also describes the past and present Christian-Muslim relations in Bale. The Islamic beliefs and practices have been discussed because most Christians understand little about the beliefs of Islam. I have also suggested some points how to do the Christian ministry among Muslims.

END NOTES

¹ Islam in Ethiopia, (a documentary film prepared by Amharic, 2007), www.mfa.gov.et, accessed December 18, 2007.

² Moten 1989:221e

³ Levtzion 2000:227

⁴ Østebø 2005, Braukamper 2002 , Trimmingham 1952, Peterson 2005

⁵ Primary data is generally a fresh and collected for the first time or the first hand accounts of information.; secondary data is sources of information which are recorded or prepared by some other person

⁶ The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Report 2005

⁷ United Nations Concise Report 2007.

⁸ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Central Statistical Agency(CSA) 1994 Analytical report vol.II

⁹ Oromia is a region inhabited by the Oromo people and it is the biggest of the nine regional states that constitute the federal state of Ethiopia

¹⁰ CSA 1994

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid

¹³ Mamo 2004:13

¹⁴ Excerpted from *American Heritage Talking Dictionary* 1997

¹⁵ Horton 1971: 41, (2); Fisher 1973: 27-40; Woodberry 1989:219-220

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ As Guluma 2003:64 cited from Robin Horton 1974: 41

¹⁸ Fisher 1973: 27-40

¹⁹ Woodberry 1989: 219-220

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Worldview is translation of German Weltanschauung

²² Wikipedia. [http:// en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org). The free encyclopedia web page accessed on 13 January 2008

²³ During those days Ethiopia in its present geopolitical form did not exist. As argues of some scholars the present Ethiopia is only a creation of about 100 year ago after the Emperor Menelik's forceful annexation of the Southern peoples

²⁴ Aymro 1997:18

²⁵ Ibid 155 as cited from Huntingford 1955:231

²⁶ Braukamper 2002: 12-105; Islam in Ethiopia (a documentary film prepared by Amharic 2007

²⁷ Braukamper 2002: 76

²⁸ Ibid 81

²⁹ Ibid 77

³⁰ Ibid 81

³¹ Ahmad Ibn Ibrahim al-ghazi was an imam and member of the Adalites ruling Sultanates who defeated Emperor Lebna Dengel of Ethiopia. Nicknamed Gagn in Amharic, meaning “the left-handed.”

³² Trimmingham 1952: 76ff

³³ Mohammed 1994: 22

³⁴ Østebø 2005 and Braukamper 2002

³⁵ Informants no.14 o. i November 15, 2007

³⁶ Braukamper 2002: 83

³⁷ Asmarom 1973: 8

³⁸ History of the Oromo to the Sixteenth Century (2nd ed).Finfinne. Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau 2006; Abbas 1982

³⁹ Abbaa Bokkuu is father of the scepter;

- he was also called *Hayyuu*
- he chaired the assembly of deputies
- he was chief speaker

Abbaa Dula is elected war leader

⁴⁰ Habtamu 2000: 145ff

⁴¹ Seeraa means law. Gada council stipulates it every eight years. It consists of a set of values and norms that guide every Oromo in his or her daily life as well as political and religious actions.

⁴² Waaqeffannaa is a belief in Waaqaa(God in Oromo), which is the indigenous belief system of the Oromo

⁴³ Qalluus are high priests that links between the Oromo people and *Waaqaa*(God)

⁴⁴ Oromo is the single largest ethnic group, which constitutes over 40 percent of the total population of Ethiopia (Abbas 2002: 99)

⁴⁵ Mohammed 1994: 22-23

⁴⁶ Informants no.1, 2, and 3 o.i October 09, 2007

⁴⁷ Bale Zone Culture and Tourism 2007

⁴⁸ Habtamu 2000: 145ff

⁴⁹ Seenaa Saba Oromoo fi Sirna Gadaa. Finfinnee. Aadaa fi Turiizimii Oromiyaa 2003

-
- ⁵⁰ Habtamu 2000: 145-6
- ⁵¹ Mohammed 1994: 150
- ⁵² Moggaasa is systems by which non-Oromo are accommodated into the Oromo social organizations, given accessibility of resources, social security and protection against enemies. A person, who is given such an opportunity, is considered Oromo
- ⁵³ *Guddifacha* is a form of parent adopting a child
- ⁵⁴ The Christian Kingdom was referred to the Axumite kingdom as a state that emerged at about the beginning of the Christian era, i.e., 4th A.D and flourished during the succeeding six or seven centuries. And that declined from the eighth to the twelfth century A.D
- ⁵⁵ Trimmingham 1965: 93-94
- ⁵⁶ Patrilineal is tracing ancestral descent through the paternal line. Excerpted from American Heritage Talking Dictionary 1997
- ⁵⁷ Informants no.6 o.i October 09, 2007
- ⁵⁸ Waaqaa's creative activity in any creature or group of creatures making them the way they are, to this world and their relationship to others and Waaqaa in particular way. Bartles 1983
- ⁵⁹ Bale Zone Culture and Tourism Bureau 2007
- ⁶⁰ Informants no.1,2,3,4 &5
- ⁶¹ Braukamper 2002: 12-113
- ⁶² The Bale Zone culture and Tourism 2007
- ⁶³ Braukamper 2002; Østebø 2005; Teshome 2001
- ⁶⁴ Teshome 2001
- ⁶⁵ The Bale Zone Culture &Tourism; Østebø 2005 and Teshome 2001
- ⁶⁶ The Bale Zone Culture and Tourism office November 2007 ; personal notes of Aman Serofta November 2007
- ⁶⁷ Ibid
- ⁶⁸ Lillata is doing something for God's sake
- ⁶⁹ Bale Zone Culture and Tourism office, November 2007; personal notes of Aman Serofta November 2007
- ⁷⁰ Abbas 1991
- ⁷¹ Markakis 1974
- ⁷² Bahru 1991: 60ff
- ⁷³ World mark Encyclopedia of Religious practices 2006: 365ff

⁷⁴ Bahru 1991

⁷⁵ Bahru 1991 & 2001: 60

⁷⁶ Holocomb and Sisay 1990

⁷⁷ Mamo 2004: 59

⁷⁸ Ibid; Bahru, 1991; Gadaa 1991.

⁷⁹ Abbas 1982: 44

⁸⁰ Temam Haji 2002; Informant no.5 and 6 o.i October 09, 2007

⁸¹ Cited from an article of freedom of Conscience in Ethiopia 1965

⁸² Informant no.6 o.i October 09,2007

⁸³ Bahru 1991: 124 & 127

⁸⁴ Pankhurst 1998: 203-8

⁸⁵ Ibid 215-6

⁸⁶ Ibid 216-218

⁸⁷ Zerihun 2002:14

- *Balabata* is an appointee at district level by the state to serve as quasi land administrator.
- *Burka* is sub-headmen whose responsibility is mainly to oversee land administration and tax collection of specified areas in the district
- *Madabaa* is closer to tenants and the most influential authority for land at a given clan level. The individual households are registered under the Madabaa as *gabbars*-tenants
- *Minizir* head of an extended family eligible for land administration at family or extended family level and serve as messenger for Madabaa

⁸⁸ Informant no.7, October,11, 2007

⁸⁹ Cited from freedom of Conscience in Ethiopia, 1965

⁹⁰ Mohammed 2004

⁹¹ Cited from freedom of Conscience in Ethiopia, 1965

⁹² Informant no. 9 and 10 o.i October, 11, 2007

⁹³ Øyvind 2000: 19

⁹⁴ Ibid 21

⁹⁵ Mohammed 1994: 8-11

⁹⁶ Trimmingham 1952: 101

⁹⁷ *Galla*- this was a derogatory connotation given to the Oromo. Therefore, the people prefer the term Oromo.

⁹⁸ Informant nos. 11 & 13 o.i November 15, 2007

-
- ⁹⁹ Ketebo 1999: 33
- ¹⁰⁰ Ibid 32
- ¹⁰¹ Ibid
- ¹⁰² Mohammad 2004
- ¹⁰³ Ibid 44
- ¹⁰⁴ Bahru 2001: 231
- ¹⁰⁵ Mohammed 2004:31
- ¹⁰⁶ Ibid
- ¹⁰⁷ Bahru 2001: 215-220
- ¹⁰⁸ Mamo 2004: 59
- ¹⁰⁹ Habtamu and Melkamu 2000
- ¹¹⁰ Ibid
- ¹¹¹ *Dergue* is the committee of military officer who seized control of the country after the overthrow of Haile Sellassie I
- ¹¹² Bahru 2001: 236
- ¹¹³ Østebø 2008 coming dissertation,
- ¹¹⁴ Ibid
- ¹¹⁵ Abbink 1998
- ¹¹⁶ The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 1994
- ¹¹⁷ Informant no.6 o.i October 09, 2007
- ¹¹⁸ Wodajo's personal notes (n.d)
- ¹¹⁹ Barlets 1983
- ¹²⁰ *Qaalluu* is Oromo religious leader. He leads ritual performances and prayers, anoints the participants as a religious piety.
- ¹²¹ *Gadaa* is Oromo socio-political, economic and religious institution in which five classes alternate in taking political as well as ritual responsibility every eight years. It is also an Oromo democracy(as per the definition of Professor Asmerom Legesse 2000:195
- ¹²² Informants no. #1 and #2 o. i October 09, 2007
- ¹²³ Ibid
- ¹²⁴ Trimmingham 1952:101
- ¹²⁵ Informants no. o.i 4, 5, October 09, 2007 and informant no. o.i November 13, 2007
- ¹²⁶ Østebø 2008 mentioned in his coming dissertation
- ¹²⁷ Globalization can be defined as the worldwide integration of economic, cultural, political, religious and social systems.
- ¹²⁸ Trimmingham 1952: 31, 250.
- ¹²⁹ Mohammed 2004

-
- ¹³⁰ Temam 2002
- ¹³¹ Mamo 2004:103
- ¹³² Informants no.1 o.i October 09, 2007
- ¹³³ Informants no.1 o.i October 09, 2007 , Mamo 2004: 103
- ¹³⁴ Informant no. 5 o.i October 09, 2007
- ¹³⁵ Informant no.5 o.i October 09, 2007
- ¹³⁶ Abbas 1982
- ¹³⁷ Wodajo's personal notes (n.d); Teshome 2001
- ¹³⁸ Gadaa Melbaa 1988:22
- ¹³⁹ Teshome 2001
- ¹⁴⁰ www.en.wikipedia.org accessed May 3, 2008
- ¹⁴¹ Østebø 2007
- ¹⁴² In Bale, the term *salafi* is commonly used as *Wahhabi* (see Østebø 2007)
- ¹⁴³ Abbink 1998
- ¹⁴⁴ Informant no.1 o.i October 09, 2007
- ¹⁴⁵ Informant no.5 o.i October 09, 2007
- ¹⁴⁶ Ibid
- ¹⁴⁷ Informant no.5 o.i October 09, 2007
- ¹⁴⁸ Informants no.1, 3 & 5 o.i October 09, 2007
- ¹⁴⁹ Trimingham 1952: 31
- ¹⁵⁰ *Sunnah* is the teachings and sayings of Mohammed. It literally means "path." The *Sunnah* were gathered into one body of work called the *Hadith*, which supplements the Quran.
- ¹⁵¹ Answering Islam: www.answering-islam.org.uk. Accessed 28 April 2008
- ¹⁵² Yusuf 1977 : 135
- ¹⁵³ Nehls 1991: 19
- ¹⁵⁴ Excerpted from *American Heritage Talking Dictionary* 1997
- ¹⁵⁵ Whiteman 1972: 2.
- ¹⁵⁶ Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) is
- ¹⁵⁷ Engelke 1996: 61
- ¹⁵⁸ Ibid 63
- ¹⁵⁹ Hasselblatt, n.d.:61, #123.
- ¹⁶⁰ Engelke 1996: 98

REFERENCES

- Abbas Haji Gnamo. 2002. 'Islam, the Orthodox Church and Oromo Nationalism(Ethiopia).' *Cashiers d'Etudes africaines* XLII-1:99-120.
- Abbas Haji Gnamo. 1982. 'The History of Arsi(1880-1935).' BA- thesis: Addis Ababa University: Addis Ababa.
- Abbink, Jon. 1998. 'An Historical-Anthropological Approach to Islam in Ethiopia: issues of identity and Politics,' *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 11(2).
- Abir Mordechai. 1980. *Ethiopia and the Red Sea: The Rise and Decline of the Solomonic Dynasty and Muslim-European Rivalry in the Region* London: Frank Class.
- American Heritage Talking Dictionary*(3rd ed.). 1997. The Learning Company.
- Andrejewski, B.W. 1972. 'Allusive Diction in Galla Hymns in Praise of Sheikh Hussein of Bale.' *African language Studies* 13, (1) 1972
- Andrejewski, B.W. 1974. *Sheikh Hussein of Bali in Galla Oral Traditions*. Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei CCCXXI, (191).
- Andrejewski, B.W. 1975. *A Genealogical Note Relevant to the Dating of Sheikh Hussein of Bale*. Bulletin of the school of Oriental and African Studies.
- Asmarom Legesse. 2000. *Oromo Democracy: An Indigenous African Political System*. The Red Sea Press, Lawrenceville and Asmara.
- Asmarom Legesse. 1973. *Gada: Three Approaches to the study of African Society*. Free Press, New York.
- Aymro Wondmagegnehu. 1997. "Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The Church of Ethiopia, 2nd ed." A Panorama of history and spiritual life: EOC Publication: Addis Ababa
- Bartels, L. 1983. *Oromo Religion, Myths and Rites of the Western Oromo of Ethiopia: an attempt to understand*. Berlin: Dietrich.

-
- Baxter, P.T.W. 1996. *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Enquiries*. Uppsala: Lawrenceville, NJ:Red Sea Press.
- Braukamper, U. 2002. *Islamic History and Culture in Southern Ethiopia*. Collected Essays, Hamburg and London: Lit Verlag.
- Central Statistical Authority. 2005. "Population and Housing Census, 1994, Analytical report on Bale region." People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia: Addis Ababa
- Central Statistical Authority. 1998. "The 1994 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia: Results at Country level." Vol. I. Statistical report. Addis Ababa
- Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Report*. 2005. New York.
- Council of the Regional State of Oromiya Bureau of Planning and Economic Development. 2000. *Physical and Socio-Economic Profiles of 180 districts of Oromiya Region*. Physical Planning Department. Finfinne.
- Carmondy, Brendan. 2001. *African Conversion.Ndola*. Zambia: Mission Press.
- Darrell L. Whiteman. 1972. 'Contextualization: The theory, the Gap, the challenge. *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*.
- Doko, Yajji. 2000. 'The narration of Gbaya People in Cameroon: some perspectives on the conversion to Christianity in the light of their political, religious and cultural tradition.' M.Phil- thesis, Stavanger.
- Engelke, Matthew. 1996. Christian Mission. *African Journal of Evangelical Theology*, vol.15.1, (61). American Theological Library Association, Chicago.
- Erlich, Haggai. 1994. *Ethiopia and the Middle East*. London
- Fisher, Humphery. 1973. "Conversion Reconsidered: Some Historical Aspects of Religious Conversion in Black Africa." *Africa* 42, (1)
- Gada Malba. 1988. *Oromia: An introduction*. Khartum, Sudan.

Nehls, Gerhard. 1991. *Premises and Principles of Muslim Evangelism*.
India: GLS Press.

Glasse, Cyril. 1989. *The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*. San Francisco,
CA:Harper & Row, Pub. Inc.

Guluma Gemed. 1993. 'The Islamization of the Gibe Region,
Southwestern Ethiopia from c.1830's to the Early Twentieth Century.'
Journal of the Ethiopian studies XXVI, 1993

Habtamu Alemayehu and Melkamu Mulualem(ed). 2000. *History:
comprehensive review of world, Africa, and Ethiopian History*. Addis
Ababa.

Hasselblatt, Gunnar. 1972. 'Islam in Ethiopia.' *The Bulletin of Christian
Institutes of Islamic Studies*. 1(3): 17-25.

History of the Oromo to the Sixteenth Century (2nd ed). 2006. Finfinne.
Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau.2006

Horton, Robin. 1971. "African Conversion." *Africa* 41, 2

Huges, T.P. *Dictionary of Islam*. 1986. New Delhi, India: Cosmo
Publications.

Hussein Ahmed. 2001. *Islam in Ninteenth-Century Wallo, Ethiopia*.
Leiden: Brill.

Ikenga-Metuh, Emefie. 1987. "The Shattered Microcosm: A critical Survey
of Explanations of Conversion in Africa." In Kristen Holst Petersen,ed.
Religion, Development and African Identity. Uppsala: Scandinavian
Institute of African Studies.

Jones, A.H; .M and Monroe, E. 1970. *A history of Ethiopia*. Oxford
University Press, London.

Kaplan, Steven. 2004. Themes and methods in the study of conversion in
Ethiopia. A review essay. *Journal of Religion in Africa*.

Ketebo Abdiyo. 1999. 'A Historical Survey of the Arsi-Oromo CA.1910-
1947.' MA- thesis: Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa.

-
- Lewis, I.M. 1998. *Saints and Somalis, Popular Islam in a Clan-Based Society*. Lawrenceville and Asmara: Red Sea Press.
- Levtzion, Nehemia(editor). 1979. *Conversion to Islam*. New York: Holmes and Meier.
- Mamo Hebo. 2004. 'Land, Local custom and State Laws': A study of land tenure systems and land disputes settlements among the Arsii Oromo, Southern Ethiopia.' A PhD dissertation submitted to the Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies, Kyoto University.
- Mansson, Anna. 2002. *Becoming Muslim: meanings of conversion to Islam*. Lund.
- Markakis, John. 1974. *Ethiopian: Anatomy of a Traditional polity*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Mindaye Abebe. 2005. 'The Oromo of Bale: A historical Survey to 1974.' MA- thesis: Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa.
- Mohammed Hassen. 1994. *The Oromo of Ethiopia, A History, 1570-1860*. Lawrence: The Red sea Press.
- Moten, Rashid. 1989. Islam in Ethiopia:An analytical Survey in Nura Alkali, Adamu Adamu, Awwal Yadudu, and Haruna Salihi(ed.), *Islam in Africa: Proceedings of the Islam in Africa Conference*, 221-231. Abuja, Nigeria: Spectrum Books.
- Mulugeta Tesfaye. 1985. 'Islam and its contemporary manifestations in Middle East Policies.' MA- thesis: Addis Ababa University: Addis Ababa. 1985
- Østebø, Terje. 2005. *A History of Islam and Inter-Religious Relations in Bale, Ethiopia*. Almquist and Wiksell International: Stockholm.
- Østebø, Terje. 2007:8. 'The Question of Becoming: Islamic Reform-Movements in Contemporary Ethiopia.' CMI, Bergen.
- Pankhurst, Richard. 1997. *The Ethiopian Borderlands: Essays in Regional History from Ancient Times to the End of the 18th Century*. Lawrenceville : Red Sea Press.
- Petersen, Henrik(ed). 2005. *Stories of Bale. Religious Development & Evangelical Christianity*. Addis Ababa.

Seenaa Saba Oromoo fi Sirna Gadaa. 2003. Finfinnee. Aadaa fi Turiizimii Oromiyaa.

Taddesse Tamrat. 1972. *Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270-1527*. Oxford. Clarendon Press

Temam Haji Adem. 2002. 'Islam in Arsi, Southeast Ethiopia (1840-1974.)' MA-thesis, Addis Ababa University: Addis Ababa.

Teshome Amenu. 2001. 'Strategic evangelization of People of other faith: special focus on Bale area.' B.Th- thesis. MYTS: Addis Ababa

The Bale Zone Culture and Tourism Bureau. 2007. Robe Bale

The FDRE, 1995. *The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia*. Addis Ababa

Trimingham, J.S. 1952. *Islam in Ethiopia*. London, Frank class.

United Nations Concise Report (UN publications). 2007. New York.

Wikipedia. [http:// en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org) "*The free Encyclopedia web page*"

Woodberry, J. Dudley. 1989. "*Muslims and Christians on the Emmaus Road.*" MARC, Monrovia, California, USA.

Yusuf, Ali. 1977. *The Holy Quran text translation and Commentary*. vol.I. Pakistan: Hafeez Press.

Zerihun Hailu. 2002. 'Land use conflicts and livestock production in Enset-livestock mixed farming systems in Bale highlands, southern Ethiopia.' MSc- Thesis, Agricultural University of Norway: NORAGRIC