For the record

To begin with, issues related with terrorism would always force me to take a back seat; and here I found myself taking a shot at a topic that usually kept me at bay or baffled me remaining as a closed book. All the same, I vowed not to retreat from the subject that entices me so much and tempted me so hard to grapple with it. Hence, knowing the risk of being thrown into a subject that would hopelessly be beyond my ability; I hereby took up the topic daringly. Being not oblivious of the fact that the topic may turn out to be a Frankenstein’s monster, I just took the plunge! Just for the record.

Terrorism is a topical agenda in the public discourse. And I know that it is a hot button nowadays that cause a chorus of disapproval in the opposition. I tried to find something that would be outrageous but that remains a Holy Grail. I took pain to understand the position of the groups or individuals who avidly demonize the new Anti-Terrorist Act and made every effort to get the slightest merit in their argument by pushing myself to the limit.

Alas, to my dismay, I could not find anything to be worried over as the opposition tried to purport. Yes, my effort in this regard glaringly ascertained to me that these groups or individuals are simply apprehensive by having the wrong end of the stick. The Anti-terrorist Act, as the opposition party leaders and their international thugs and gangs are claiming, is not conceived or ushered into force by malicious motive on the part of the Ethiopia government to muffle the voice of its opponents. It is rather born out of the pressing need of the Ethiopian people and government to avert the clear and present danger that threaten the peace, security, stability developmental and democratization effort of Ethiopia. Besides it is a response to its regional as well as international obligations emanating from the multilateral
agreement it has entered to. Those who allegedly accuse the government for enacting a maliciously devised Anti-terrorist Act argued that some of the articles are vaguely defined so as to make it instrumental in stifling the voice of its opponents. However, they must be reminded that AU has a decision that requires its member states to adopt or create a legal framework for combating and preventing terrorism.

No one can deny that terrorism is a major item on Africa’s agenda, just as it is on the world agenda. Events in the last decades were wake-up calls for African states to adopt a more collective and comprehensive approach to deal with the issue of terrorism. Terrorism was no longer a European, American, or Islamic concern: it became an African issue as well. In the past, adherence to OAU agreements or decisions was left to the goodwill of member states. These shortcomings ignited the need for a new approach, a new strategy to pursue Africa’s interests within a new world order that is characterized by globalization.

The efforts that led to the creation of the African Union (AU) intensified in the 1990s as it became increasingly clear that the OAU was ill-equipped to advance Africa’s interests both within the continent and externally in a more sophisticated global economy. African leaders meeting in Libya issued the Sirte Declaration in September 1999 calling for the creation of an African Union. The Constitutive Act of the African Union was adopted in Togo in 2000 and its implementation agreed upon in Lusaka, Zambia in 2001. On 9 July 2002, the African Union was officially launched in Durban, South Africa.

**Harmonization of Action**

AU has done a commendable job in harmonizing its action on terrorism on continental level and has devised a plan of action to this effect. The creation of the African Union transformed Africa’s fight against continental and even global terrorism in substantive terms. In dealing with continental terror, the African Union (AU) has firmly aligned itself with the global fight against terrorism.

It has taken several steps to put forth an effective strategic plan in dealing with terrorism. This plan, called the African Union’s Plan of Action against terrorism, is the first comprehensive plan ever put forth by African states to confront the challenge of terrorism.
The AU overall strategy represented an attempt to strengthen the capacity of African states through a more structured common approach in dealing with the terrorist threat. It acknowledged the destructive and manipulating nature of terrorism through a carefully drafted definition of terrorism. And through its Plan of Action of 2002, the AU’s role in dealing with continental terror has been enormously harmonized.

AU called for the ratification and implementation of the Algiers Convention of 1999, provided for police and border control, harmonized legal and judicial measures, called for compliance with international agreements in dealing with terrorism, adopted measures designed to curtail the financing of terrorism, called for a more open information exchange regime, and created the Peace and Security Council to implement The Plan.

The first preoccupation of the AU Plan of Action was to define and acknowledge the destructive and destabilizing nature of terrorism. In its preamble, it defines terrorism as:

*a violent form of transnational crime that exploits the limits of territorial jurisdiction of States, differences in governance systems and judicial procedures, porous borders, and the existence of informal and illegal trade and financing networks.*

African Union recognizes the enormity of the problem and created a blueprint to prevent terrorist acts on the continent. The AU’s plan implored member states that a concise legal framework, cooperation among member states, and between the African Union and the international community, are indispensable for a successful struggle against terrorism. These approaches are also captured in the preamble of the African Union’s Plan of Action:

Eradicating terrorism requires a firm commitment by Member States to pursue common objectives. These include: exchange of information among Member States on the activities and movements of terrorist groups in Africa; mutual legal assistance; exchange of research and expertise; and the mobilization of technical assistance and cooperation, both within Africa and internationally, to upgrade the scientific, technical and operational capacity of Member States Joint action must be taken at the intergovernmental level. This includes: coordinating border surveillance to stem illegal cross-border movement of goods and persons; developing and strengthening border control-points; and combating the illicit
import, export and stockpiling of arms, ammunition and explosives. These actions would assist in curbing terrorist networks’ access to Africa.

It also recognizes that informal and illegal channels for the transfer of funds and goods used to finance and support terrorism must be closed. Few African governments are in a position, on their own, to marshal the requisite resources to combat this threat. Pooling resources, therefore, is essential to ensure the effectiveness of counter-terrorism measures. If such measures are implemented then the AU will perform a valuable role in confronting continental terrorism.

This situation dictates not only a common definition of terrorism but also a strong harmonization of legal framework that even define the concrete approaches of dealing with terrorism. Of course AU believes that harmonization of legislative and judicial measures are indispensable in the war against terrorism. That is why the ratification and implementation of the Algiers Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism (1999) had become the first priority of the African Union.

In the general provisions of The Plan, this intention is expressed in clear and concise terms when it calls on Member States to: sign, ratify and fully implement the Algiers Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism and, where necessary, seek assistance of other Member States or the international community to amend national legislation so as to align such legislation with the provisions of this Convention.

We know that this Convention was crafted under the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the predecessor of the African Union (AU). It was a comprehensive document that addressed several issues pertinent to the fight against terrorism: its definition, obligations of Member States, cooperation modalities, state jurisdiction, and extradition. However, because of the lack of discipline and structured cooperation that reigned under the OAU, the pace of signing and ratifying the Convention was characteristically slow. Though this Convention contained concrete approaches to deal with terrorism, and required only fifteen of over fifty members to ratify for it to go into effect, the OAU was having a difficult time getting the fifteen ratifications that were necessary to usher the Convention into force. Member States for their
respective reasons failed to sign on and ratify at a pace that would usher the Convention into force. Under the auspices of the African Union Commission, a Senior Officials’ Meeting was called, the purpose of which was to secure the fifteen ratifications necessary to bring the Convention into force. The target was not only met at this meeting but it was exceeded. This was indeed a major accomplishment because the African Union had succeeded in bringing into force the Convention that provided the blueprint for the continental struggle against terrorism.

The African Union’s Plan of Action has also made it difficult for terrorists to move freely from one state to another within the continent. Prior to the ratification of the Convention, the ability of terrorists to travel with ease from one country to another had on several occasions complicated the fight against terrorism. When individuals commit acts of terrorism, they usually escape to a neighboring state to evade capture or detection. In many cases they use forged passports and other travel documents to hide their identity. It is not uncommon for a terrorist to have more than one passport with different assorted names. These illegal strategies have made it more difficult to deal with terrorism. In some instances, these forgeries are perpetuated by officials within the government structures. Mindful that a successful fight against terrorism could not be achieved without limiting the ability of terrorists to move from one country to another, The Plan, among other things, employed Member States to undertake the following:

“Enhance border control and surveillance, as well as the necessary means to prevent the forgery and falsification of travel and identity documents; ensure identity documents contain advanced security features that protect them against forgery; keep a passport stop list containing information of individuals whose application would require special attention or who may not be issued with travel documents develop and upgrade the regulations governing border control and security procedures including land, sea and air exit and entry points so as to curb infiltration and promote cooperation among police agencies having due regard for relevant provisions of relevant regional and continental agreements on the free movement of persons and goods.”
In addition to these measures, The Plan also called for computerizing all points of entry to maintain a more accurate arrival and departure record, and to examine all passports for authenticity. It also called for a substantial investment in human resources through the training of immigration officers to detect forged travel documents and to be able to profile travelers.

The African Union’s efforts have not been limited to measures designed to prevent terrorism. The AU has also focused on dealing with the aftermath of terrorism: bringing terrorists to justice. Even terrorists have rights to a fair trial. Accordingly, the Plan called for the creation of a common legal and judicial framework that would facilitate the prosecution of terrorists.

Having the aforementioned description as a perspective, let us now go back to the Anti-terrorist Act of Ethiopia which is demonized by the opposition and its international allies. We have seen that under the OAU, a harmonized approach was far-fetched. Each state had its own legal and judicial regime that reflected its own interests. But under AU Africa has gone a long way in harmonizing the Anti-terrorist Act of the member states. Then it goes without saying that Ethiopia’s Anti-terrorist Act should, out of necessity, go in tandem with the continental and international effort made in the fight against terrorism.

Considering the comment forwarded by some opposition members on the Anti-terrorist Act of Ethiopia as draconian or stringent, I stumbled on a tricky question that demand an immediate answer. As it was the case before the coming into being of AU, some countries were having stringent while others adopt a weak legal framework. But the dilemma is that having a weak legislation will embolden terrorists and give them a good opportunity to exploit for their advantage.

Terrorists usually prefer to engage countries with weak legal and judicial regimes. Therefore adopting a feeble legal regime is, in effect, a rose bed that lures terrorists to come in. However Under the African Union Plan that luxury extinguished. The prescribed legal and judicial regime for dealing with terrorists is not only more stringent than under the OAU but it is more uniform. The harmonization process signifies that terrorists can no longer shop for safe havens within the Member States of the African Union.
As part of the harmonization process, The Plan called on Member States “to amend, where necessary, national laws relating to bail and other criminal and procedural issues so as to give effect to the requirements of expeditious investigation and prosecution of those involved directly or indirectly in the crime of terrorism. These measures should include issues such as the protection of witnesses, access to dockets and information, and special arrangements on detention and access to hearings; harmonize the standards and procedures regarding proof for terrorism-related crimes; promote specialized training and reinforce the capacities of the judiciary [and]; harmonize legal frameworks pertaining to the prevention and combating of terrorism.”

Another point that must be considered in this regard is the fact that since 1998 the Horn of Africa—Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia, Eritrea, and Sudan—have emerged as the major source of terrorism on the continent. The Horn is a region where we have governments who cajole with terrorist groups and provide a safe haven for terrorists, the most famous of which is Osama bin Laden’s al Qaeda transnational terrorist network. Since September 11, the Horn became a “strategic focal point in the American war against terrorism.” The instability in the region has been attributed to the “inability of the weak, ‘failed’ or ‘failing states’ in the region to police effectively its borders, maintain law and order, and protect Western strategic economic interests.

In addition to the Horn of Africa, closer examination has also revealed that the threat of terrorism has persisted in West Africa in two regions: Muslim Sahara and the Sahelian Belt.

Similarly, in the North African country of Algeria, US troops have been engaged in military maneuvers due to the presence of terrorist groups who infiltrate the area as a result of unprotected borders to plan and execute their agenda. Other countries such as Niger and Mali also pose a security risk to the interests of the United States and the West. As a result of these the continent has been the center of attention, particularly in the East and West Africa regions.

All the same, Africa has become the theater for dramatic terrorist acts and like many regions of the world it has become a breeding ground for terrorists. And it became the center stage in
the battle against terrorism. After two US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania were attacked in the late 1990s, the United States, Britain, and France began to fortify themselves against terrorist attacks. This indicates us that terrorists have turned their attention to Western targets in less secure areas of the world.

It is easier for terrorists to attack Western targets in Africa. And they also found the continent as an attractive fertile ground for recruiting terrorists. As a result of those attacks in Kenya and Tanzania, Africa had become a battle ground for future acts of terrorism.

What I would like to suggest, at least, to my fellow citizens who mistakenly condemn the recently enacted Anti-terrorist Act of Ethiopia is; that they should adopt a broader perspective in their evaluation of the Act. We should not give a chance to our narrow interest to domineer our judgment. And we must begin from appreciating the fact that the fight against terrorism requires a concerted attention and action of all nations. However, there are some specific conditions that would make some countries more vulnerable than the other and give them a precarious bearing in their fight against terrorism.

Considering the security issues of the Horn and the current status of the neighboring countries of Ethiopia, we can easily understand what formidable situation Ethiopia is facing. Therefore, Ethiopia must have this Anti-terrorist Act not only to avert the imminent danger hovering around the corner of its cities and defend its national security ably; but also to enable itself to fulfill its international obligation in combating terrorism.

Ethiopia shouldn’t be left a dead meat to any terrorist attack and its hard won victories must be defended so as to ensure the realization of the long awaited dream of its people - prosperity.

Hence, the uproar heard from some opposition parties’ leaders and international organizations against this Act could be nothing but an exhibition of a malicious intent to subvert the constitutional order or a neoliberal lament. Oppositions, so far, were taking basic democratic values or rules and procedures as a default option- an option they opted to take when they find that all other possible roads are closed. To my knowledge, beating a path by simultaneously involving themselves in lawful and illicit actions was a customary practice for
Ethiopian opposition’s party leaders. This being the case, they would surely abhor the Anti-terrorist Act enacted. Save this, there is nothing to worry over.

And of course, the plain clothed opposition party members who joined Shiabia in its destabilizing project must understood that Ethiopia has declared a zero tolerance in this regard.

Being in the Horn, where we find the militarized regime of the Eritrean government, Ethiopia would definitely be faced with a daunting security challenge. Isaias uses the confrontation with Ethiopia to justify severe internal discipline and military adventures across the region. Since independence the people of Eritrea is suffering under a system that run by a one man machination. The long–promised election and the long-delayed implementation of the constitution had also changed into thin air. Following the devastating war with Ethiopia (1998-2000), this authoritarian, militarized regime has further tightened the political space and never tolerates any opposition or dissent.

It must be noted that Isaias’s foreign policy has became even more fixated on destabilizing Ethiopia. Eritrea believes that its national interest can best be served by a weak, unstable or dismembered Ethiopia. The vehicle of its foreign policy is a proxy warfare rather than conventional diplomacy. Its militarized politics has also spilled into its foreign policy. The Eritrean government has always been involved in armed responses and aggressive adventurism at the expense of a conventional diplomacy. To date, Eritrea has fought, directly or indirectly, with Ethiopia, Yemen, Djibouti and Sudan and involved itself in various ways in the conflicts in eastern Sudan, Darfur and Somalia. The rogue state in Asmara is unwillingness to demilitarize its foreign policy and to make concessions on any level. It is bent on sponsoring terrorist groups based in the stateless Somalia. Its relations are thorny with the region and the wider international community. Therefore, the African Union (AU) has requested the UN Security Council imposed sanctions in 2009 for its support of the Somali Islamic insurgency. “Eritrea has become a siege state whose government is suspicious of its own population, neighbors and the wider world.”
Ethiopia’s foreign policy is a direct antithesis of the Eritrea’s policy. Ethiopia exhibits a political and ideological consistency in the implementation of its foreign policy in the Horn.

The Ethiopian government has regularly acted in the pursuit of what it identifies as its national and regional interest and in accordance with its political analyses of the region. And I believe the recently promulgated Anti-terrorist Act would give a more solid deportment in this regard.

It would at least enable Ethiopia to check the destabilizing project of Shabia which otherwise would tend to follow a spiral trend and go out of control and run into an escalation of violence, confrontation and polarization in the sub region. Hence, the first mechanism to prevent this kind of danger from happening is having an Anti-terrorist Act it has enacted now. Moreover a clear-headed leadership and meticulous analysis of situations in the Horn is mandatory. In my opinion, the government of Ethiopia must closely see the visible tendency of politicization of religion in the Horn.

**Take a heed**

There is a strong relation between terrorism and the politicization of religion. A point I would like to mention in this regard is what Haggai Erlich has remarked in his study “The Grandchildren of Abraha” (2011). Haggai said that, “the December 2006 military intervention of Ethiopia in Somalia put her again (most strongly) on the agenda of the Muslim world. [And] the voices from all over, it seems, tend to demonize her resorting to ancient tradition.”

Considering the state of affairs in Ethiopia since the 1990s, Haggai Erlich further pointed out two important interrelated aspects that have defined the current socio-political condition of the country. And these important “aspects which have generated a multi-dimensional changes and provoking all sorts of sensitivities are the ethnic decentralization and religious pluralization” of Ethiopia. He remarked that “Ethiopia has definitely witnessing a period of transformation since 1990s.”
In analyzing what he identify as “the Islamic dimension” of the transformation he indicated the growing danger of politicizing religion in the Horn from the prism of its current Middle Eastern aspects.

Examining Ethiopia’s situation in this regard he remarked its December 2006 military intervention in Somalia has a great impact on its image. And he concluded, “Whatever the circumstances or the consequences, the Ethiopian campaign in Somalia will probably be considered one of the major events in Ethiopian-Islamic relations.”

As we all remember, in the 1990’s, Ethiopia successfully neutralized serious security threats arising from radical Islamism and it is currently doing the same again. It is worth mentioning in this regard that Ethiopia’s effort to secure its national interest has, more often than not, faced with an insidious distortion of the intent and purpose of its move on regional level.

It is to be recalled that some rascal had portray Ethiopia’s intervention in Somalia as the latest in a long round of national and religious wars between highland Christian Abyssinians and lowland Somali Muslims. Others depict this as Ethiopian aggression in pursuit of territorial aggrandizement and its centuries-old search for a secure access to the sea. Still others render the conflict as a pre-emptive invasion to prevent the establishment of a Taliban-style state in Somalia that would provide a home base to al Qaida. Some insist that it is a proxy war between the two countries, namely Ethiopia and Eritrea, who had been in daggers drawn situation for the last two decades.

Abdul Mohammed, a scholar from AAU had mentioned in an essay he wrote 2007 that historically Ethiopia has been the hub of either stability or instability in north-east Africa. He further commented “although poor, Ethiopia has a long history of statecraft and a sense of national identity and a military tradition, which together mean that it is capable of acting in pursuit of a clearly-conceived national interest. Ethiopia can project force beyond its own borders, and also act with sufficient restraint to prevent its use of military power from turning into a destabilizing adventurism.” And the fact on the ground certifies his opinion.

Haggai Erlich said, starting from its inception Islam developed a dual conceptualization of Ethiopia. On one hand, it viewed her in positive terms as a neighbor deserving gratitude for
saving the persecuted pioneers of Islam, the “sahaba” of the Prophet, and therefore a legitimate entity in spite of her Christian culture. On the other hand, Ethiopia has been conceived in negative terms: A country, which, already in the days of the Prophet, joined the “land of Islam,” but then revolted and returned to Christianity. Through that second prism, Ethiopia was a land of the ultimate heresy, Irtad; namely, being a Muslim and then betraying Islam. In the eyes of Islamic radicals, Ethiopia could therefore be redeemed only by full restoration as part of the land of Islam. Throughout history, whenever Ethiopia appeared on Middle Eastern Muslims’ agenda, they discussed her in these dichotomous terms. The discussion of Ethiopia among Muslims is perhaps more heated following her intervention in Somalia than ever before. Moreover, it is now spilling over into Ethiopia proper, having a direct impact on the country’s Muslims, and influencing their attitudes towards her redefinition.

The reservoir of Islamic concepts legitimizing Ethiopia, even as a Christian dominated state, is rich and unique. The legacy of the Christian “najashi” saving the “sahaba” has been canonized and recycled. Vast literature has been produced presenting and re-interpreting Ethiopia as a model of universal humanity and grace.

One major aspect of this legacy is the notion that Muslims can live under non-Islamic governments, provided that these governments are just; namely, that they allow Muslims to freely observe their religion. In the eyes of many, the precedent of the Prophet’s ordering the first believers to live under the benevolent Christian king of Ethiopia today legitimizes living in Europe, the US, and even in Jewish Israel, provided, of course, that they are progressive and permissive towards Islam. It surely legitimizes living in Ethiopia proper, on condition that religious equality is implemented. Here again, examples are abundant, as the call for the victory of Islam in Ethiopia has been repeated throughout and from all quarters – from Arabia, Egypt, Sudan, and from within the Horn of Africa. The latest declaration of Jihad on Ethiopia was pronounced by the Islamic militants of the Union of Islamic Courts of Somalia in June 2006.

Hagai further said that “the literature de-legitimizing Ethiopia has been produced over the years by Islamic radicals is, as diverse as the moderate publications. Nothing, however, seems
comparable to the new drama surrounding Mogadishu. Though Ethiopia was invaded in the past by Sudanese, Egyptians, Somalis and others, and though the Christian empire conquered and harassed local Islamic communities, the December 2006 Ethiopian invasion is exceptional.”

He also mentioned that the Al-Qaida website, the Reform Forum (Muntada al-tajdid) is full of articles and responses demonizing Ethiopia’s military intervention in Somalia. Ethiopia is portrayed as a vengeful, crusading state that has collaborated with European imperialism against Islam from the days of Menelik. Ayman al-Zawahiri, Bin Laden’s deputy, declared a Jihad against Ethiopia and called for volunteers from all over the Islamic world to join forces in Somalia.

However, he underlined that the voice of the radicals is far from being dominant. He also indicated that, “most governments and political establishments in the Middle East are primarily worried about Islamic militancy. They are not at all sorry about the fall of the Islamic Courts’ regime in Somalia. Most leaders of Sunni communities view Iran and her Shiite allies as the ultimate danger, and would not be tempted to divert their attention to Ethiopia.”

For many Arab and Islamic pragmatists, Ethiopia is more a partner than an enemy. Therefore, Ethiopia’s significant contribution to the fight against radicalism may well solidify the already momentous process of Ethiopia’s re-joining the Middle East.

Haggai draws two contradictory conclusions in analyzing Ethiopia’s incursion to Somalia. “Its incursion, whatever its reason, depicts Ethiopia in the eyes of many as an active enemy of Islam”- on the one hand. And still “for many, the episode may acquire a different meaning that Ethiopia, by combating the fanatics, again helping Islam”- on the other.

All things being said, what we should focus most is preserving the unique, long established and precious culture of tolerance we have among the followers of two religions. This is an important task in fighting terrorism.

Study of Islam and Islamic populations in Ethiopia has been relatively under studied since the great survey of J.S. Trimingham that was published in 1952. In his study, under the title, *An historical-anthropological approach to Islam in Ethiopia: issues of identity and politics*, Jon
Abbink declared “that Ethiopian Islam is interesting both because of its antiquity (since the inception of Islam itself) and because of the particular patterns of interaction and symbiosis with an, until recently, predominantly Christian culture.” And he tried to identify the socio-cultural and historical explanation of patterns of tolerance of Islam and Christianity since the 16th century deserves to be developed.

In addition, he stated that “In the last decade, new issues of religious identity and communal political identity of Muslims in Ethiopia emerge in the wake of the political and socio-economic reforms in federal Ethiopia and the impact of 'globalization' processes in the cultural sense. While Ethiopians Muslims have in recent years gone through a phase of revivalism and self-assertion, they have remained rather impervious to 'fundamentalist' ideological movements in both a social and political sense.”

Taking a brief historical overview of Islam in Ethiopia would help us to understand this unique situation. And we must look into some of the major changes since 1991 against the growing tendency of taking Islam as a globalizing project.

Jon Abnik has recently made a socio-historical research on the place and role of Muslims in Ethiopia and on the relationship of Islam (and Christianity) with 'modernity', ethnicity and group identity.

A deeper understanding of Islam in this country is of great relevance, not only because of the notable political changes in the country since 1991, but also in the context of late twentieth-century conditions of political, economic and cultural globalization which is shaping both domestic policies and ethnic identification as well as international relations.

However, Islamic studies in Ethiopia have not been recognized as an academic discipline within the broader framework of Ethiopian studies until recent times. Our limited knowledge has been viewed within the framework of Christian – Muslim conflicts of the medieval period. These limited researches focused more on religious and political issues than on contacts and interaction among the Muslim and non-Muslim communities. The interdependence that facilitated the process of integration among the various communities has not been part of the study.
Trimingham’s research was on the distribution of Muslim communities and viewed the history of Islam from the perspective of Muslim-Christian conflicts. The themes were very limited and without a critical analysis of the contribution of Islam for the development of modern Ethiopian culture and history. Though the history of Islam in Ethiopia spans more than 1200 years, research and conservation activities have been marginalized. On the other hand, Islamic faith has contributed to the enrichment of Ethiopian modern culture. Islam in Ethiopia is not only a religion but also the whole civilization within which indigenous traditions have achieved harmony, tolerance and co-existence that brought unity and integration to the country—according to Abnik.

Another scholar from AAU, College of Social Sciences, Department of History, Archaeology Unit, Kassaye Begashaw has presented a paper on the 16th international conference on Ethiopia, 2009 titled as *The Archaeology of Islam in North East Shoa* tell us that Ethiopia is one of the countries in the world that provided a fertile ground for early Islamic expansion. This expansion was manifested particularly in present day Harar, Afar, Somali, Shoa and Wello regions. And he declared that this process of Islamization and interactions was pacific and the principal cultivators were Muslim traders and missionaries who moved from the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden to central Ethiopia as far as Northeast Shoa.

“In due course,” Kassaye said, “the Muslim traders produced the first urban Muslim communities and urban centers within the Christian state. These Muslim merchants had the support of the Christians and their rulers. This is because the Muslim merchants controlled the principal long distance trade as well as the import and export commodities during the medieval period. The role of the Christian rulers, therefore, was to facilitate and promote the normal flow of trade and maintain peace and stability by introducing law and order in the entire area where trade was practiced.”

Kassaye’s paper tries to discuss the contribution of Islamic heritages in shaping and molding the historical and cultural developments of modern Ethiopia from an archaeological perspective. His study attempts to bring to light new issues that go beyond simpler culture description and tries to analyze how Islam is perceived in the society for the last one thousand and two hundred years. It seeks to discuss the role of Islam as a socializing force
that has brought a new sense of religious identity and that promoted social, cultural and political values in the creation of modern Ethiopia.

According to Kassaye, “though relations between Christian and Muslim communities and rulers had fluctuated, political and economic contacts were frequently maintained. This mutual dependency was practiced through coastal and caravan traders in collaboration with the commercial agents of both Christian and Muslim rulers.”

Kassaye noted that in the past decade, especially since the arrival of a new regime in Ethiopia in 1991 that emphasize recognition of ethnic identity as a polity and the public religious equality of Islam and Christianity, the issue of connecting to global developments in Islam as an expanding world-religion and identity has emerged as a major concern for Ethiopian Muslims, who had until then been marked by a strong inward orientation.

An important question at present is whether Islam in Ethiopia will serve as a vehicle for political or social mobilization and exclusivist identity, as has happened in several other African countries (notably Malawi, Sudan and Nigeria), where earlier patterns of co-existence between Christians and Muslims are being redefined in the context of emerging 'fundamentalisms.' This question is in fact one relating to the social foundations of Islam in Ethiopia and to the political culture of an ex-imperial state.

Jon Abnik has explained “the emergence and identity of Ethiopian Islam has been inextricably linked with the nature of the Ethiopian state and its economic base, and with Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity (and vice versa). Both religions are part of one ideological-religious framework rooted in a multi-ethnic Ethiopian culture. Thus, the one cannot be understood without the other.”

And he goes on saying, “they have had their phases of violent antagonism and confrontation but in the past centuries have evolved a modus vivendi of practical everyday co-existence and co-operation, especially in the last three centuries. This modus vivendi was grounded in the economic activities of the Muslims, who introduced trade in and markets for new products, serving as pioneers intensifying trans-national commercial trade relations with countries
outside Ethiopia, and also in common elements in the underlying cultural fabric of Ethiopian societies.”

From its very inception, Islam has been a trans-continental religion, in this case helped by the proximity of the African Red Sea Coast to the Arabian heartland where it first emerged. In fact, the first converts to the new religion - outside the close circle of the Prophet Muhammad - are assumed to have been Ethiopians.

In the year 615, so tradition goes, the first Hijra occurred: a group of Arab followers of Islam in danger of persecution by the dominant Quraysh authorities in Arabia (Mecca) were advised by Muhammad himself to seek refuge across the sea, in the empire of Aksum, where a '... righteous king would give them protection.' These refugees were indeed well-received in Aksum and could practice their faith freely. Requests from the Meccan authorities to deliver them back were refused. The tolerant attitude of the Ethiopians gave rise to a whole new genre of Arab literature extolling the virtues of 'the Ethiopians.' The practical effect was that on the authority of the Prophet himself Ethiopia was not to be seen as a target for jihad.

**Unique features**

While Ethiopia was one of the first countries to receive Islam (later developing centers of Islamic learning in Harar, Massawa, Zeyla, later Jimma), it has also seen a notable tendency towards inward orientation, displaying the kind of seclusion and self-sufficiency that was equally characteristic of Ethiopian Christianity. In addition to the geographical reasons for this, linguistic and cultural factors probably also played a part.

Arabic never was and never became an indigenous spoken language - even most Ethiopian Muslims only knew Quranic passages and prayers in Arabic - and for many purposes ethnic and regional identities tended to be as important as religious identity. The religion cannot be identified clearly with particular regional or ethnic groups and is found across most of them.

In Ethiopia - where since the fourth century a deep-rooted Orthodox Christian religion was predominant, especially in the highland plateau - Islam largely spread by peaceful expansion, via trade routes and itinerant teachers (many of Yemeni and Arab origin), tolerated by the Christian monarchs.
This tolerance can be explained, according Jon Abnik, by a variety of reasons, among them the particular hierarchical social structure and ethos of the Amhara-Tigray Christians - amongst whom craft-work and regional and international trade were somewhat despised activities, in favor of soldiery, peasant-farming, administration and priesthood.”

Ethiopian Muslims do not derive from 'Arab stock' but are indigenous, belonging to the various ethnic communities of the country. They only rarely trace descent from prestigious Arab lineages (an example is the Mirghani family in Eritrea). And also we saw that some holy men or sheikhs who did so have become the object of veneration and pilgrimage. Of course, Arab traders, teachers and entrepreneurs have settled in the country and inter-married with Ethiopians, but on a rather limited scale. While the Shariah is in favor of marriage between relatives, it is notable that a social trait like patrilateral cross-cousin marriage (widespread in Arab countries) is still very rare among Ethiopian Muslims, perhaps only to be found among the Afar and the Somali.

The important role of the Sufi mystics and orders is immense in Ethiopia. These have also been important in the spread of Islam, e.g. the Qadiriyya (since the sixteenth century), and the Sammaniya and Tijaniyya (nineteenth century). Abinik stated that Islam in Ethiopia has been molded by these and other elements from the cultural and ethnic traditions of the country. The Ethiopian societal context has, so to speak, forced the idea of 'pluralism' not only on the minds of the country's Christians but also on that of its Muslims.

Abnik indicated in his paper that, “in recent years, after the 1991 change of regime, these very patterns of tolerance (in Wollo and elsewhere) have been the target of a movement of itinerant teachers/preachers of 'true Islam.’” He further noted, “In 1994 during interviews in the Aliyu Amba area (a traditional mixed border-area in east-central Ethiopia where Islamic and Christian people live together in the villages), it was remarked to me by some people that their village had been visited by persons who came and asked them to reduce their contacts and co-operation with the Christians, and to reinforce the 'Muslim character' of their village and their way of life.”
In my opinion, our fight against terrorism should focus on defending the culture of tolerance we enjoyed for centuries. Studying the heritages and histories of Islam in Ethiopia should also be intensified. We should begin this fight by appreciating and defending the recently enacted Anti-Terrorist Act of Ethiopia.