

Mythical Roots, Phantasmic Realities and Transnational Migrants: Yemenis Across the Gulf of Aden

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Abstract

This article analyzes the relationship between transnational migration, state-based religious cosmologies and new electronic media. It illustrates the way mythical realities and a Christian cosmology have structured the existence of the Yemeni diaspora. In analyzing the way mythical realities have been deployed, I seek to understand how old ways of creating boundaries have been redeployed in electronic landscapes. Much has been written regarding the interface between religion and media. Yet little attention has been paid to the phantasmic element that exists in digital-based transnational discourses. Drawing on the Lacanian concept of jouissance in this article, I pinpoint how mythical realities, important for creating boundaries, also operate at the phantasmic level. In doing so, I ultimately aim to show how transnational migration across borders operates within a field that is dotted with religious mythology and phantasmic realities that are increasingly expressed in the electronic landscape. I also show how the changing relationship between Muslims and Christians should be explained by taking more factors into account than concrete human reality. Explanations should also be sought in the distant past and in the domain of fantasy, which has so far proved to be uncomfortable ground for most scholars studying religious dynamics in the Horn of Africa.

Keywords

ethnography, Ethiopia, cosmology, migration, identity, Internet, study of religion, conflict, Yemen, Muslim minorities, Christianity, media studies, Islam

Writing in the thirteenth century, the Arab traveler Ibn al-Mujawir related to his readers an extraordinary deed that Dhu al-Qarnayn undertook to separate the warring people of southern Arabia from the Ethiopians. Dhu al-Qarnayn, the Qur'anic mythical figure whom, we are told, Islamic schol-

ars often identify with Alexander the Great, turned a small river located in present-day southern Yemen into the Red Sea. He allegedly did this, so that the Ethiopians would no longer be able to fight with the southern Yemenis. His efforts, however, proved futile; the Ethiopians crossed the newly created sea and continued to fight in Yemen (Ibn al-Mujawir 2008:169).

In the present-day Horn of Africa, the effects of Dhu al-Qarnayn's miraculous act are imperceptible. A river has not been turned into a sea, nor are there any mythical beings that attempt to separate warring parties through miraculous acts. One can, however, see the continuation of conflict and tension between Ethiopians and Arabs, who happen to have been settling in the major cities of Ethiopia since the beginning of the twentieth century. Interestingly, and in spite of the absence of miraculous acts, the tension and conflicts are rooted in mythical realities and the phantasmic realm, which are increasingly being expressed using new electronic media.

Drawing on my ethnographic research carried out in Ethiopia and analysis of online cyber materials, I would like to show in this article that mythical realities and fantasy have structured the Yemenis' existence. With a focus on inter-religious interaction, I would particularly like to explore the role played by mythologies and fantasy in the interaction between the Yemenis, who are Muslim, and the Ethiopian Orthodox Christians, who have traditionally dominated the Ethiopian state. The Yemenis I write about in this article migrated from the region of present day Yemen to Ethiopia at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. In Ethiopia they mostly settled in urban areas and engaged in trading activities. So far there is only limited research regarding this group.¹ There is no single study that has tried to document how the Yemenis' existence in Ethiopia has been structured by fantasy and state cosmology in an increasingly digitalized world. This article, through such analysis, aims to redress this research gap. In so doing, the article looks to offer a theoretical reflection on the relationship between transnational migration and religion. Below, before presenting the empirical material, I will discuss recent theorization that has attempted to tie together transnationalism and religion.

Religion and the Transnational Social Field

In social science, the transnational crossing of borders by immigrant groups has gained greater attention in recent years. Through the very act of mobility, it is frequently affirmed, immigrant groups have become part and parcel of a process of de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation. Immigrant groups are often thought of as vehicles for cultural hybridity. We are also told that transnational migrants contribute to the waning of national sovereignty. Simultaneously, immigrant groups are viewed as bringers of cosmopolitanism, of flow and of a perpetual post-modern mixing.

Although not often taken into account in debates about transnationalism, religion is also viewed in terms of the connectivity that it provides. We are told that religion has become an important source for the definition and re-definition of spaces. It also serves to re-attach cultures, dislocated from their traditional reference point, within new space-time configurations (Vasquez and Marquardt 2003). As religion is important in the life of immigrants, it is also affirmed as enabling the emergence of an alternative cartography of belonging (Vasquez and Marquardt 2003). Religion, this argument maintains, helps create inter-personal connections and helps migrants in the various phases of migration (see, for example, Hagan and Ebaugh 2003; Hirschman 2004; Richman 2005). Transnational migrants find routes and ways to build cultural bridges through religion. Within the transnational discourse, religion is seen as a form of civil society that occupies an intermediate position between sovereignties (see Rudolf and Piscatori 1997). Relegating religion to an institutional framework, such as established churches, works on transnationalism to date have examined only the functional value of religion for migrants (see Orsi 1985; Tweed 1997; Ebaugh and Chafez 2000). In current, emerging social science discourses on the relationship between religion and globalization, scholars have been mainly interested in the globalization of religion (see for example Beyer, 1994; Van der Veer, 1996; Vasquez, 2003; Wolffe, 2002; Hefner, 1998; Casanova, 2001; Rudolf and Piscatori, 1997).

In these studies migrants are conceived as means through which the globalization of religion occurs (see for example Csordas, 2007). However, trans-

nationalism and the transnational religious experience need not be linked to a globalization scenario, in which religion retains a functional and at best intermediate position. Borders are not only zones of contact, but also points of regulation. Thus, transnational groups can become enmeshed in the assimilation processes that operate through the exclusion of people. Within this situation, religion can and indeed does act as part of the state's assimilation process. This holds increasingly true, as states are not only secular legal entities, but also religious entities; based on what Kapferer (1988:84) has termed cosmological ontologies. That is, "the fundamental principles of being in the world and the orientation of such being toward the horizon of its experience."

In light of this, we should, as Schiller (2005) argues, bring power dynamics into transnational studies. In analyzing state hegemony, Schiller (2005) examines ways in which religion as part of a hegemonic network serves as a tool of domination. Although this perspective is interesting, I contend that a research agenda focused on domination and the ways in which religious ideologies contribute to the hegemonic agenda may miss the nuances of state power. It runs this risk because any domination in which religion acts as a key component does not only work through the act of governance. As Schiller (2005) notes, migrants contribute to imperialistic rule not only through self-induced participation, but also through an active process of exclusion. In this process of exclusion, the cosmologies of the state hold an important place.

This article will contend, then, that state cosmologies do not only operate at the intuitional level, but also at a social level. What we need is not only an understanding of institutional set up operations, but also an understanding of the broader, more diffuse, social imaginaries that are linked with state cosmology. In agreement with Charles Taylor (2002:106), I see social imaginaries as "ways in which people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underline expectations." The people's imagination creates moral hierarchies, which swing between complementarities and

egalitarianism. In looking at social imaginaries, however, I am not only interested in the operation of moral hierarchies; I am also fascinated by the concept of fantasy. Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek (1997) relates fantasy to the Lacanian concept of *jouissance*, which Lacan employed to mean enjoyment. He argued that fantasies about “the other” emanate from perceiving the racial or ethnic other as having a strange or privileged access to *jouissance* - as the result of perceiving the other as being in a process of stealing one’s *jouissance*. Beyond being entangled in social imaginaries that are linked to the state, transnational migrants are assimilated by phantasmic narratives that are intrinsically linked to both the State and religion.

Beyond being entangled in social imaginaries that are linked to the state, transnational migrants are assimilated by phantasmic narratives that are intrinsically linked to state and religion. By associating fantasy with state and its cosmology, I subscribe to the argument that Jacqueline Rose (1996) made in her now famous book, *States of Fantasy*. Rose (1996) argued that fantasy is not, as in popular thought, a private matter; i.e. one that is asocial and divorced from the public sphere. Relying on Freudian analysis, she argues that fantasy forms part of the social, for it is instrumental in forging the collective will or the creation of a bond among people. In light of this, she argues that conflict and political identities can only be understood in the modern world of states and nations, if we allow room for the analysis of fantasy. For Rose (1996) the concept of fantasy, however, is not only something that exists within the social field: it is deeply interconnected with state. As fantasy stretches itself from the private realm to that of the social, the state - she argues - has a set of meanings which move back from public being into the heart of the individual. The focus of her argument is on the mechanism through which the state operates. Despite their sovereignty and monopoly on physical power, states “need to pass straight off the edge of the graspable, immediately knowable world” and utilize fantasy. She notes that the modern state “enacts its authority as ghostly, phantasmic authority.” In this light I argue that transnational migrants are embedded in the phantasmic discourses, which are generated and linked to the state. Unlike Rose (1996), however, I do not distinguish between modern and ancient states.

The ancient becomes very much active in the modern. Here I document how the seemingly ancient currently structures the life of transnational migrants, who exist within a modern state framework purported to be secular.

Ethiopian State Cosmology

Ethiopian state cosmology relates in a number of ways to Judeo-Christian traditions and intrinsically links Ethiopia with the ancient land of Israel. Accounts of this traditional cosmology start with the journey of Queen Makeda of Ethiopia, which is recorded in a medieval Ethiopian text, the *Kebre Negest*.² The story tells us that the queen's journey took place after she heard of the wisdom of King Solomon of Israel from her merchant, Tamrin. In the cosmology of the Ethiopian state, the core story of the legend begins on the night before the queen departs for Ethiopia. On this night Makeda slept with Solomon. Afterwards, in his dreams, Solomon saw a bright sun that came to shine on Israel. As it shone, however, it suddenly withdrew itself from Israel and flew to the country of Ethiopia, where it shone forever. Solomon waited in his sleep to see if the sun would come back, but it never did. In his dream the Israelites threatened to destroy it.

On the day of her departure, Solomon gave the queen a ring that he had been wearing on his little finger, so that she would not forget him. It was also intended as a means by which to identify a male child that might have been conceived between them. Afterwards, Makeda travelled for nine months and five days. She reached Ethiopia and gave birth to a son whom she named Bayna Lehkem. Bayna Lehkem grew up to become a strong man. When he reached twenty years of age he started asking his mother about his father. Makeda was at first angry, as she did not want to tell him who his father was - she did not want him to travel to Jerusalem. But eventually she told him and asked Tamrin to take him to Jerusalem to see his father.

Bayna Lehkem and his retinue travelled until they reached Gaza, which, according to the legend, was given to Makeda by King Solomon. They later proceeded to Jerusalem in Judea. Bayna Lehkem stayed with his father for

approximately three years, learning all the wisdom of his father. Eventually, however, he was eager to return to his mother. Although Solomon did not wish to part from his son, he accepted his wishes and agreed to send him back to Ethiopia accompanied by all the first-born sons of the nobles of Israel. In doing so, Solomon envisioned rule through his son, who according to legend was to be the first born of a virgin of whom God had spoken prophetically to David. However, the people of Israel, and particularly the first born of the Israelis, were not happy to leave Zion behind. So they conspired to take with them the Ark of the Covenant, which in the legend was referred to as Zion. The God of Israel did not oppose their plans as the Israelites had angered Him. With the assistance of an angel, they removed Zion in the twinkling of the eye. After making a short stop in Gaza, they travelled to Ethiopia using a swift wagon that flew in the air.

This story in the state cosmology suggests God's preference for Ethiopia over Israel and the fulfillment of the dream that Solomon had on the day he slept with Makeda. It was Zion, the sun, which was taken from Israel and given to the Ethiopians. God's preference in the story is signified by the removal of Zion from Israel; making Ethiopia the new Israel. As Zion is simply a covenant given to the children of Israel, its removal made Ethiopians the children of God: the new Israelites with a special covenant with God. Bayna Lehkem was likened to the first son who ruled (in Christian theology this is the figure of Jesus Christ). According to Ethiopian state cosmology, Bayna Lehkem is considered to be the precursor of Christ. Bayna Lehkem's mother, who had been a virgin until the night she conceived her son, is thus linked with the Virgin Mary, who was to give birth to Christ.

Yemenis within Hierarchical Social Existence

Within Ethiopian state cosmology it is not only Makeda, who is associated with Mary, but also Zion - the tabernacle taken by Bayna Lehkem. Like Mary, the tabernacle holds God's law: Jesus Christ. As Mary chose to reside in Ethiopia with the first born of the Israelites, Ethiopia is thus linked intrinsically to Mary. In day-to-day interactions, this association is demon-

strated in the way Ethiopians associate their national flag - the green, yellow and red tricolor - with Noah's covenant. In the Bible, God made a covenant with Noah, promising that he would never again destroy the earth with water. As a sign of this promise, God gave Noah the symbol of the rainbow. In Ethiopia, the rainbow (which, when seen with the naked eye, is green, yellow and red) is not only perceived as God's promise, but also as Mary's belt. Therefore, the Ethiopian national flag symbolically brings together the promise of God and the fact that Ethiopia is intrinsically linked to Mary.

The story surrounding Makeda's journey was primarily used by the state to legitimize the rule of Ethiopia's imperial house - the Solomonic dynasty. Beyond this, the state cosmology created a hierarchy of different religious communities. As the state was affiliated with Orthodox Christianity, members of the Orthodox Christian church were regarded as being the proper subjects of the state by virtue of having a covenant with God. On the other hand, Muslims, animists and (since the state accepted Christianity in the fourth century) Jews were regarded as being outside God's covenant; hence, they were not perceived as proper Ethiopians.

Within the traditional Ethiopian framework, the presence of this state cosmology has had an effect on the social existence of Ethiopian Muslims and on foreigners, who moved to Ethiopia, such as the Yemenis. In traditional Ethiopian cities, Muslims lived segregated lives and existed outside the city. In addition to this physical segregation, they were considered - politically speaking - inferior to the Christians and unworthy of holding office or owning significant properties such as land. Beyond the physical and political exclusion, the presence of a state cosmology, which likened Ethiopia to Israel and presented the Orthodox subjects of the state as the chosen people of God, also entailed the presence of a social imaginary that worked on a hierarchical principle. In traditional Ethiopian society, Yemenis, as they were Muslims, were ranked lower than Christians. The Yemenis were outside the category of the chosen people. To enforce this hierarchy, an actual boundary mechanism existed between Christian Ethiopians and Yemeni Muslims. Orthodox Christians refrained from marrying Yemenis and Yemenis were not allowed to take a spouse from the Orthodox community. The

social imaginaries of these traditional societies also presented the Yemeni Muslim communities as being impure: or at best as pollutants. Yemenis were considered to be unclean. This imaginary was especially concretized through Islamic ritual, which demanded that members of the Islamic faith should perform a five-times-per-day cleansing ritual that involved washing the genitalia. For the Orthodox Christian community, the presence of this ritual portrayed Yemenis and other Muslims as unclean and unworthy of association.³

In addition to considering the social persons of Yemenis to be unclean, the social imaginaries of the traditionally dominant Orthodox community also considered Yemeni food unclean. This was particularly true of food made from animals slaughtered by Yemenis. As animals are slaughtered while the butcher calls the name of Allah, rather than the Christian God, such food was considered unclean; as was the container holding the food. In extreme cases, even a container from which a Yemeni had been drinking was considered unclean. The impurity thus created required a cleansing ritual that usually involved the sprinkling of holy water by an Orthodox priest; specifically one familiar with the rituals considered necessary to undo the pollution. If someone ate Yemeni food, especially meat slaughtered by a Yemeni, that man or woman also required a cleansing ritual. A person, who had eaten meat slaughtered by Yemenis, often had to be re-baptized in the Orthodox Church because they were considered to have become Muslims.

Unlike the situation in earlier times, however, the current link between social imaginaries and the cosmology of the state does not just operate in terms of everyday, face-to-face interactions; it is also to be found in the more informal and impersonal context of media. Since the overthrow of the Derg regime, the EPRDF has followed a more liberal policy towards the media. The government has allowed the operation of new, privately-owned newspapers and the broadcast of satellite television. Since the 1990s, a number of Ethiopian websites have also emerged. In this new environment, traditional state cosmology and the accompanying social imaginaries are reproduced and accentuated. Within the current Ethiopian context, one method by which traditional cosmology and its imaginaries are reproduced

is to be found in a series of books written by Nibur Id Ermiyas Kebede Welde Selassie, a former parliamentarian with a close affinity to the Ethiopian Orthodox church. Currently residing in the United States, he also runs a website entitled “Ethiopia: The Kingdom of God Services” [*sic*].

In both his books⁴ and on the website, Nibur Id affirms the intricate association between being Ethiopian and being a Christian, who has a covenant with God. The author argues that God has given seven covenants to His chosen children: namely, the covenant of Adam, which established marriage; the covenant of Noah, signified by the rainbow; the covenant of Malke Tsedake, signified by Holy Communion; the covenant of Abraham, signified by circumcision; the covenant of Moses, signified by the Ark of the Covenant; the covenant of David, signified by kingship; and the new covenant, signified by the birth of Christ from the Virgin Mary. The author affirms that these seven covenants

...are seven characteristics which have given Ethiopians their sovereignty, life and identity. Ethiopia or being Ethiopian are these seven covenants. Yes these seven covenants mean Ethiopia and being Ethiopian. Without these seven covenants there is no country called Ethiopia. There cannot also be a being or a people called Ethiopian. As a result of these covenants this Ethiopia is not only the true Ethiopia but she is also the true Israel. And this Ethiopian is not only the true Ethiopian but the true Israelis... (Welde Selassie, 2001).

In the current Ethiopian context, the holiness of Ethiopia and the covenant that the people have with God are also affirmed in modern Orthodox religious songs recorded on cassettes, video and DVD. Within the Orthodox Christian church, these new songs are sources of controversy as they deviate from the traditional way of singing hymns. Religious singers in the Orthodox Church did not previously record hymns for mass consumption. Despite their newness, these hymns express the deep relationship that the church has with the state and its cosmology. The latter has been guiding

the Ethiopian state. One such hymn entitled *Kestedamena* (Rainbow) is by a renowned gospel singer, Mirtinesh. The song tells about the tradition of associating Mary, God's covenant with Noah and the Ethiopian state. The refrain expresses this as follows:

Rainbow

The covenant of Noah and our confidence

He has promised not to destroy us through you

You who have become the joy of the world by giving birth to the savior

You are our flag whom we indicate to the world⁵

There have also been recent incidents in which traditional Ethiopian state cosmology has been forcefully and perhaps more explicitly demonstrated. One such incident was the Epiphany ceremony celebrated in 2009. The Ethiopian Epiphany ceremony commemorates the baptism of Christ in the river Jordan. To commemorate this, an Orthodox Christian priest takes replicas of the Ark of the Covenant to a water source for an overnight stay. On the following day, the priest prays over the water and sprinkles the thousands of people, who have gathered for the ceremony, with this water. Finally, the replicas of the Ark of the Covenant are ceremoniously taken back to the church.

In 2009, the Epiphany ceremony was celebrated as it had been in the past. The 2009 Epiphany, however, was a special occasion, as Orthodox Christians used it to dramatically declare the intractable relationship between Christianity and Ethiopia. Orthodox youth published a number of t-shirts declaring that "Ethiopia is a Christian island." They also came up with a number of slogans, such as, "Ethiopia, Christianity, and Baptism," "One baptism, one religion, one country."

Phantasmic Realities

At this juncture it is important to understand the reason that Orthodox Christians felt they needed to proclaim an affinity between Christianity

and Ethiopia. The Ethiopian Orthodox church has many followers and is one of the biggest churches in Ethiopia. According to official statistics, its members far outnumber both other Christian faiths and Muslims. Despite this, Orthodox Christians feel threatened.

A significant factor that explains the Orthodox Church's reaction is the liberal policy followed by the EPRD regime since 1990. Since the EPRDF came to power, a considerable number of mosques have been built; numerous books and audio materials critical of Christianity have also been published. These developments, as I have indicated elsewhere, have been a source of tension. Orthodox concern can be explained, in part, by these developments. However, it cannot be fully explained by them. In addition to the rise of the new, critical media, the traditional movement of people across the Ethiopian border has also played an important role here.

Since the 1990s, the EPRDF regime has liberalized the movement of people across the border. In contrast to the previous socialist regime, which had attempted to curb it, the EPRDF made this movement a constitutional right. This sudden freedom of mobility within a post-socialist state led to the migration of thousands of Ethiopian women as domestic workers to Arab countries; particularly the Gulf States. Simultaneously, the opening up of borders and the liberalization of the Ethiopian economy has led to the arrival of many Arabs in Ethiopia; particularly Yemenis, who - during the pre-Derg period - had left Ethiopia. The Yemenis, who returned, as well as other Arabs, engaged extensively in investment activities and small trade. As they are Muslim, they also assisted the local Muslim community in building mosques.

A notable example in this regard is the world's 61st wealthiest billionaire⁶, Sheik Mohammed Hussein Ali Al-Amoudi, a Hadrami born of an Ethiopian mother. Al-Amoudi invested massively in Ethiopia. When state-owned companies were privatized as part of an IMF and World Bank economic reform package, Al-Amoudi acquired 96 percent of the companies. Al-Amoudi currently owns a luxury hotel, the Sheraton Addis. His company, MIDROC Ethiopia, is active in the construction sector and in gold mining in addition to other activities. Recently Al-Amoudi's Saudi Start Agricul-

tural Development PLC acquired 10 thousand hectares of land for growing rice; mainly for export to Middle Eastern countries.

These activities have led Orthodox Christians to perceive Muslims, and Arabs in particular, as a threat to the Ethiopian state. They are increasingly considered to be Islamizing the Christian nation of Ethiopia. An interesting example that demonstrates this perceived threat is the sermon of a man, who converted to the Ethiopian Orthodox faith. The speaker, who claimed to be the son of a high-ranking Muslim cleric in Ethiopia, said that while a Muslim he had been actively working with evil spirits in order to destroy Ethiopian Christianity. In a video recording that has since been uploaded onto YouTube, he claims that in consultation with malevolent spirits he tattooed his body with the signs of an elephant, a snake and a map. This tattooing, he says, was undertaken deliberately to dismantle the Ethiopian faith and state.⁷

In the perception that sees Muslims as a malevolent force intent on Islamizing the Ethiopian state, transnational migrants groups, particularly Arabs, are regarded as the chief culprits. This is particularly apparent in online responses to news items that focus on the investments of Arabs in the country. One such news item was a piece posted on February 8, 2008 on the well-known Ethiopian blog, *Ethiopian Review*. Entitled “Millionaire Sheiks Turning Ethiopia in to Their Personal Brothel,” the blog posts details about a plan to build a tourist resort on an 8 thousand hectare piece of land. The blog post sparked a huge debate both for and against the investment. What is interesting is that, although the news item did not mention the name of Al-Amoudi or any other covert plan, a number of responses interpreted investment by Arabs (in particular the presence of Al-Amoudi in Ethiopia) as having a covert intent of Islamizing Ethiopia. One of the commentators who gave his name as Assta B. Getu wrote:

...The Arabs die for the Ethiopian girls, and this new building could serve as a brothel that would hire over one-thousand young Ethiopian girls, so that the Arabs don't have to go from one motel to another in Addis to get these lovely and attrac-

tive Ethiopian girls; they can easily get them huddled together and exploit them now in one place, at this tourist resort, thanks to Al-Amoudi. Does the Ethiopian Orthodox Church leader, Abune Paulos, know Al-Amoudi's hidden agenda to convert the Oromo into Islam? Even if he does, there is nothing he could do, for he is the slave of Meles Zenawi. He has to follow and do what his master, Meles the evil commands him to do. He is not the servant of God; he is the servant of Meles, the evil. After this project is over, Al-Amoudi would ask Meles to build a second Mecca somewhere in Ethiopia so that the Ethiopian Muslims don't have to make a *hajj* every year to Saudi Arabia and spend their money there; instead they would spend it here in Ethiopia. This is a noble idea, I think; King Lalibela did it; why not Al-Amoudi?⁸

A similar reaction could also be observed when the *WikiLeaks* files dealing with the situation of Islam in Ethiopia were reproduced in an Ethiopian blog. The commentator tells us that:

Ethiopia was closed for Arab Wahhabis for a long time. I heard the golden Emperor Haile Selassie (Man of the Millennium) deported every single Arab out of Ethiopia for spreading sexually transmitted diseases and encouraging prostitution & homosexuality. He also closed many corrupt Indian shops and deported a lot of Indians out of Ethiopia for manipulating and mistreating Ethiopians just like what they are currently doing in Kenya, Zambia, Zanzibar, etc.

Ethiopians owned businesses in Ethiopia and ruled their own destiny. Now, the two parasites (Indians & Arabs) along with other foreigners are back in action, in full force in the name of leasing land and investment. As long as they throw dollars and grain at Meles, he will gladly lick their hairy behinds. He evidently doesn't give a damn about Tigray Chris-

tians or any other Ethiopians for that matter. Arab Wahhabis and Indian parasite's dreams finally came true thanks to the morally, mentally and economically challenged trashes from that cursed barren land. It is as if they haven't seen money or food for an eternity the way they are selling everything. Ethiopia before Arab and Indian investment was much better off. At least people ate food, could afford basic items, and were dignified and respectable. We all know Ethiopia has become in the past two decades.

Now, they are trying their very best to create tension between Muslims and Christians by importing radical Wahhabis to Ethiopia but as we read on a previous cable, Ethiopian Muslims refused to be used as Arab tools. I suggest we should learn a crucial lesson from Ethiopian Muslims and stop being used and trampled on by everybody with dollars, barley and wheat to spare.⁹

In the discourse of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the Arabs and Muslims - who are viewed interchangeably - are affecting not only religious structures and the very existence of the country, but also Ethiopian women. In this regard, Arab investors are seen as the chief culprit. As we saw in the above-mentioned reaction, the commentator affirms not only the Islamization of Ethiopia, but also the theft of Ethiopian women by Arab capitalists. The context for such a reaction, however, is not just the flow of Arabs and their capital into Ethiopia. It also involves the movement of Ethiopians, especially Ethiopian women, to Arab countries. In Ethiopian-owned blogs, the movement of Ethiopians has drawn much attention as some of them are violently mistreated by their patrons. Such news both in everyday conversations and in Ethiopian blogs often leads to the assertion that Arabs plan to steal Ethiopian women. When the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce demanded that the relevant Ethiopian authority adopt a more efficient recruitment system, one comment expressed resentment toward the EPRDF government and toward Arabs, who are seen as being favorably treated by the EPRDF:

Why Melese does not hand the whole nation to the Arabs all in all? Is it not better? Slave trade in the 21 century in Ethiopia? ... The Arabs has got new way of making Ethiopia and Islamic state. They take Ethiopian girls and send them with Arab boys and girls and is an advance way of advancing Islam [*sic*].¹⁰

In short, Ethiopian Orthodox Christians perceive Muslim and Arabs as having taken their *jouissance*; namely the privilege of being a Christian nation and taking Ethiopian women. They also perceive Muslim and Arabs as having particular access to a certain *jouissance*; namely the privilege of being favorably viewed by the EPRDF regime. The regime in collaboration with Arab capitalists are said to be working to dismantle Ethiopia.

Digital Conflicts

The orthodox fantasy, made known both in everyday life as well as via web blogs and audio video materials, has resulted in a strong reaction among Muslims, especially by Yemenis living in Ethiopia. One web commentator tells us, for example, that:

I don't know how these Orthodox people say they have a religion. They are slaves to Israel and they should exist for what they want to die for. These people are so barbaric that they love their *tobot* and their master Israel more than they love their closest relatives the Muslims of Ethiopia. We should never sleep until we find an antidote to this poisonous church ... Ethiopian Muslims let us get united and don't let this barbaric church lead us into ruin in the age [*sic*].¹¹

Muslim reaction is not only apparent in this comment, but it is also noticeable in Muslim Ethiopian chat rooms hosted on Paltalk. One such chat room discussion, which was later posted on YouTube, tells its Muslim participants to defend themselves against the Christians:

We are not afraid. If they want war we will respond with war. Negotiation does not work. In the first place to which government are we referring when we talk about negotiation? There is no government. If there is government why don't the security apparatus exercise their duties? Is the government established so that mosques can be destroyed? In the future you should know that they will slaughter us. In the future they will demolish the Anwar Mosque (the main mosque in Addis Ababa). In the future they will destroy the Benin Mosque, which is located in the area of Sumaletera. Who is going to forbid them? We will not go out for demonstration by taking oranges in our hand. Even if we want, from where are we going to get the oranges? It is from them that we buy the oranges! We have to be aware of things. How can we only focus on worldly affairs! There should be a limit to that ... Haven't Abubaker Sidiki said that I have given allowed everything? He has declared so for the sake of Muslim right...for the sake of Islam. Today what are we doing? We should organize ourselves to bring a lasting solution for Muslims. We need power. Without power we can't do anything. It is impossible. We can't establish a Muslims state in Ethiopia without power. We can't ...what did Allah said to us in Sura Al-Anfal. He told us to be ready by all means. It means with all our power financially, economically and in terms of having a skilled human resources. If we have to make missiles we have to make missiles. We should not buy it from Russia or from Florida. We have to be able to do it. We have to explore the science of Chemistry. We should not just memorize the periodic table. We should know about periodic table. We should know the use of potassium. We have to know! Let's not just exchange our *jelebias*. Let's not just waste water of ablution...it is better to save these resources to our families. They are mocking on us. From where did Melse Zenawi (the current Prime Minister) and his colleagues organized themselves. They organized themselves from Muslims countries.

They took power (from the Socialist regime) by basing themselves in Sudan and Somalia...We are not weaker than them. Inshallah. We should not be afraid...Allah is with us. But we should organize ourselves. We should develop a strategy. In the Ethiopian defense force 50 percent of the soldiers should be Muslims...If there are 50 Generals 25 should be Muslims. If there are twenty Ministers in Ethiopia eleven of them should be Muslims. It is only then that we are going to get right... we should not wait until Christians bring justices to us. Hasn't Mussa (Moses) fought with the Pharos? Hasn't the Prophet Mohamed (Peace be Upon him) waged war with the Quraish. The religion has not spread just like that. In Islam it is not a crime to slap a person back. It is not a sin. It is a right... We should not be afraid. We should wake up. If Muslim makes demonstration they will imprison them. I know where they will imprison them. I know which prison they will send them ... They are torturing us. We are in detention...We are called immigrants in our own land. And they are showing us how we are immigrants. In the Ethiopian army who are the decision makers. Do you want me to mention their name? There are no Muslims in there. May be you will say General Smoray Yenus. Him alone will not do anything... I feel that we should bring a lasting solution. I feel that me King Nejashi I should bring a lasting solution ...If it is necessary to start guerrilla warfare we should do so. ...If we need to go to Somalia we should be able to do so. I can go. I can do it for the sake of Allah. If we need to start from Sudan we need to be able to do that. We have to declare war for the sake of Ethiopian Muslims right...We should bring a lasting solution and the solution wellahi will not come out from the negotiation table. We should not loose hope... Freedom and right is not obtained just like that ...The only solution is war. We should declare a strategic war. Until Ethiopia become a freedom land. Until both Muslims and Christians get equal right...We should exchange information.

The Christians do not have any program other than destroying us. They always conspire about destroying us. They are all politicians. What they study in church is politics. Do you think that they go to pray? They are teaching those politics. They tell them that Muslims are going to destroy you and that they go to heaven by killing you. They are funny. If it was possible to go to paradise by just killing a Christians it is would have been easy. Let alone one I would have killed ten Christians. But it is not like that. We should not be afraid...It is only Allah that we should be afraid off... We don't know when the war will be declared so let's get ready [*sic*]...¹²

In the above quotation what the speaker call for is for an outright attack which should be orchestrated through the employment of scientific knowledge which would help the so called Muslim camp build missile and bombs. The call for violence, however, has not only been made by Muslims, but also by Orthodox Christians:

What happen to the Christians in Ethiopia. The minority Muslims are killing innocent people in that country for sometime now. It is not right. You Christians have to defend yourself. Don't listen the stupid dictator communist group. They don't believe in any form of God. They are pagans. Please defend yourself. If they kill in Muslim dominated area, you have to attack in a different area. Muslims don't understand tolerance. Take action before they kill you all. Respect comes that way. Not just by begging Muslims. God Bless Ethiopia [*sic*].¹³

Needless to say the Orthodox reaction is not only made by Orthodox Christians on the net. Numerous books and journals published by the Church's Sunday School Department also present a strong reaction to the Muslim presence. One such book is by Ephrem Eshete (2008) and is entitled *Akrari eslemena be Ethiopia*. Ephrem began his book by aptly outlining the threat that the Christian country faces and calling for an awakening within the Orthodox community. Like Ephrem, Abba Samuel, who at some point was

part of the higher echelon of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, presents a frontal attack on Islam and Muslims in his book entitled *Ewen be Ethiopia Ye haymanot mechachal alene*. The various writings in *Hamere Tewehado*,¹⁴ a journal run by the Sunday School Department, and various Orthodox sermons also put forward a strong challenge to Muslims; especially Yemeni Arabs.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this article, I discussed the coming together and the separation of people; as well as the formation of the mythical account given by Ibn al-Mujawir. I then described a number of border crossings: one of which was the journey of Queen Makeda to Israel. In social science parlance, border crossings are usually associated with people coming together to both share and mix their cultures. Without a doubt, social mixing in this region has been apparent throughout its history. Border crossings, however, need not only be associated with such mixing. This article, I believe, has shown how the act of crossing borders can be linked to exclusion and conflict. Within the Ethiopian context, the exclusion of people is deeply rooted in the mythical reality that transported Makeda to Israel. Serving as a focal point of state cosmology, this mythical crossing has been instrumental in influencing the social imaginaries of the people of this region. Migrants coming to the Horn of Africa have been viewed as inferior in the social hierarchy and in this state cosmology.

In the post-Cold War era, the mobility of people, ideas and investment in the form of capital have intensified; the mythical realities that traditionally structured the Ethiopian polity have gained new vitality. Rather than declining, with the multiple movements of commodities, people and ideas, they have been used and deployed by traditionally dominant groups linked to the state. In the post-socialist context, this involves the proliferation of fantasies increasingly expressed in cyberspace.

Taken in its entirety within the Ethiopian context, the transnational migration of people has been deeply influenced by religion, which nevertheless intersects with the state format. In transnational studies, religion is often

looked at as part of the migrant context. Meanwhile, a state is often considered a secular entity. A similar position is maintained in relation to the broader social discussion: the state is perceived as secular, while religions are viewed as operating within the social sphere. Such a disjuncture between a secular state entity and migrants, who are the seat of religion, is clearly untenable. As Talal Asad (1999:231) has observed, even in the United States, “religion continues to be important despite the constitutional separation of state and religion.” This, as we have seen, holds true in the context of Ethiopia. In light of this, migrants should be viewed both as a barrier to and a catalyst for the globalization of religion, as Csordas (2007) points out. In addition to seeking to determine how religion is spreading across the global terrain, we should also seek to understand how migrant groups are structured by religion while travelling across state borders. This calls for a detailed analysis of the interface between religion and media in the new digitalized age.

For transnational migrants the intersection of religion with the state means existence in a condition that does not limit itself to formal law. In the field of transnational migration studies, the majority of the material tries to place the local transnational migrant within a legalistic discourse - and it often proves to be a bad fit. This focus tends to lead to the emergence of a number of terminologies that try to classify migrants in terms of legality and illegality. This is because migrants’ exclusion is often associated with the presence or absence of state documents. Although a legalistic explanation of transnational migrating is a valid undertaking, it is equally important and necessary to examine the social dimension: especially mythical realities and fantasies expressed in everyday life and in cyberspace since they are part of the game in which transnational migrants are embedded.

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Notes

¹ On Yemenis in Ethiopia, see Bezabeh (2008, 2010, 2012) and Manger (2010).

² For a translation of the Kebre Negest and a detailed account of the story, see Budge (1922).

³ For further reading on the way the traditional social imaginaries affected the Yemenis, see Bezabeh (2010).

⁴ See Welde Selassie (2001, 2004, 2005, 2006).

⁵ A video of the hymn can be seen on YouTube (see Zemarit mirtnesh 2009). Accessed December 4, 2011.

⁶ Mohammed Al-Amoudi, Forbes, <http://www.forbes.com/profile/mohammed-al-amoudi/>, accessed April 3, 2012.

⁷ See Ethiopia a Muslim converted to Christian 2009. Accessed May 4, 2012.

⁸ Kifle 2008.

⁹ WikiLeaks: Allah in Ethiopia: mostly quiet on the Islamic front 2011.

¹⁰ Ethiopia Asked to Expedite Maids Recruitment 2011.

¹¹ Comments to article Ethiopian woman arrested for alleged stabbing of man and his son in UAE 2010.

¹² Islamist vision for Ethiopia 2010.

¹³ Comment on Ethiopia Charges 130 in Church Burning Incidents 2011.

¹⁴ See, for example, the writings of Atantewos (2001).