The last three decades of the 20th century witnessed a revival of Islam in Ethiopia, the genesis of which can be traced back to the 19th century. Since the early 1970s Islam has manifested a growing awareness among Ethiopian Muslims of their collective identity, characterized by an intensified struggle to enhance the status of Islam at the national level, to establish a countrywide Islamic organization, and to participate actively in the public sphere. These aspirations were articulated through mass demonstrations, publications, and publications, especially after the demise of the military regime that had ruled the country from 1974 to 1991.

One of the sources of inspiration for the resurgence of Islam in Ethiopia today is the 19th century. This century witnessed the rise of Islamic movements that were: Shaykh(s) Stieler’s Hand-Atlas 1991.

The third Muslim reformer was al-Hajj Uthman al-Mirghani (1793–1853). After his return, he established his teaching centre at Gata (southeast of Kombolcha). He was renowned for his piety, sanctity and strict observance of the sharia, as well as for his relentless struggle against all forms of bias (innovations). He regarded the neglect of the daily prayers as a relapse into infidelity and condemned the zjar (spirit possession) cult, the ritual sacrifices offered under big trees, and the beating of drums. He authored a number of treatises, only one of which, Minhat al-Atayyia wa F-ayiad al-Rab-bonyaa (The Divine Gift and Divine Emanation), has been published.

The brief accounts and treatments about the lives and careers of the reforming and militant mystics and scholars of Wollo offer an insight into the dynamism of regional Islamic religious life as manifested in the veneration of both the ordinary people and some of the indigenous scholars who displayed exceptional qualities of leadership, organization and piety. The Muslim uprisings in Wollo in the 1840s were partly inspired by them. Another legacy is the vital role that the mystical orders still play in social and religious life as manifested in the veneration of saints and annual visits to their shrines.

Resistance to the imposition of Christi-anity

The policy of forced conversion to Chris-tianity proclaimed by Emperor Yohannes IV (1872–1889) and implemented by his vassals was a serious, albeit temporary, setback. Its injustice and the ruthlessness with which it was carried out led to stiff resistance organized by militant ulama. These forms of re-sistance of the Wollo Muslims to the imperial decree can be identified. Firstly, at the level of both the ordinary people and some of the ulama, there was an outward acceptance of Christianity which led to the phenomenon of Christians by day and Muslims by night; appearing to be practising Christians while remaining loyal to Islam. This was based on the Islamic concept of tayyiu (dis-simulation). Secondly, the enforcement of the edict by violent means caused an exodus of a large number of people to the Sudan and the Nile. Thirdly, there were orga-nized and armed rebellions led by Muslim religious leaders. The first Muslim militant cleric who led an armed opposition against the policy of forced conversion of the Wallo Muslims imposed by Yohannes was Shaykh Ali, originally from Jern in northern Shawa. His militancy was derived from two sources: he was a disciple of Shaykh Muhammad Shafi and his father was renowned for his efforts to spread Islam in Eryite. Shaykh Ali fought a contingent of Yohannes’s army at Wahelo (northwest of Lake Hayq), where he and his followers lost their lives.

In 1884 Shaykh Talha, an innovative teacher and a prolific writer of manuals in Amharic for the teaching of Islam, pro-

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Four reformist and militant shaykh

Four of the most prominent exponents of the reformalist, scholarly, reformist and mili-
tant tradition of Islam in Wallis who lived in the 18th and 19th centuries were: Shaykh Muhammad Shafi Muhammad (1743–1806/7), Jarfar Bukko B. Siddiq (1793–1860), Bushra Ay Muhammad (d.1862) and Talha b. Muhammad Shafi Muhammad (1743–1833–1936).

According to a biography written by his son, Naashit al-Mundir (Advice for Novices), Shaykh Muhammad Shafi was a native of Wollo. After his initiation into the Qadiriyya he travelled to Gafara where he befriended a local hereditary ruler, who provided him with men and means for the propa-
gation of Islam in southeast Wollo. Muhammad Shafi strongly felt that the Islam prac-
tised by the local people was heavily influ-
enced by indigenous ideas and was there-
fore in need of reform. He accused the ‘ulu-
ma’ of the time of complacency and avarice. His influence gradually spread to other parts of Wallis including Borana, where he estab-
lished a more orthodox Islam among the Oromo- and Amhatica-speaking populations. Later he moved to Alabuko, where he set up his centre at Jama Negus which, after his death, became one of the biggest shrines in Wallis.

According to local traditions, Shaykh Muhammad Shafi divided his time between teaching, organizing a jihad (benevolent peri-
thet, mujahid), and prayer and meditation. This was a reflection of his initiative to de-
velop a concept of a vigorous Islam in per-
petual renewal and expansion through a harmonious combination of mystical exer-
cise, education and physical coercion. He authored several religious treatises which still remain unpublished.

The son of the well-known mystic Siddiq Bukko (d.1800/1), Shaykh Jarfar was noted for his outspokenness and unwavering position on questions related to faith and practice. According to a hagiographical ac-
count, he was once bragged to his grandson under the title, Misal al-Ahadfi f Maqahf Sayaf al-Haqq al-Shaykh Jarfar (The Pungent Music on the Virtues of Sayaf al-Haqq Shaykh Jarfar). Shaykh Jarfar attempted to abolish certain rituals asso-
ciated with chot (Arabic: qat). He strongly condemned the belief that traditional lead-
er clerics initiated a process of Islamic renewal. They also resisted the policy of religious co-
ceris issued by the Ethiopian rulers of the second half of the 19th century. This re-
vival was primarily associated with the in-
creasing awareness among Ethiopian Muslims of their collective identity, characterized by an intensi-
ed struggle to enhance the status of Islam at the national level, to establish a countrywide Islamic or-
ganization, and to participate actively in the public sphere. These aspirations were articulated through mass demonstrations, publications, and publications, especially after the demise of the military regime that had ruled the country from 1974 to 1991.

Historical Approaches

The Wallo Muslim resistance showed that indigenous Islam, given the necessary stim-
ulus, was capable of not only inspiring the Muslim community to organize and mobil-
ize, but also of providing a serious military challenge to the Christian rulers of Ethiopia, but they were a matter of concern. According to a local tradition, Ras Mikael (formerly Muhammad Ali) once bragged to Yohannes in Warra Ilu that Talha was only an obscure cleric who, under the influence of a union of the local Muslims to commit acts of bravado. Shortly after this, news arrived that Talha’s men had managed to commit a most heinous crime. This earned Mikael a sharp reprimand from Yohannes.

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Stieler’s Hand-Atlas (Gotha, 1847):