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Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in Ethiopia:

A Historical Introduction to a Largely Unexplored Movement

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Abstract

Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity has become an increasingly noticeable phenomenon in Ethiopia, which coincides with the significant rise of Protestantism in the past two decades. In contrast to the ubiquity of this new religious factor and the public debates it inspires, the movement has hardly been addressed in Ethiopian Studies. This contribution seeks to provide a concise historical introduction to the origins of Ethiopian Pentecostalism, its development under the governments of Ḫāylä-Səllase, the *Därg*, and the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), as well as its impact on the Ethiopian religious composition today. The argument will be made that Ethiopian Pentecostalism should not be seen as simply another instance of the "missionary factor", but that it needs to be understood first and foremost as an Ethiopian movement, answering to the country's political and cultural dynamics in the last decades, signifying as well as amplifying Ethiopia's inherent religious plurality.

A. Introduction

There is a new religious factor in Ethiopia, which attracts considerable public attention, invites dispute, influences social behavior, and has produced new Amharic phrases. It is visible in the multitude of church signs in any town or even small villages, displaying names like "Full Gospel Believers Church" (**ሙሉ፡ወንጌል፡አማኞች፡ቤተ፡ክርስቲያን**, *Mulu Wängel Amaňočč Betä-Krəstiyan*), "Paradise Church" (**ገነት፡ቤተ፡ክርስቲያን**, *Gännät Betä-Krəstiyan*), "Light of Life Church" (**ሕይወት፡ብርሃን፡ቤተ፡ክርስቲያን**, *Ḥəywät Bərhan Betä-Krəstiyan*), "Deliverance Church" (**አርነት፡ቤተ፡ክርስቲያን**, *Arənnät Betä-Krəstiyan*), and many more. It is audible every Sunday morning, when the public broadcast of Orthodox liturgy and the morning call of the Muezzin are joined by the sound of electric guitars, drums, and the joyful cries of *ʾəlləlta* (**እልልታ**). One can read about it in a recent church history by the Orthodox Sunday School Movement, warning of the detrimental effects of a certain renewal (**ተሐድሶ**,

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täḥaddəso) for the life of the church and public morale in general.[1] The more common label for this new religious factor is "*p̣änṭe*" (**ጴንጤ**), and its use often signals a deep social and cultural divide. For example, declining a beer may lead to the question whether one is a *p̣änṭe,* and an internet search of this term reveals spirited debates and even vigorous polemics about this phenomenon and its meaning for Ethiopian identity.

Despite its fairly ubiquitous presence, there are hardly any academic publications about this new religious factor. The standard Amharic dictionaries do not yet include the term **ጴንጤ** (*p̣änṭe*)[2], and its correct spelling is not solidified.[3] Obviously, the word is derived from the Amharic term for Pentecost (**ጰንጠቆስጤ**, *p̣änṭäqosṭe*), or the English "Pentecostal," and as such it points to the Pentecostal movement. But how did Pentecostalism come to Ethiopia in the first place? Why has it become such a notable phenomenon only now, whereas in other African countries, such as neighboring Kenya, it has been around for much longer[4]? Why are mainline Protestants, such as Lutherans and Baptists labeled as *p̣änṭe*s as well? What is the significance of these developments for the religious landscape of Ethiopia as a whole?

The following remarks seek to address these and similar questions in an historical overview of the Ethiopian Pentecostal movement that will look at its origins, spread, and impact. In detailing these developments, the paper seeks to show that the dynamics underlying the inception and spread of Ethiopian Pentecostalism are not sufficiently understood by the prevalent dichotomy between indigenous Christianity (i.e. Orthodoxy) and foreign or missionary Christianity (i.e. Protestantism). Instead, the argument will be made that despite early missionary origins, Ethiopian Pentecostalism is first and foremost an Ethiopian phenomenon, pointing to important recent transformations in its religious discourse.

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[1] Mängəśtu/Kaśa: **የቤተክርስቲያን፡ ታሪክ፡ ቁጥር ፪**, *yä-betä-krəstiyan tarik* [,] *quṭər 2* (2008), pp. 164ff.

[2] So far, the term can only be found in supplement dictionaries such as www.amharicdictionary.com or Girma Y. Getahun: *Advanced Amharic Lexicon* (2003).

[3] The most common is the spelling used here (**ጴንጤ**), which also corresponds with the first written instance of the term in Mulu Wängel Amañočč Betä-Krəstiyan, **ሙሉ፡ ወንጌል፡ አማኞች፡ ቤተ፡ ክርስቲያን፡ ክልደት፡ እስከ ... መቸስ፡ ሰው፡ ጌታ፡ ኢየሱስን፡ ፈልጎ፡ ሲመጣ፡ ተመለስ፡ አይባል!!!**, *Mulu wängel amañočč betä-krəstiyan kä-lədät əskä … mäčäss säw geta Iyyäsus-ən fälləgo s-i-mäṭṭa tämälläs ay-ball!! (The Full Gospel Church from Birth until ... Well, it is Impossible to turn back the People when they come wanting Jesus!!)*, Addis Abäba 1978, p. 12. Due to a flawed Wikipedia transliteration, a common internet spelling is also "**ፔንጤ**". The fairly comprehensive online Amharic Dictionary (www.amharicdictionary.com) opts for the spelling "**ጰንጤ**"which, however, is hardly in use anywhere else. For a detailed history of the term and its application see Haustein: *Writing Religious History* (2011).

[4] Pentecostal missionaries had arrived in Kenya as early as 1912, cf. Anderson: *An Introduction to Pentecostalism* (2004), p. 111.

B. Origins

Ethiopian Pentecostalism does not have American roots, but began with Finnish and Swedish Pentecostal mission initiatives, which entered the country in the 1950s. At the time of their arrival, a number of other Protestant and Evangelical mission groups already were well-established in the country, and founded their own churches in the following decades, most notably the "Kale Heywet Evangelical Church" (**ቃለ፡ሕይወት፡ወንጌላዊት፡ቤተ፡ክርስቲያን**, *Qalä-Ḥəywät Wängelawit Betä-Krəstiyan,* KHC), the "Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus" (**የኢትዮጵያ፡ወንጌላዊት፡ቤተ፡ክርስቲያን፡መካነ፡ኢየሱስ**, *Yä-Ityop̣ya Wängelawit Betä-Krəstiyan Mäkanä-Iyyäsus,* ECMY), and the Meserete Kristos Church (**መሠረተ፡ክርስቶስ፡ቤተ፡ክርስቲያን**, *Mäsärrätä-Krəstos Betä-Krəstiyan,* MKC).[5]

The first Pentecostal missionaries with a long-term presence in Ethiopia were the Finnish couple Anna-Liisa and Sanfrid Mattson who arrived in Addis Abäba in 1951. They opened a vocational school in Wolmera, a town approximately 35 km west of the capital. Their organization was called "Scripture Publishers to Every Creature" and was structured like an umbrella organization for otherwise independent Finnish missionaries. In 1956 a female missionary belonging to this organization opened a work centre in the Addis Abäba Märkato area and began spiritual meetings there, which allowed her to connect with some Ethiopian youths, mostly high school and university students.[6]

The second group of missionaries was Swedish Pentecostals, who embarked on a number of mission initiatives from 1959 onward. The most important one of these was the work of the Swedish Philadelphia Church Mission, established in the southern town of Awasa in 1960. While the main work of this mission was a vocational school, they also conducted spiritual meetings and formed a small congregation. The importance of the Swedish mission in Awasa for the early Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia, however, lies in the annual summer Bible conferences conducted there. These meetings lasted several weeks and were attended by students from all over the country during their summer break. The mission thereby functioned as an important hub for the emerging Pentecostal groups in the following years.

The Pentecostal movement gained momentum toward the middle of the 1960s, with a number of mostly young Ethiopians claiming to have experienced the central Pentecostal initiation experience: baptism in the Holy Spirit. Ethiopian Pentecostals usually anchor this first proliferation of Pentecostal practice in a story of "initial outpouring" of Holy Spirit baptism, which is connected to the ministry of a Kenyan evangelist at Swedish and Finnish mission revival meetings.[7] The story of this Kenyan man is often used to denote the inherently African origin of the movement, instead of a presumed Western missionary one, making the case for a certain indigeneity or at least non-European origin of Ethiopian Pentecostalism.[8]

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[5] For the origins of the KHC, see esp. Fargher: *The Origins of the New Churches Movement* (1996). For the ECMY, see Arén: *Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia* (1978); Arén: *Envoys of the Gospel* (1999). For the MKC, see esp. Hege: *Beyond Our Prayers* (1998).

[6] For details about these early Pentecostal mission endeavors, cf. Haustein: *Writing Religious History* (2011), pp. 46–51.

From 1963 to 1966, Pentecostal experiences and practices spread to a number of mission-independent prayer groups across the country, most notably at the Teacher Training Institute in Harär, at the Nazret High School, and among university students in Addis Abäba. A number of these initiatives converged in Addis Abäba and led to the foundation of the "Full Gospel Believers Church" (**ሙሉ ፡ ወንጌል ፡ አማኞች ፡ ቤተ ፡ ክርስቲያን**, *Mulu Wängel Amañočč Betä-Krəstiyan*, FGBC) in 1967. During this process, the students selected seven leaders from the different revival groups and asked two Swedish missionaries to ordain them as "elders" for the new church. The involvement of missionaries in the ordination was a controversial decision since the group wanted to maintain their independence, yet they apparently also saw the need to obtain an authoritative ordination through established Pentecostals.[9] However, the FGBC kept its distance from the Swedish missionaries in the following years and asserted its independence in conflicts with them.[10]

There are three important observations to be made with regard to these origins. First, the early Ethiopian proponents of Pentecostalism were members of the young and highly mobile student elite. The international and arguably modern style of Pentecostal Christianity matched their educational experience, and their travels, e.g. for home visits, student campaigns, conferences, or educational purposes, enabled them to quickly spread their faith and to form a national network. Secondly, while the theological origin of Ethiopian Pentecostalism certainly lies with the Pentecostal missions, the Ethiopians quickly developed a strong sense of mission independence, partially because their own leadership ambitions clashed with the setup of the missions, and partially because they did not want to be seen as a foreign faith. Thirdly, the somewhat unguided convergence of different revival groups with youthful ambition resulted in interesting and quite energetic church politics right from the start, which continue to the present day as different parties assert their historical influence in the inception of Pentecostalism to Ethiopia.[11]

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[7] For the first written instance of this narrative see Engelsviken: *Molo Wongel* (1975), p. 29.

[8] Cf. Haustein: *Writing Religious History* (2011), pp. 69–79.

[9] Cf. ibid. Ethiopian Pentecostal histories tend to not mention the Swedish missionary contribution to their foundation, cf. e.g. *Mulu Wängel Amañočč Betä-Krəstiyan*, **ሙሉ ፡ ወንጌል ፡ አማኖች ፡ ቤተ ፡ ክርስቲያን** [...], op. cit. (fn. 3).

[10] See Haustein: *Writing Religious History* (2011), pp. 132–136.

[11] These arguments revolve around the central initiatory event and different contributions regarding the establishment of the FGBC, cf. ibid, pp. 91–136.

Only a few months after its foundation, the FGBC applied for registration as a religious association. This was a bold attempt reflecting the modernizing impulses of the Pentecostal youths because in public sentiment and political reality the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (የኢትዮጵያ፡ኦርቶዶክስ፡ተዋሕዶ፡ቤተ፡ክርስቲያን, *Yä-Ityop̣ya Ortodoks Täwaḥədo Betä-Krəstiyan,* EOC) was the only legitimate representative of Ethiopian Christianity. All other Christian groups were operating under the "Regulations Governing the Activities of Missions" from 1944[12]. However, there had been recent legislative changes, which made this Pentecostal request possible. The 1955 revision of the constitution, while proclaiming the EOC as the state church, also contained first tenuous provisions for freedom of religious practice[13]. The Civil Code of 1960[14] took up this basic provision, outlawed discrimination on the basis of religion, and laid the foundation for registering religious groups outside the EOC as legal associations[15]. In 1966 the "Legal Notice No. 321"[16] followed up with guidelines for this registration process. Only less than a year later, the Ethiopian Pentecostal youths explicitly invoked this legal framework in the registration request for their church, and became the first religious group to test the new legislation. The Ministry of the Interior apparently did not know what to do with such an application and forwarded it to the Ministry of Education, which had been in charge of registering foreign missions. However, since the FGBC was not connected to a mission, the Ministry of Education did take on the case, and after some months, the application was rejected by the Interior Minister, which also entailed the closure of the church's meeting places[17].

The Full Gospel Church at first complied with this ruling and relied on smaller meetings in private homes. For a time, the group also gathered at the Swedish mission property in Addis Abäba, who also attempted to use some of their Imperial contacts to intervene on their behalf. During this time, the Ethiopian Pentecostal movement encountered its first doctrinal division, when one of its evangelists teamed up with Oneness Pentecostal missionaries from the USA and subsequently founded the "Apostolic Church of Ethiopia" (የኢትዮጵያ፡ሐዋርያዊት፡ቤተ፡ክርስቲያን, *Yä-*

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[12] A copy of these regulations can be found in Aymro/Motovu: *The Ethiopian Orthodox Church* (1970), p. 174.

[13] Ethiopia: Revised Constitution (1955), art. 40.

[14] Ethiopia: የፍትሐ፡ብሔር፡ሕግ, *yä-Fətḥa Bəḥer Ḥəgg* (1960).

[15] Aklilu Habtä-Wäld [*Ṣäḥafe Tə'əzaz*]: Civil Code of the Empire of Ethiopia (1960), see esp. art. 407.

[16] Aklilu Habtä-Wäld [*Ṣäḥafe Tə'əzaz*]: Legal Notice No. 321 of 1966. Regulations Issued Pursuant to the Control of Associations Provision of the Civil Code of 1960 (1966), pp. 1–10.

[17] See Engelsviken: *Molo Wongel* (1975), p. 65. Engelsviken also mentions a riot against Pentecostals in Debre Zeit in connection with this refusal, but it is doubtful whether the authorities really knew enough about the movement to connect this incident to the application, cf. Haustein: *Writing Religious History* (2011), p. 230.

Ityop̣ya Ḥawaryawit Betä-Krəstiyan, ACE).[18] Oneness Pentecostalism denies the doctrine of the trinity, which of course was an extremely problematic outlook in Orthodox Ethiopia.

From the end of 1971 onward, the government increased its pressure on religious groups without a permit. In November 1971, the Security Department in the Ministry of Interior sent a circular letter reminding local governments to enforce the meeting ban against Pentecostals and Jehova's Witnesses. In the spring of 1972, the ACE in Awasa was shut down following a rather brutal mob attack.[19] This incident also made the Pentecostal missions nervous, who now increasingly sought to communicate the distinction between them and the anti-trinitarian beliefs of the ACE[20]. Swedish Pentecostal missionaries also were still hoping for negotiations to resolve the status of the FGBC, but the Ethiopian youths decided to wait no longer and resumed public meetings again, insisting on what they believed to be their constitutional right.[21] However, this attempt failed and led to the arrest of approximately 250 worshipers on Sunday, August 27, 1972. Alongside the Pentecostals, the government also rounded up Jehovah's Witnesses in Addis Abäba. The arrested individuals were charged with illegal assembly, and those who pled guilty were sentenced to a fine, whereas the others, who insisted on their right to meet, received a prison sentence of six months[22]. They immediately appealed their case to the High Court and were released on bail in the following weeks.

During this time, the Ethiopian Pentecostals managed to bring considerable international attention to their case. At first, only Western Christian magazines took up their case, most prominently *Christianity Today*, but in January 1973, the international edition of *Newsweek* also printed an article, which even prompted a government response in the *Ethiopian Herald*[23]. Moreover, with the help of some Lutheran supporters, they sparked an investigation by the World Council of Churches (WCC) into the matter, and in June 1973, the issue was raised in a private meeting between the General Secretary of the WCC and the Ethiopian Patriarch. However, all this international attention did not bear fruit in Ethiopia. In July 1973, the High Court upheld the ruling against Pentecostals, but commuted the sentences to a probation, which also strictly prohibited further meetings. Therefore, the FGBC congregated in small "underground" groups until Ḫāylä-Səllase's government came to an end two years later.

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[18] For Oneness Pentecostalism in general see Reed: Oneness Pentecostalism (2002), p. 944. The ACE is a very strong church, especially in southern Ethiopia, and was featured in a number of English Oneness publications, see Freeman: *Unseen hands* (1987); Freeman: *Then Came the Glory*, (1994); Gezahegne: *Acts of God in Ethiopia*, (2007).

[19] Cf. Freeman: *Unseen Hands* (1987), p. 143.

[20] Since the Americans had called their mission United Pentecostal Mission, Swedish missionaries began to worry that they might be seen to deny the trinity as well, see Haustein: *Writing Religious History* (2011), pp. 160–164.

[21] See Haustein: *Writing Religious History* (2011), pp. 172f.

[22] According to the Penal Code, this was the maximum sentence for so-called "ringleaders, organizers or commanders" of illegal assembly. Täfärra-Wärq Kidanä-Wäld: The Penal Code (1957), art. 476.

[23] See Rayner: Persecution in Ethiopia (1972), pp. 54ff.; Persecuting the Sects (1973), p. 32; Newsweek's Report on Pentecostalists Unfounded (1973), p. 2. The Editorial in the *Ethiopian Herald* actually predates the release of the Newsweek report in an attempt to preempt its impact.

C. Under the Därg Regime

When the popular revolution of 1974 began, Pentecostals hoped that now they could realize their aspirations to religious liberty and freedom of assembly. The FGBC resumed public meetings in the summer of 1974 and immediately set up a new national structure. The renewal of central leadership also entailed the second doctrinal division in the church, when a group began to emphasize exorcisms more than before and contended that even born-again and Spirit-filled believers may be possessed by demons.[24] They were forced out of the church and established the Gospel Deliverance Church.

The FGBC meetings in Addis Abäba continued until 1976 when they were suspended on account of a neighborhood riot. In 1977, the church was granted land by the city and completed their first own building in October 1978.[25] However, this was already at a time when the *Därg* turned toward 'scientific socialism', violently coopted the Orthodox Church, and settled internal differences in the bloody campaigns of the Red Terror (**ቀይ፡ ሽብር**, *qäy šəbbər)*.[26] Many of the liberties that the revolution had initially brought were revoked. In the country side, a number of rural FGBC congregations had already been shut down and leaders imprisoned[27], and a few months after its opening, the Addis Abäba church was closed as well, and its property was taken over by the government. Once again, the FGBC relied on home meetings until almost the end of the *Därg* time.

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[24] The Pentecostal controversy of whether or not born-again Christians may be possessed by demons began in the USA with the teachings of the popular evangelist Derek Prince. The Deliverance group had listened to some of his audiotapes and began to spread his teaching. The whole issue had a peculiar twist in that one of the elders of the FGBC suffered from epilepsy, which the Deliverance group, among them another elder of the church, attributed to demon possession. See Haustein: *Writing Religious History*, pp. 210f.

[25] See the jubilee magazine issued by the church for the completion of the building, Full Gospel Believers' Church: **ሙሉ፡ ወንጌል፡ ቤተ፡ ክርስቲያን** […], op. cit. (fn. 3).

[26] Cf. Elliesie, Hatem: Different Approaches to Genocide. *Recht in Afrika* (2009), p. 36.

[27] Some were held for many years without a trial, for example the Yərga Aläm FGBC pastor Tesfaye Gabbisso, who spent seven years in prison and today is a popular Pentecostal singer.

During the initial years of the *Därg*, the Pentecostal missions began to turn over their work to Ethiopians. The Swedish Mission invited representatives from its different congregations to the yearly mission meeting in Awasa in 1975 where they agreed to form the Ethiopian Hiwot Berhan Church (**የኢትዮጵያ፡ሕይወት፡ብርሃን፡ቤተ፡ክርስቲያን**, *Yä-Ityop̣ya Ḥəywät Bərhan Betä-Krəstiyan,* HBC), with its headquarters in Addis Abäba. Their application for registration as a religious association, however, was not received favorably by the revolutionary rulers. In 1978, the Swedish missionaries were forced out of the Kaffa province, and the churches there were closed. One year later, the Addis Abäba HBC was shut down as well. The Awasa mission station and church continued until 1983 when they too were closed and the property was taken over by the government.[28]

The Finnish Mission at Märkato in Addis Abäba appointed Ethiopian leaders for their work in 1976 who less than one year later notified the mission of their desire to be established as a financially independent national church. In 1978, the *Därg* forced the Finnish Pentecostal missionaries out of their development projects in the Kaffa and Šäwa provinces, and subsequently, the mission decided to leave Ethiopia. A fellowship of Finnish mission-related churches was formed in June 1978, which took on the name of “Ethiopian Gennet Church” (**የኢትዮጵያ፡ገነት፡ቤተ፡ክርስቲያን**, *Yä-Ityop̣ya Gännät Betä-Krəstiyan,* GC), and the last missionaries departed in July 1978 after appointing the lead pastor as their representative. In 1979, the *Därg* closed the Addis Abäba GC and imprisoned its leaders for some months, and a number of other *Gännät* congregations throughout the country were shut down as well. While many of the GC congregations had to rely on private house meetings and secret programs in the following years, its southern branch in the Sidamo province flourished and operated publicly throughout the *Därg.*[29]

The political repression of Ethiopian Pentecostalism also had serious repercussions in the mainline Protestant churches. The MKC and the ECMY had already seen some Pentecostal influence with the emergence of Charismatic groups in their midst, which now were in a somewhat precarious position. The considerable public visibility of Pentecostals and Charismatics, as well as their defiant attitude toward worldly authorities, had made them a target for the revolutionary rulers. For example, Charismatic youths on different occasions were arrested for publicly refusing to chant socialist slogans like “The revolution above all!” maintaining that they should not put anything above God.[30] Therefore, when the *Därg* began to attack the mainline churches, officials increasingly applied the derogatory term *p̣änṭe* to all Protestants, though it originally had denoted Pentecostals only. Some of the Lutherans or Baptists so labeled had never even heard of Pentecostalism before.[31] In a number of instances this caused the mainline churches to draw a clear distinction between them and Pentecostals, for example, by not allowing Pentecostals from already shut-down churches to participate in their services, or by exiling their own Charismatic groups.

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[28] For details on the Swedish mission during the *Därg*, see Nyberg Oskarsson: *Svensk Pingstmission i Ethiopien (1959–1980)* (1997).

[29] For the Finnish mission churches during the *Därg* see Ashebir: *The History of Ethiopian Guenet Church* (1993); Roininen: A Condensed History of the Finnish Mission in Ethiopia (2001).

[30] See Eide: *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia* (2000), pp. 247f.; Tibebe: *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia* (2009), p. 248.

When mainline Protestant congregations were shut down as well, many set up their own secret cell groups as well. It is likely that the more Charismatic elements in the churches led the way, and there may have been some conflation with Pentecostal cell structures under such circumstances. However, the amount of contact between cell groups strongly depended on local conditions. Especially in areas with high political pressure, security concerns among cell group leaders were too high to admit people from other denominations in fear of government spies.[32] However, it is possible that in certain areas and over time cell groups were structured less by denominational boundaries and more by interpersonal relationships and local proximity, so that as church identification lessened, spiritual practices became more homogenous.[33]

Altogether, it appears that the *Därg* regime furthered the spread of Pentecostalism in an indirect way. The strong repression of Pentecostals and their relatively defiant attitude toward government power resulted in the creation of fairly stable underground structures that effected significant church growth. On account of these developments, Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians began to be seen as a political alternative to the more accommodating attitudes of some established churches[34]. Moreover, government propaganda increasingly identified all Protestants as Pentecostals, and this hegemonic practice effectively altered public discourse: today many Protestants call themselves *p̣änṭe*. The churches' attempts to counter this identification by excluding Charismatic groups enabled the latter to produce a historical narrative of moral superiority after the *Därg* had been brought down. As they tell of persecution brought on them by the government and their own congregations, they cast themselves as representatives of the true and unblemished church.[35]

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[31] Donham: *Marxist Modern* (1999), pp. 144, 164.

[32] Cf. Haustein: *Writing Religious History* (2011), p. 200.

[33] Cf. Bäqqälä: **ሪቫይቫል.** 2002, pp. 107, 160.

[34] The Ethiopian Orthodox Church was forcefully appropriated by the *Därg* fairly early on, symbolized perhaps most of all by the murder of Patriarch Theophilos. The ECMY also began to adapt to the political structures of the *Därg* in the 1980s, for example, by participating in the drafting of the new constitution and taking up a seat in the parliament. See Haustein: Navigating Political Revolutions: Ethiopia's Churches during and after the Mengistu Regime (2009), p. 136.

D. Current Developments

After the fall of the *Därg*, Ethiopia began to see an unprecedented measure of religious plurality. While the core of the present government, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (**ሕዝባዊ፡ወያነ፡ሐርነት፡ትግራይ**, *Ḥəzbawi Wäyyanä Ḥarənnät Təgray,* TPLF), had been no less Marxist in orientation than the Mängəśtu regime it fought,[36] it took a more tolerant stance on religion early on, since its armed struggle against the *Därg* was built mostly on rural support and had to accommodate their religiosity.[37] Therefore, when the TPLF-led EPRDF took over power in 1991, their new governing philosophy of "ethno-regional federalism" was extended to religions as well. Article 13 of the constitution states that "[t]he national emblem on the flag shall reflect the hope of the Nations, Nationalities, Peoples as well as religious communities to live together in equality and unity." Accordingly, Article 11 marks a clear separation of religion and state, rules out a state religion and provides the assurance of no government interference in religious matters and *vice versa*. Article 27 warrants freedom of religion, belief, and opinion, which includes the right of believers to "establish institutions of religious education and administration in order to propagate and organize their religion." Based on these constitutional provisions, the legal framework for the registration of associations, already set up by the 1960 Civil Code and the "Legal Notice No. 321" of 1966, was now put into practice, allowing and mandating the official registration of all religious bodies.

Like all Protestants, Pentecostals immediately took advantage of the changes the new government brought and re-emerged in public space, discovering that their following had grown significantly under the *Därg* regime. The FGBC, for example, reclaimed its Addis Abäba church building from the government within a few months after the EPRDF had taken over the city and held its first public worship service there with an estimated attendance of 15,000 worshipers.[38] The HBC reclaimed the former mission compound in Awasa within two months after the new regime came to power and resumed public services. Moreover, despite occasional local difficulties, it became much easier for all Protestants to secure land for church buildings and burial grounds, which had been impossible before. This is especially significant in areas they previously had hardly any access to. In the largely Orthodox town of Baḥər Dar, for example, Protestants erected tall churches, which appear to compete in visibility with Orthodox buildings.[39] The increased public presence of Protestantism in Orthodox areas has led to a number of clashes and riots, during which government forces have usually protected Protestant gatherings.[40]

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[35] See for example Assefa: *A Clean Hearth for the Fire to Blaze* (1997), p. 23; Jeto: *"Troubled But Not Destroyed"* (1999), p. 33; Mintesinot Birru: *The Impact of Charismatic Movement* (2002), p. 27.

[36] Mäläs Zenawi renounced Marxism-Leninism at about the same time as Mängəśtu Ḫāylä-Maryam, see Tiruneh: *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974–1987* (1993), p. 362.

[37] See Young: *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia* (1997), pp. 177ff.

[38] See Addis Abäba Full Gospel Believers' Church: **የ40ኛ፡ዓመት፡የወንጌል፡አገልግሎትና፡የምስጋና፡በዓል፡ መጽሔት**/ **ሐምሌ** 1958–1998 **ዓ.ም.** *(Yä-40-ñña ʿamät yä-wängel agälgəlot-nna yä-məsgana bäʿal mäṣḥet / hamle* 1958–1998 ʿa.mə / "Magazine of fourty years of Gospel Ministry and of the Anniversary Celebration (July 1966–2006)"), Addis Abäba 2006, p. 15.

The mandate for the registration of religious associations was largely welcomed by Pentecostal churches, since for them this was the first time they could obtain official recognition. Moreover, the organizational requirements for registration and the legal recognition this process awards are largely compatible with Pentecostal modes of organizing and their tendencies to grow via fragmentation. A list of registered associations obtained from the Ministry of Justice in 2004 indicates the mushrooming of Pentecostal associations. Of the 291 religious denominations, churches, and ministries in this list, the absolute majority belongs to the Protestant fold and many of them are Pentecostal or Charismatic. The most relevant recently established Pentecostal denominations are the “Assemblies of God” (**ኢትዮጵያ፡ጉባኤ፡እግዚአብሔር፡ቤተ፡ክርስቲያን**, *Yä-Ityop̣ya Guba'e Ǝgzi'abəḥer Betä-Krəstiyan*), the “Bible Army Church” (**የመጽሐፍ፡ቅዱስ፡ሠራዊት፡ቤተ፡ክርስቲያን**, *Yä-Maṣḥaf Qəddus Särawit Betä-Krəstiyan*), the “Gospel Light Church” (**የወንጌል፡ብርሃን፡ቤተ፡ክርስቲያን**, *Yä-Wängel Bərhan Betä-Krəstiyan*), the “Harvest Church of God” (**መከረ፡እግዚአብሔር፡ቤተ፡ክርስቲያን**, *Mäkkärä-Ǝgzi'abəḥer Betä-Krəstiyan*), the “Maranata Church” (**የኢትዮጵያ፡ወንጌላዊት፡ማራናታ፡የቤት፡ክርስቲያን፡ኅብረት**, *Yä-Ityop̣ya Wängelawit Maranata yä-Bet Krəstiyan Ḫəbrät*), and the “Winners' Chapel” (**አሸናፊ፡መቅደስ፡ቤተ፡ክርስቲያን**, *Aššännafi Mäqdäs Betä-Krəstiyan*).[41] The largest trinitarian Pentecostal denominations are the FGBC and the HBC with approximately 500,000 members each.[42] The

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[39] In the predominantly Protestant south, such representative buildings are rarely to be found.

[40] For examples of such occurrences in Baḥər Dar (1994) and Mäqällä (2003), see Tsega: Protestant Mission Activities and Persecutions in Bahər Dar (2005), p. 220; U.S. Department of State: *Ethiopia: International Religious Freedom*, www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2003/23705.htm (last access 7 Jan. 2011).

[41] For an annotated list of the most important Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, see Haustein: *Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches in Ethiopia* (2011). See also Schröder: Äthiopien. Religiöse Gemeinschaften (1997).

[42] Most churches do not have reliable statistical information about their membership. For the FGBC estimates obtained in interviews with church leaders ranged from 500,000 to one million. Especially smaller churches tend to offer greatly exaggerated estimates, in hopes of recruiting foreign support.

ACE is comparable in size.[43] Most other Pentecostal churches are considerably smaller with membership in the five-figure range or below.

The proliferation of Pentecostal theology, and practices into mainline Protestantism continued at an accelerated rate in the last two decades. Almost all Protestant churches now are deeply influenced by Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity and have adopted central Pentecostal propositions in their theological statements and regulations. The Baptist KHC, for example, whose founding organization, the Sudan Interior Mission, was decidedly anti-Pentecostal in the 1970s.[44] published a revision of its Doctrinal Statement in 2004, which defines Pentecostal terms like "baptism in the Holy Spirit" and regulates in detail Charismatic practices, like speaking in tongues, prophesy, or laying on of hands.[45] The ECMY officially welcomed the Charismatic movement in 1993 and found it compatible with its own Lutheran teachings and traditions.[46] In 2008, the church published a liturgy reform, which outlines a number of issues with regard to Charismatic practices, but in general affirms their use if applied in the right way. Likewise, the Mennonite MKC confirms the belief of the church in the "fullness of the Holy Spirit" and the work of "spiritual gifts" in their Statement of Faith.[47]

There are a number of Charismatic movements within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church as well. However, they are routinely a point of contention, not least because whole Charismatic groups have left the church in the past and became independent Pentecostal churches.[48] In other cases, charismatic groups tended to function as a sort of transit point for Orthodox Christians turning Protestant.[49] However, there still are a number of Charismatic groups who wish to maintain a distinctly Orthodox identity, but due to their precarious position, they mostly keep a low profile.

The theological alliance between mainline Protestants and Pentecostals has its organizational correlate in the Evangelical Churches' Fellowship of Ethiopia.[50] It is the only significant ecumenical body on the Protestant side and almost all the major

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[43] In an interview, the leader of the church estimated the number of his congregations at over 5,000 with altogether 2 million members. A more conservative estimate by a trinitarian Pentecostal still puts the number at around 600,000.

[44] See Baliski: Case Studies from the Bible (2004), pp. 19.

[45] Qalä-Ḥəywät Wängelawit Betä-Krəstiyan: **የእምነት፡አቋም**, *yä-əmnät aqʷäm* (2004), p. 32.

[46] See Fogi: *The Charismatic Movement in the EECMY,* (2000), pp. 97f.; Alemu: Reflection Paper, p. 1.

[47] See Mäsärrätä-Krəstos Betä-Krəstiyan (Ed.): **መሠረተ፡እምነት**, *mäśärätä-əmnät* (1995), p. 6.

[48] The most prominent example of this was the Ammanuel Fellowship (now **እማኑኤል፡ህብረት፡ቤተ፡ክርስቲያን**, *Ǝmanu'el Həbrät Betä-Krəstiyan*; "Ammanuel Fellowship Church") which began as a prayer fellowship in a Nazret in 1991, left the church in 1995, and became increasingly Protestant in the following years until it finally joined the Evangelical Churches' Fellowship in 2004.

[49] See Haustein: Die pfingstlich charismatischen Bewegungen (2011).

[50] For the history of the ECFE, see Fite: *The Challenges of Denominational Conflicts* (2001), p. 22.

(trinitarian) Pentecostal churches participate in it. The Fellowship facilitates theological discussions as well as cooperation in evangelism, development projects, or practical matters such as burial grounds, and, to some extent, it seeks a common political representation of Protestants. As an ecumenical body, it also functions as a platform for Pentecostal and Charismatic theologies. However, these hardly appear to be a dividing issue anymore, rather the controversial topics are proselytism and infant baptism versus adult baptism.

This conflation of Pentecostal and Protestant Christianity coincides with the significant growth of Protestantism in the last 25 years. In the 1984 census, roughly 2.1 million people identified as Protestant, which was 5.5 % of the total population.[51] By 1994 the number had more than doubled to 5.4 million, or 10.2 % of the overall populace,[52] and by 2007 Protestants had more than doubled again, amounting to 13.7 million people, or 18.5 % of the population.[53] Most of this increase appears to have come at the cost of the Orthodox Church, whose share declined from 54.0 % in 1984 to 50.6 % in 1994, and 43.5 % in 2007. Though Protestantism outgrew the population increase in all regions except Somali by large margins between 1994 and 2007,[54] its growth has not fundamentally altered the map of Ethiopia's religious composition because of the vast differences between regions. In Təgray, for example, only about 1,100 people self-identified as Protestant in 1994 (0.04 % of the population there), which increased to roughly 3,600 (0.08 %) in 2007. Protestantism is mostly a religion of the south and the west, over 97 % of all Protestants live in the Southern Nations, Nationalities' and Peoples' Region, Oromiya, and Gambella, where they take a share of the population of 55.5, 17.7, and 70.1 %, respectively. These three regions also grew by more than the country average, which would account for part of the Protestant increase. In Addis Abäba, Protestants claim a share of the populace of 7.7 %. Because of this regional distribution, Protestantism is more of a rural than an urban phenomenon in Ethiopia. Only 11.6 % of Protestants live in cities or towns, compared to 16.1 % of the overall population. The gender distribution in Ethiopian Protestantism largely follows the country's, although women are slightly overrepresented in age groups under twenty-five and over forty-five. In all regions of Ethiopia, the population share of Protestants is larger among youths than older people. Even though the census numbers are debated by some,[55] they indicate a significant change in Ethiopia's confessional landscape.

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[51] Ethiopia: *The 1984 Population and Housing Census* (1991), p. 60. The number of Protestants might be underestimated by this study, given the difficult conditions to identify as such during the *Därg*.

[52] See Ethiopia: *The 1994 Population and Housing Census* (1998), p. 129.

[53] See Ethiopia, *The 2007 Population and Housing Census.* (2008), p. 17.

[54] Islam 2.8 %; Orthodox 1.3 %; Catholicism 1.1 %; traditional religions 1.7 %. Own calculations based on the detailed census figures released at www.csa.gov.et/index.php?option=com_rubberdoc&view=category&id=72&Itemid=521 (last access 7 Jan. 2011).

E. Conclusion

With the rise of Protestantism and the "Pentecostalization" of mainline Protestant churches, Pentecostalism has become a highly public affair, be it in large stadium conferences, in notoriously loud neighborhood churches, or in the use of the label *p̣änṭe* for anyone who does not drink alcohol. This stands in quite stark contrast to the little work produced about this movement in the field of Ethiopian Studies, which all too often equates Ethiopian Christianity with Orthodoxy only.

However, viewing Pentecostalism simply as another instance of the "missionary factor"[56] hardly does justice to the historical and social dynamics of this recent religious change. The core of Ethiopian Pentecostalism sought mission independence from the start, leading to the foundation of the FGBC and its attempt to register as an indigenous religious association. When this failed, Ethiopian Pentecostals asserted their independence wherever possible, most of the time congregating in secret cell groups rather than mission compounds. The restrictive politics of the *Därg* further reduced the remaining influence of foreign missions, whose role from then on was reduced to material support at best, even with regard to their daughter churches, who since have developed their own identity as mission independent churches.[57] Today, Ethiopian Pentecostals, by all accounts, do not understand themselves as the vanguard of international Protestantism, but as a renewal movement for their country, heralding the same national heritage and patriotism as their Orthodox counterparts.

Even in the mainline Protestant churches, Pentecostal theology and practices have become a way of marking a difference to the founding missions, especially with regard to music and liturgy.[58] Pentecostal music, for example, never relied on translated works, but drew from contemporary Ethiopian popular music early on, which it complemented with original lyrics. This was and is one of the most popular features of Pentecostalism in Ethiopia that has transformed music in mainline Protestant churches and has become a part of Ethiopian culture in general.[59] Furthermore, Pentecostal exorcisms connect to traditional cosmology, invoking names and domains of traditional spirits or linking certain diseases to spirit possession. Their healing services also take up a traditional function of the church and are understood by some as an alternative to the all too often unattainable Western medicine. Finally, the combination of modern technology in Pentecostal services with a rather traditional outlook may be attractive for people aspiring to be part of contemporary global culture without losing their heritage.[60]

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[55] Especially Muslims have criticized the census for underestimating their population share, see e.g. Ethiopia: Muslim Critics Reject National Census for "Missing Millions" (2008).

[56] Cf. Getatchew Haile/Lande/Rubenson: *The Missionary Factor in Ethiopia* (1998).

[57] This can be seen, for example, in their historical narrative, which tends to diminish the missionary impact, see Haustein: *Writing Religious History* (2011), pp. 38–40.

[58] See Domianus: Essay zum TEE-Lehrbuch (2005), p. 16.

Moreover, as the historical overview has shown, Ethiopian politics and internal affairs have been a very influential factor in the history of Ethiopian Pentecostalism and its spread to the mainline churches. The modernizing ambitions of Ḫāylä-Səllase led to legislative reforms, which made the public emergence of other Christian groups possible. When the Imperial government failed to implement this legal framework, it implicitly politicized the Pentecostal movement, whose defiant insistence on religious liberties and effective underground structures set them up as an alternative to the aging Empire. After the revolution, the same dynamic applied. When the *Därg* began to suppress Pentecostals and alienated Protestants as *p̣änṭe* the movement resorted to effective underground structures and began to be seen as a political and religious alternative to 'scientific socialism'.[61] The severe repressions encountered during this time therefore allowed the movement to build a significant popular base, which emerged in public after the EPRDF came to power in 1991. The EPRDF's interest in religious pluralism, which corresponds to its philosophy of ethno-regional federalism, has allowed the Pentecostal movement to build on this base, especially since the legal framework of registration and land grants are largely compatible with Pentecostal organizational models. Likewise, the incursion of Pentecostalism into the mainline Protestant churches in the form of the Charismatic movement is rooted in the precarious position Pentecostals had under Ḫāylä-Səllase and the *Därg*, and it accelerated under the present government due to internal

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[59] Engelsviken notes that the FGBC choir was already featured in national TV and radio in 1971, see Engelsviken: *Molo Wongel* (1975), p. 93. Today it is possible to ride a mini taxi in Addis Abäba with Orthodox icons in the windows and a Pentecostal music tape in the car stereo.

[60] There is a sizable Ethiopian Protestant exile community, especially in the USA, which originated with emigrants during the *Därg*. A number of US pastors travel to Ethiopia and Western Europe frequently, visiting Ethiopian Pentecostal churches or immigrant communities and thereby establishing an international network, which facilitates the transport of theological ideas, financial resources, music, books, and more.

[61] Cf. Eide: *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia* (2000), p. 247.

Protestant dynamics in a fairly unregulated religious marketplace.[62] With the possibility of land grants, Pentecostals (and Protestants overall) also have gained access to predominantly Orthodox and Muslim areas, which has caused some unrest, but in neither case has the religious majority been impacted significantly. The same could be said of the Charismatic movement within the Orthodox Church.

Since the rise of Pentecostalism is based on its defiance of governments seeking to suppress religious minorities, since it thrives under the present conditions of religious liberty, and since its growth coincides with the increase of Protestantism in certain parts of the country, it is safe to conclude that Pentecostalism amplifies Ethiopia's inherent religious plurality. This is precisely why it is important to study Pentecostalism as an indigenous Ethiopian movement. The rise of Pentecostalism gives insight to important religious dynamics of Ethiopia's recent history, for example regarding the relationship of religion and politics, the competing articulations of an Ethiopian cultural identity, the challenges to Christian diversity, or the development of interreligious relations. Therefore, researching Ethiopian Pentecostalism will likely become more important as religious plurality remains a significant factor in Ethiopian politics and culture.

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[62] Mainline Protestant churches increasingly compete with Pentecostals and adopt their practices, since Charismatics in their midst occasionally threaten to leave the church, and whole mainline congregations have in the past gone over to a Pentecostal denomination.

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