HAILE SELASSIE AND THE RELIGIOUS FIELD: GENERATIVE
STRUCTURALISM AND CHRISTIAN MISSIONS IN ETHIOPIA

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Jason E. Craig
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Thesis Approvals:

_____   Terry Rey, Advisor, Department of Religion

_____   John Raines, Committee Member, Department of Religion

ABSTRACT

With the momentum of previous Emperors, Haile Selassie steered Ethiopia on the path to modernization. One of his greatest obstacles was the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC), which, being steeped in sixteen centuries of tradition, was accustomed to being the primary hegemonic power. Pierre Bourdieu's generative structuralism will be employed in this thesis to analyze the EOC's symbolic power as well as Selassie's efforts to dispossess the Church of its cultural power and make it an arm of the state. Controlling the rural periphery of Ethiopia, however meant introducing the basic structures of modernity to ethnic groups who had historically resisted Selassie's Amharic culture. Selassie permitted foreign missions, such as the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) and Swedish Evangelical Mission (SEM), to function as his subcontractors for civilization by building schools, establishing medical stations, and evangelizing the non-Orthodox populations. Selassie failed to anticipate how mission structures contributed to the formation of resistant identities for Maale and Oromo converts. In analyzing these processes, the thesis also employs Robin Horton's theory of conversion while refuting Horton's broader claim about the superficiality of Christianity in Africa.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia offers unique avenues for historical and sociological scholarship found nowhere else in African studies, such as sixteen centuries of indigenous African Christianity and the advent of modernization removed from traditional patterns of European colonialism. Ethiopia, as defined by external civilizations in the Middle East and Europe, has existed in one form or another for two millennia as Cush, Punt, the kingdom of Axum, and Abyssinia. According to Richard Stevens (1981), "During much of its history the dominant feature of state organization was the notion of an absolute monarch, but his power in fact fluctuated considerably under the impact of external onslaughts and internal obstacles to its exercise" (p. 3). Muslim encroachment in the thirteenth century, Oromo migrations to the north in the sixteenth century, provincial power struggles of the seventeenth century, combined with the arduous terrain of the highlands, mitigated the emperor's ability to centralize power. Twentieth century Ethiopia posed similar internal and external challenges to a larger-than-life emperor, Haile Selassie. In his attempt to create an independent, consolidated, and self-sustaining world power, Selassie facilitated a collision between the traditional world and modern world of Ethiopia. Orthodox Christianity, feudal lords, and centuries of isolation were abruptly ended with foreign alliances and modern institutions, such as Western education and healthcare.

For Pierre Bourdieu (1989), in order to "change the world, one has to change the ways of world-making, that is, the vision of the world and the practical operations by

which groups are produced and reproduced" (p. 23). As an Ethiopian Orthodox Christian and a member of Amhara nobility, Selassie assumed the throne in 1930 with stores of symbolic capital, which he sought to mobilize in a national project of such world making. His imperial authority, however, could not withstand the military power of Italy nor prevent a five-year exile extending from 1936-1941. In an open letter to the British people, Selassie (1994) explains:

> When Italy invaded Our country, We…were totally unprepared for the type of war unleashed against Us. The few soldiers we had were ill-armed. They were unequal to the task of resisting the enemy that was on the move in the air as well as on the ground (p. 103).

Selassie imagined a new Ethiopia upon his return, one that could contend with the world's superpowers. Catching up with the West meant improving the nation's military, education, and healthcare. Developing such institutions however, were not for mere material benefit of the people, but for cultural assimilation (Amharatization). "The Amharic culture," Peter Schwab (1979) believes, "has almost always been imposed whenever and wherever possible on all other ethnic and religious groups" (p. 12). The motives behind all such imperial efforts were to generate and maintain absolute power. Constructing a modernized Ethiopia entailed dominating any forces, traditional or otherwise, that might challenge Selassie's modernizing ethos.

As a statesman and nationalist, Selassie won favor among his own people and much of Europe. By the 1960s, however, his absolute power had nearly disintegrated, and by 1974, he was deposed by a military junta. Scholars of Selassie's life and reign often trace his power disintegration to the "perfect storm" of failing policies that resulted in an

education slowdown, superficial land reform, and famine cover-ups, which claimed

hundreds of thousands of lives in 1958, 1966, and 1974.[1] Religion has been an

underestimated force and, at times, a disregarded variable in the study of Haile Selassie's

rise to and fall from power. To date, no link has been forged between the advent of

foreign missions and Selassie's loss of power. This study seeks to fill this gap in

scholarship. I submit that in Selassie's fervor to inculcate the nation with modernity, he

dispossessed the Church of its full ritual power. In doing so, he created fissures in the

religious field, facilitating competition from foreign missions that offered non-Orthodox

ways to be Ethiopians. From the peripheral regions such as Welega and Gama Gofa,

foreign missions offered the Oromo and Maale a platform to resist Selassie's attempt to

control and homogenize the population.

Individuals within a system develop ways of relating to one another that, in turn,

shape how they relate to members of other systems (Levine, 2000). In his *Outline of a

Theory of Practice*, Bourdieu (1977) refers to the *habitus* as an "immanent law, *lex insita,*

laid down in each agent by his earliest upbringing, which is the precondition not only for

the coordination of practices but also for the practices of coordination…" (p. 81). Toward

viewing Ethiopian agency as a reflection of internal dispositions and assessing Ethiopia's

historical interaction with objective structures of control, the discussion should be framed

by Donald Levine's (2000) holistic conception of *Ethiopianness*. His sociological

perspective viewed Ethiopian identity as a complex, evolving socio-cultural system of

diverse, historically autonomous societies of small scale, which were transitioning from

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[1] See Bahru Zewde (2001), P. Gilkes, (1975), P. Schwab (1979), Paulos Milkias, (2006) for a detailed analysis of Haile Selassie's fall from power, which is beyond the scope of this study.

an "intersocietal system to a single societal system" (p. 25). While approaching these variegated people groups, Levine questioned whether imperial expansion was "basically *a subjugation of alien peoples or an ingathering of peoples with deep historical affinities?"* (Levine, p. 26). From this query, Levine posited that Ethiopia must be viewed as an interplay between two distinct social systems: the Amharic and the Oromo. Without flattening the cultural diversity of the tribes comprising these systems, Levine constructed broad boundary principles for each system, which offer the necessary background for constructing each habitus. The Oromo and Amhara systems provide a structure for analyzing the consolidating of Selassie's power of as well as the destabilizing force of foreign missions. Below is a brief synopsis of Levine's two systems.

<div align="center">The Amhara System vs. The Oromo System</div>

The Amhara system encompasses those tribes that have fallen under the historic categorization of Axumites or Abyssinians and includes modern tribes such as the Amharas and Tigreans of the North. Amhara social life is rooted in the households and isolated homesteads which function more as political economies than family units. While the authoritative structure of the household is relatively stable, membership "waxes and wanes…as *individuals* see their life chances better served in one place than in another…" (Levine, 2000, p. 114, emphasis mine). Members of Amhara system households are brought together by the market and the Church but obligated to sustain the political structure (i.e. local lords) and the ecclesiastical structure (i.e. priests) through agricultural surpluses. Knowledge of one's genealogy is paramount for exogamous marriage[2] as well as access to inherited-land rights, known as *rist.* National consciousness appears to have

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[2] Marriages in the Amhara system must be "seven houses" apart, so spouses must not have a common great-great-great grandparent (see Levine, 2000).

originated from a sense of restlessness within individuals, best described as "looking

beyond" (pp. 117-8). Members of this system are constantly "looking beyond" for more

fertile land, more sacred parishes, and greater opportunities to generate status and power

by indebting others. The supraethnic expression *Habesha* is a notion that not only

includes members of the Amhara system but also extends to all those who have been

conquered and incorporated by the dominant power.

The Amhara system contains separate lines of legitimation for its political and

religious structures, most noticeably in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church's (EOC)

historical attachment to the Egyptian Coptic Church (ECC). The religious and political

orders have "distinct bases of power and influence, contrasting patterns of internal

organization, and specialized societal function" (Levine, 2000, p. 120). This knowledge

provides a relevant context for analyzing Selassie's subjugation of the EOC in the

following chapter. The most fundamental association, however, of the Amhara

hierarchical structure is the patron-client dyad, which is a reflection of aggressive

masculinity and an overall distrust of others. A man's status and power within the system

correlates directly with the number of men obligated to him. The ability to distribute and

collect favors appears to be the basis for such power. Moreover, the ethos of the Amhara

system is saturated with notions of respect, duty, and compliance for all superordinates

(Levine). The habitus of the members of the Amhara system can be congealed into an

Amharic proverb: "*Amara yazzal inji aytazzezim*—'the Amhara is to rule, not to be

ruled'" (Levine, p. 149).

The Oromo system, encompassing tribes such as the Oromo and Maale, is the

antithesis to the Amhara system. More solidaristic, the Oromo seek to preserve status quo

and fuse religious and political functions with common lines of legitimation. With smaller, more stable households, the polygynous Oromo conduct social life within three overlapping spheres: *olla*, lineage, and class. The *olla* is the foundation of egalitarian collectivism. Members of these residential groupings not only dwell together but also work cooperatively on all agricultural projects, including animal husbandry. The lineage groups locate one Oromo to another but function more as the "agents of moral control" (Levine, 2000, p. 131). Members of the same lineage or clan assemble for weddings and birth ceremonies and mete out sanctions for personal offenses. The most senior member of each lineage group is the *Qaalluu*, a lone, semi-divine mediator to the world of spirits. Class or status roles are determined by the *gada* system, an eight-year cycle of class structuring based on generation and age. The *gada* system, according to Levine, is "one of the most complex systems of social organization ever devised by the human imagination" (Levine, p. 132). Although the gradations of the *gada* are exhaustive and largely irrelevant to this thesis, it is helpful to note that the eight-year cycle of ruling elites conditioned a check-and-balance mentality among the people. The complex, rigid *gada* organization was highly unsustainable, and with few exceptions, deteriorated in the face of Amhara expansion. While rank does in fact play a role in Oromo social life, the power that accompanies position is often curtailed to avoid ridicule and criticism. In contrast to Amhara, the Oromo have a "lack of power motivation and sense little pressure to escape subordinate position" (Levine, p. 149). Although the early modern members of this system pursued corporate interests, they lacked understanding of nationhood. Maale, Matcha, and Borana refer to themselves along tribal lines, not within the supraethnic conception of Oromo. Levine remarks:

If by nation one means a sizable group of people who have some sense of

belonging to a single societal community by virtue of sharing important past

experience and common historic identity, then the Galla [Oromo] do not

constitute a nation (p. 135).

Oromo political and religious activity functioned on a narrow field, anchored to specific

localities. Although these differences explain how and why a more portable Amhara

system overcame and subjugated a localized Oromo system, they are of greater import

when judging the imperial center's relations to the periphery in the twentieth century.

Modernization In Ethiopia

Haile Selassie owed much of his success to the efforts of his imperial

predecessors. A brief look at their accomplishments contextualizes modernization and

emphasizes Selassie's impetus. For the purposes of this thesis the broad term

modernization refers to the process of Amhara expansion and tribal consolidation in

absence of European colonialism, along with the adoption of Western structures and

technology. Teshale Tibebu[3] (1995) summarizes the progression of modernization as,

"Tewodros II *initiated,* Yohannes IV *elaborated,* Menelik II *consolidated,* and Haile

Selassie I *completed* the process of transformation from parcellized sovereignties to

centralized sovereignty" (p. 31). The era preceding Tewodros II, from 1766 to 1855, was

known as *Zamana Masafent* (Age of Princes). Renowned for its feuding provincial

authorities, this period manifested political tension that collapsed Gondar as the

centralized urban capital. Beginning with Tewodros II's ascension to the throne in 1855,

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[3] The names of Ethiopian and Eritrean scholars will be cited in their
entirety according to the patronymic tradition which gives children the father's
first name as their surname. One exception will be made for "Haile Selassie," who
will also be referred to as "Selassie," as his name is also a title.

the northern and central Christian tribes of the Amhara system, highly motivated and organized, battled to regain a more centralized state.

A distant member of the royal family, Tewodros II gained great popularity as a type of Ethiopian Robin Hood during his days as a mercenery soldier (Pankhurst, 2001). As Emperor (1855-1868), he successfully mitigated the power of the fuedal princes and kings by further fragmenting their provinces and placing trusted officials over new administrative regions. In addition, Tewodros led Ethiopia out of cenurties worth of xenophobia and isolation. Importing European firearms and artillery, the Emperor created the first professional army, outsourcing the training to Europeans and Turks (Adejumobi, 2007). In his efforts to fund such projects, however, the Emperor clashed with the EOC by taxing their holdings and confiscating some of their property. "By alienating the Church," Bengt Sundlker and Christopher Steed (2000) note, "he lost his most important ally in his quest for national unification" (p.162). As his political power disintegrated, weakening consolidation, Tewodros took his own life during the Battle of Maqdawa in 1868.

From the northern Tigray region, Yohannes IV's reign (1872-1889) continued Tewodros' drive for power consolidation by expanding military, arsenal, and foreign diplomacy. Superior firepower enabled Yohannes to impose the Amhara system on the western and southern peripheries. Schwab (1979) observes that "Ethiopia is the only state south of the Sahara that utilized classic techniques of imperialism and expansion through military conquest to determine its geographical boundaries" (p. 11). Yohannes' expansion policy, however, differed. Learning from his predecesor's mistakes, Yohannes carefully aligned himself with the cultural power of the EOC. Beginning in 1870, Yohannes linked

church expansion to the enlargement of the Ethiopian state (Sundkler and Steed, 2000).

Every conquered area, such as Wallagga, contained a garrison, clergymen, and a church.

Somewhat fanatical, Yohannes believed that national unity would require the

Amharatization and Christianization of the periphery, so his civilizing mission presented

a conversion timeline for those who wished to escape persecution: two years for Christian

heretics, three for Muslims, and five for practitioners of traditional local faiths. Within 2

years, approximately 550,000 had embraced Christianity (Sundkler and Steed). The

intimacy of church-state relations allowed Yohannes, in Bourdieuian terms, to accrue

religious capital, which could later be transubstantiated into political capital. In 1878, he

convened the Council of Boru-Meda to resolve doctinal controversies resulting from the

decentalization of church authority. During the council, Yohannes established the doctine

of *Tewahedo* as the sole doctrine of the church and threatened to cut out the tongues of

dissenters (Bahru Zewde, 2001).[4] Yohannes IV's manipulation of the religious field for

imperial benefit influenced Selassies's reign in the twentieth century.

Menelik II marked his era (1889-1913) with a widespread centralization of

Ethiopian territories. Concurrent with the European "scramble for Africa," Menelik

combined diplomacy with military prowess to double Ethiopia's territory, and in doing

so, aligned areas, such as Welega, Jimma, and Harrar with the state (Adejumobi, 2007).

In 1891, the capital city moved to Addis Ababa, establishing a new center for the

expanding nation. Before taking the throne, Menelik used his international connections to

procure arms and build an army that could repel European advancement. He rejected

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[4] *Tewahedo* refers to the EOC's non-Chalcedonian doctrine that Jesus Christ is fully divine and fully human in a single, unified nature. See Aymro Wondmagegnehu (1970) for a detailed description.

Italy's threat, stating, "Ethiopia has need of no one; she stretches her hands unto God" (Adejumobi, p. 29). The defeat of the Italians at Adwa in 1898 concluded a colonial failure and demonstrated evidence of national consolidation. Menelik's reign supported the advancement of Western conventions, including the railroad, telegraph, and national currency. This period also marked the genesis of modern education in Ethiopia with the foundation of the first state-run school called "Menelik II" in 1908. Supplanting the EOC as monopoly holders on education, Menelik eased tensions with the church, entrusting the modern institution to the Coptic teachers and priests (Adejumobi). Although less fanatical, Menelik preserved Yohannes' policy of Amharatization and Christianization to civilize the periphery. However, the EOC's under-trained priests and monks experienced considerable difficulty transforming the periphery. In fact, the only requirement for EOC membership was baptism (Sundkler and Steed, 2000, p. 694). Menelik's ability to navigate the delicate lines between church and state, as well as his early attempts at modernization influenced Selassie's dispositions.

Along with the civilizing power of the EOC, the emperors gained social control with Ethiopia's unique brand of feudalism, the *gebbar* (peasant) system. By Bahru Zewde's (2001) estimation, "the nineteenth century, as indeed also in earlier centuries of Ethiopian history, the economic basis of political power was tribute and surplus labor" (p. 87). Peasants in the Amhara system maintained *rist* rights (genealogical inherited ownership) over parcels of land, but emperors granted *gult* rights to local lords and clergy over the same land. *Gult* gave the dominant powers to the ability to expropriate oppressive tributes such as teff, honey, and firewood from the *gebbar*. Typically, little was left for the marketplace or the home, and numerous *gebbars* were forced to sell their

labor as well to the local lords. Expansion of the Amhara system exported *gebbar* oppression to the Oromo territories, encouraging Northern Abyssinian clients to settle among their new Oromo and Maale patrons. During the last three decades of the nineteenth century, the conquests of Yohannes and Menelik tripled the territory, adding dozens of tribes and millions of people to the empire (Levine, 2000). Although the northern tribes failed to completely Amharatize the South and West, they achieved a level of compliance within Oromo system, demonstrating their ability to control. The imperial triumphs of military prowess and the hegemony of the land controlling elite were the foundation for a "self-regulating market" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 183). In fact, throughout this historical collision, most Oromo groups "acted either independently or in alliance with the Ethiopian provincial nobility… reinforcing the centrifugal tendencies of provincial and internecine struggles" (Adejumobi, 2007, p. 8). By the beginning of Selassie's reign, the decentralized, vulnerable tribes of the Oromo system appeared to support and reproduce the structures of Amhara domination.

Haile Selassie envisioned a unified Ethiopia and successfully formed a centralized bureaucracy, which included a bicameral parliament, a four-level judicial system, national taxation and banking, a national airline, an air force, and a public education system. Structures and systems became "appendages of the Throne," endowing Selassie with unprecedented power (Markakis, 1973, p. 372). Building on his predecessor's centralization policies, Selassie sustained the momentum, accumulating the religious and political capital necessary to dominate the traditional structures of the Amhara, especially the EOC. His ecclesiastical success in the religious field depicts the cautious, deliberate implementation of symbolic violence on an ancient structure of cultural control. Until

Selassie's reign (1930-1974), the EOC defined *Ethiopianness* and maintained cultural power over the people.

> Levine (2000) summarizes the Emperor's efforts on the political field:
>
> Haile Sellassie [*sic*] successfully steered the precarious course of all rulers who have forged or maintained bureaucratic empires by creating a variety of free-floating resources relatively unconstricted by traditional restraints and yet maintaining a firm control over these new resources and over the persons and groups who produce them (pp. 179-180).

The *gebbar* system was antithetical to centralization. The traditional economic and social structures granted local nobility and clergy excessive control over the means of rule and production. Selassie's efforts were an attempt to create "the conditions required for the *mediated, lasting appropriation*," (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 183) of capital production as well as the necessary structures of dependency. For example, Selassie allowed Menelik's *gult* grants to expire when their owners died, and in 1951, redistributed and reassigned land to Maale elite who paid taxes directly to the government (Van Aswegen, 2008). Although the land was distributed to the wealthiest in Maale (Donham, 1986), the local lords and the EOC were dispossessed from their traditional lines of control. Selassie was not anti-feudal; however, he rejected power sharing. The transformation of the *gebbar* system relegated peasant owners to tenant farmers, weakened their *rist* rights, and maintained the patron-client oppression, which was emblematic of the Amhara system. Revised land policies further polarized landlords and tenants by allowing the tax burden to rest among the subjugated (Eide, 2000). This was the spirit of absolutism, exemplifying the condition of periphery when foreign missions accessed the religious field.

Foreign Mission Presence

The Portuguese appear to be the first European power to impact Ethiopia. During the Ahmad Gragn wars (1527-1543), Portuguese soldiers assisted Ethiopian rulers to push back Muslim encroachment. Jesuit missionaries soon followed. In 1622, Emperor Susenyos espoused Catholicism, which incited a civil war that ultimately led to his ousting to the Jesuit's expulsion (Tibebe Eshete, 2009). Two centuries of isolation allowed the EOC to develop free from foreign influence.

Evangelical pioneers Samuel Gobat and Johann Ludwig Krapf exemplified the two divergent mission approaches of the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Gobat worked in Tigray, the heart of the Amhara system, whereas Krapf focused on those in the Oromo system. Gobat explicitly stated his goal was to "multiply copies of the Bible and to instruct the people with the Holy Scriptures" (as cited in Tibebe Eshete, 2009, p. 66). He attempted to reform the nation by bringing renewal to the EOC and leveraging its influence over the population. A winsome debater, he spent five years challenging EOC doctrine and suggesting improvements for theological education and church governance. Although he successfully translated and distributed thousands of copies of the Scriptures, Gobat failed to win the full support of the church or the hearts of the populous and soon succumbed to poor health (Tibebe Eshete). Conversely, Krapf entered the Oromo system envisioning a revival among the extensive pagan tribes of the southwest. An accomplished linguist, Krapf translated the Gospels into the Oromo vernacular and attempted to build an "army of devoted Bible-inspired evangelists" that would transform the nation from the periphery to the center (Sundkler and Steed, 2000, p. 156). His colonial aspirations to position Ethiopia as a British protectorate, however, unleashed a

xenophobic response, and in 1842, Krapf was banned from the country.

Subsequent missionary societies, such as the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) and the Swedish Evangelical Mission (SEM), stimulated the formation of independent Ethiopian denominations, the Kale Hewitt Church (KHC) and the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY). Haile Selassie formally embraced the foreign missions' presence in Ethiopia in 1944, despite the fact that SEM's earliest work among the Oromo had begun at the turn of the century. SEM, based in Eritrea at the time, sent Oromo converts as agents of Christian service to areas such as Welega. Early agents embraced a strategy similar to Gobat, rejecting the notion of forming a separate institution. Instead, building a network of schools, SEM used education as their primary tool of evangelizing, directing early converts to the EOC for baptism and membership. Agents such as Onesimos Nasib captured the Oromo imagination by translating the Scriptures into the native vernacular, contributing to the growth within the EOC (Tibebe Eshete, 2009). Nevertheless, divergent doctrinal views, promoting salvation through Jesus Christ alone and rejecting the veneration of the saints, forced a divide between native evangelists and the EOC. In 1941, the EECMY materialized from the explosion of converts in the Welega. The EECMY's unique shape blends a Lutheran theology of salvation with liberal views of local culture and EOC rituals such as infant baptism (Tibebe Eshete).

In contrast, SIM began work in the South in 1928, with a clear mission from the outset to form distinct Christian societies apart from the established church. SIM, as a "faith mission," did not align itself with a single denomination and, instead, built its support base from the growing number of evangelicals in North America. Dr. Thomas Lambie, the first SIM missionary, established pivotal relationships with political figures

such as Welega governor Ras Nadew and Ras Tafari,[5] Regent to the throne. In his

memoir, *A Doctor's Great Commission,* Lambie recounts a time when Ras Nadew,

complaining of severe ear pain, woke him one evening. After Lambie discovered that the

culprit was a black beetle and removed it, the governor was so grateful that he introduced

him to Ras Tafari (Tibebe Eshete, 1999). Such enduring relationships enabled SIM to

establish their first mission station in Welega, complete with hospital, school, and church.

Although they used clinics and schools to evangelize the periphery, SIM viewed Gospel

proclamation as distinct from Christian service (Tibebe Eshete). Employing native

evangelists, SIM confronted traditional culture. For example, among the Maale,

evangelists condemned drinking and smoking and "taught that traditional beliefs and

customs were contrary to the truth and should be rejected in order to become a believer"

(Van Aswegen, 2008, p. 18). The SIM approach focused on individual conversions that

would generate concentric rings of revival among households, villages, and tribes. In

1971, the KHC became an independent entity, separate from SIM.

These evangelical movements originated in the periphery, far from the imperial

center. Such new expressions of Ethiopian Christianity provoked persecution from the

Italian occupiers and from the EOC. Add to this Selassie's continued pattern of Amhara

hegemony, and the result was an explosion of Protestant conversions. While conversion

statistics are difficult to document, Johannes Laundhardt (2004) posits that Evangelical

Christians numbered 1,000 in 1935 and spiked to 90,000 or 100,000 by the 1950s.

Oyvind Eide (2000) claims the EECMY had grown from 20,000 members at its founding

in 1959 to over two million in 40 years. The KHC website reports a membership of

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[5] Haile Selassie's name prior to coronation

15,000 following the Italian occupation, increasing to 4.5 million in 70 years (Getachew Bellete, 2005).

From Selassie's perspective, all citizens of Ethiopia, including new waves of Protestants, must submit to his authority and accept the modern restructuring of Ethiopian culture. In a 1938 interview, Selassie (1994) confirmed that compliance was crucial to advancement:

> I have always taught and explained to my people the benefits of accepting Western civilization as it is or with some modifications. Moreover I have emphasized that becoming a member of a family entails the responsibility of respecting the rules and regulations of the family; and if these are properly pursued, one should be entitled to the benefits that the shared membership brings (p. 60).

Uttered from exile, Selassie seems to be referring not only to Ethiopia's position in the League of Nations, but also his expectations for the Ethiopian citizenry. As Selassie assembled a single "family" composed of over 70 tribes of Semitic, Cushitic, and Omotic origin, he would establish the rules as the unquestionable head. Chapter Two chronicles Selassie's ability to accumulate and transubstantiate symbolic capital in order to dispossess the EOC from their position as the traditional culture bearers of Ethiopia. A subtle manipulator, Selassie preserved traditional structures of domination and absolutized modernization to form a new *doxa*, an experience when "the natural world and social world appears as self-evident" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 164). Exporting modernization, however, from the capital to the periphery, proved to be one his most formidable challenges. Chapter Three details Selassie's attempt to capitalize on foreign

mission zeal and manipulate them as his subcontractors of modernity. Convinced of the efficacy of modern structures in the incorporation of the Ethiopian people, Selassie forged alliances with SEM and SIM in order to acquire the civilizing power of healthcare and education, and thereby push forward his overarching project of modernization.

CHAPTER 2

GENERATIVE STRUCTURALISM IN HAILE SELASSIE'S ETHIOPIA

"If he is not a monk, even the king cannot give orders to a monastery" (Ethiopian proverb, as cited in Levine, 2000, p. 122).

Emperor Haile Selassie's rise to the Solomonic throne in 1930 signaled the beginning of a new era in Ethiopia. The nation, described as a "museum of cultures, religions and modes of production" (Teshale Tibebu, 1995, p. xi), required centralization within the religious and political fields before becoming a modern state. For centuries, Ethiopia was geographically isolated by highland mountains of the Christian north and the deserts of the south and west, mostly inhabited by practitioners of Islam and local religions. The consolidation efforts of previous emperors, beginning in the late nineteenth century, were sporadic attempts and had only a superficial impact (Markakis, 1973). Selassie, in his desire to catch up with the West, systematically used his considerable religious and political capital to dominate and tame the fourth century EOC, one of the greatest obstacles for modernization and possessors of the greatest stores of Ethiopian cultural capital. Proving the proverb untrue, Selassie's strong forces favoring modernization were "locked in a struggle with the potent advocates of traditions going back to the earliest days of recorded history" (Schwab, 1972, p. 1).

This chapter examines several relevant and interrelated fields of struggle in an attempt to understand how an ancient, feudal nation made the transition from a legacy of

disjointed kingdoms to a more streamlined modern empire. Selassie's success can be

analyzed with several of the thinking tools from Pierre Bourdieu's social theory.

Concepts such as *habitus*, symbolic violence, *doxa*, and transubstantiation of capital

assist in explaining the structures of domination that Selassie generated to accumulate

and maintain imperial power. Selassie took advantage of the EOC's cultural and religious

monopoly over half the population—in effect mobilizing religious capital for political

consolidation. With subtle movements and symbolic violence, the Emperor updated the

Ethiopian *doxa* by inculcating modernism into the EOC, which they regenerated,

reflecting Pierre Bourdieu's (1991) claim that:

> Because symbolic systems derive their structure… from the systematic
>
> application of one in the same principle of division, and because they can
>
> organize the natural and social world only by carving out antagonistic classes . . .
>
> they are predisposed by their very structure simultaneously to serve the functions
>
> of inclusion and exclusion, of association and disassociation, of integration and
>
> distinction (p. 3).

This chapter intends to *excavate and magnify* a few of the antagonistic

relationships and patterns of domination within the political and religious fields during

this significant period of Ethiopian history, 1930 to 1974. Teshale Tibebu (1995) believes

a theoretically framed social history of Ethiopia has not yet been written. Gaps in

historical and ethnographic scholarship pose great challenges and opportunities for future

research, and as such, limitations in scholarship must be taken into consideration. This

work begins by exploring the *collusio* and power and of the EOC, reflecting its cohesive

membership in the Amhara system. After analyzing the Church-lay relationship, the

focus shifts to Selassie's *habitus,* accumulated capital, and use of symbolic violence, which not only tamed the EOC, but made them a mechanism of modernization.

<div align="center">The Ethiopian Orthodox Church</div>

With a tradition dating to the fourth century, the EOC has deep stores of religious and cultural capital. From its inception, the Church was legitimated and controlled by the ECC in Alexandria. For centuries, a series of foreign bishops and patriarchs ruled over the native hierarchy and dispossessed the local churches of the power to consecrate their own priests. Regardless, the EOC, with its rich history and cultural capital, became a cornerstone of Abyssinian civilization, successfully linking the entire notion of *Ethiopianness* with the Orthodox faith. Haile Mariam (1987) argues that Ethiopian Christianity is, "the most profound expression of the national existence of the people" (as cited in Loukeris, 1997, p. 210). The power to generate cultural identity was a result of their ability to absolutize the arbitrary. Three sacred symbols legitimated the Church's power, the *Kebra Negast,* the *Tabot,*[6] and the use of Ge'ez as a holy language.

The *Kebra Negast,* or "Greatness of the Kings," is a composite work of sacred writings, spanning from the fourth to the fourteenth century. Donald Levine (2000) viewed it as a national epic and the "foremost creation of Ethiopic literature" (p. 92). With quotations from over 30 sources, including the Old Testament, New Testament, Talmud, Koran, and various apocryphal writings, the *Kebra Negast* defines the "greatness of the kings" in terms of their connection to the *Tabot* and the elect genealogy of King Solomon. According to the writings, the Ethiopian Queen Sheba conceived a son, Menelik I, with Solomon. As a young man Menelik returned to Jerusalem to visit his

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[6] The Tabot is a small wooden box representing the Judaic Ark of the Covenant, and is housed in the inner sanctuary of every Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

father and was involved in a plot to relocate to sacred Ark Ethiopia. The *Kebra Negast* espouses a type of replacement theology wherein the Abyssinians obtained God's blessing as the new "chosen" people. Through series angelic appearances, God inspired Menelik's servant to execute the removal of the Ark from Solomon's Temple:

> And behold, the Angel of the Lord appeared again to Azaryas and he stood up above him like a pillar of fire, and he filled the house with his light. And he raised up Azaryas and said unto him, "Stand up, be strong, and rouse up thy brother Elmyas and Abesa and Makari … and I will open for thee the doors of the sanctuary. And take thou the Tabernacle of the Law of God, and thou shalt carry it without trouble and discomfort" (Budge, 1932, p.71).

Soon after, Menelik's caravan of servants, animals, wagons, as well as the first-born of Solomon's nobility departed the city. Michael the Arch Angel spread his wings of protection over the group and:

> made them to march through the sea as upon dry land, and upon the dry land he cut a path for them and spreading himself out like a cloud over them he hid them from the fiery heat of the sun…each was raised above the ground to the height of a cubit; and all those who rode upon beasts were lifted up above their backs to the height of one span of a man…(Budge, p. 77).

For the EOC and its followers, this second exodus was the successful execution of God's will. He ordained a journey without wandering, free from physical exertion, and spared from the implications of any theft or wrongdoing. The EOC's ability to define a superior race was the basis for their *collusio,* a "collective habitus" and shared "grounding in the *doxa*" (Rey, 2007, p. 88). In terms of Abyssinian political and religious territorial

expansion, the *Kebra Negast* legitimated such agency with a righteous formula: conquer and convert. The *Kebra Negast* issued divine assurances to the Abyssinians such as: "God shall bring to thee thine enemies who have risen up against thee, and they shall be trodden small beneath thy feet…Thou shalt rule over many nations, but they shall not rule over thee. Amen" (Budge, p. 41). The developing church embraced this ancient map of domination and used to justify various social positions within society. In Levine's (2000) social paradigm of the northern tribes, these notions of election and expansion were the root of the Amhara system.

Ethiopia is the only Christian nation that has the Ark of the Covenant as the quintessential representation of the Church (Teshale Tibebu, 1995). Nearly all members of the EOC believe that the original Ark of the Covenant is hidden in the Aksum Zion Church in northern Ethiopia. Although no one is allowed to view the Ark, the unshakable belief that the Church houses the most sacred relic inspires pride and loyalty among the adherents. *Tabot* replicas become the "focal point of parish life" (Levine, 2000, p. 115). In fact, it is the presence of the *Tabot*, not the building location, nor its priesthood, which provides the local church with its sacral power. The Church uses the *Tabot* to "conserve the social order by contributing . . . to the 'legitimation' of the power of the 'dominant' and to the 'domestication of the dominated'" (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 4). EOC membership was equated with a sense of *Ethiopianness*. The EOC supplied its adherents with a system of meaning and a sense of superiority as the protectors of the "true faith." Providing these social functions empowered the church to determine the "rules of the game" (Bourdieu, 1992, as cited in Rey, 2007, p. 5).

Finally, the use of the ancient Semitic language Ge'ez in liturgical practices was another tool separating the priestly class from the common peasant. Closely associated to the symbolic power of the *Kebra Negast* and Talbot, Ge'ez linked Ethiopians to their ancient cultural heritage and notions of original purity. The EOC view it as an all-transcending language endowed with the ability to express key divine concepts enshrined in the Bible as well as the means for preserving unity of the Church (Tibebe Eshete, 2009). Ge'ez, at one time the common vernacular of the Axumite empire, was slowly replaced with Amharic as the dominant language. As knowledge of Ge'ez waned, only the *debtaras* (scribes) and a few educated priests remained literate in the holy language. In fact, Eide (2000) estimates as late as 1960, 96% Ethiopians were completely illiterate. Only those pursuing the education of the priesthood would be given access to language study. By and large, for the ordinary person, religion was *mester* (mystery) something given, beyond reach and interpretation (Tibebe Eshete, 2009). This is a prime example of what Bourdieu (1991) means by "religious specialists": "the exclusive holders of the specific competence necessary for the production . . . of a *deliberately organized corpus* of secret (and therefore rare) knowledge . . . with the objective dispossession of those who are excluded from it" (p. 9). The mystery and inaccessibility of the sacred Tabot, *Kebra Negast,* and Ge'ez language represent efficacious tools of legitimation and division. In fact, such representations contributed to the EOC's "monopoly over the administration of the goods of salvation"[7] (Bourdieu, 1977, p.4). The laity were

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[7] "Salvation goods" are the products or promises believers desire to consume and religious specialists are able to produce. Bourdieu adapted Max Weber's economic language, placing salvation goods in a religious field wherein they can be a objects of domination.

convinced that the esoteric nature of their faith required it to be administrated by those with special "qualifications" or "a gift of grace" (Tibebe Eshete, 2009, p. 31). The EOC generated cultural identity as well as justifying the distance between the priestly class and the laity

<div align="center">Power Over The People</div>

The EOC gave its members an overwhelming sense of ethnic worthiness, at the expense of intense domination. Addressing religious habitus, Terry Rey (2007) states that Bourdieu's most important assertion concerning religion is:

> The perception and appreciation of the meaning and function of religious symbols and doctrines (not to mention belief itself) are attributable mainly to the agent's religious habitus, and the power relations, both institutional and personal, that unfold in and structure the religious field . . . (p. 93).

The religious *habitus* of nearly every Orthodox adherent is rooted in salvation insecurity. Teshale Tibebu (1995) observes that "the divine right [of the Church] to interfere in the internal affairs of everyone was never doubted for a moment, the concern about sin and damnation was second nature to all" (p. 80). At the core of their fear was an obsession with sin. "Famine, pestilence, disease, death, demotion from power, etc.," Teshale Tibebu continued, "were all seen as being due to a single cause, sin" (p. 80). The lay population perceived the church as the ultimate source of meaning and authority and turned to the priests for blessings and prayers of good fortune. The Church inculcated in their habitus this lifestyle of ecclesial dependency by producing an environment of fear and insecurity. Even notions of personal freedom were quite limited within Abyssinian society. The closest Amharic word, *natsanet,* referred to political independence, but no word existed

for personal freedom (Teshale Tibebu). Within the deeply rooted *habitus* of the individual was the right to bind or be bound by another, an extension of Levine's patron-client dyad. So this seemingly irreligious element of the habitus is still "the product of the work of inculcation and appropriation" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 85).

Church schools in Ethiopia, until the beginning of the twentieth century, maintained a monopoly on education and used this position to preserve and propagate their version of Abyssinian culture. Several elements of EOC education shaped the layperson's habitus and reinforced their dominated position in society. According to Mulugeta Wadajo (1961), the "ordinary level" consisted of teaching students basic reading and writing, using biblical passages as texts. This level of education, however, ended after one year, whereupon the student's family was expected to hold a banquet reception and present the clergy with expensive gifts, such as clothes. (pp. 232-3). More extensive, formal education was reserved for those entering the priesthood. This brief, utilitarian instruction appears at its best to be an attempt to maintain cultural unity and at its worst an obligatory structure to provide for the material needs of the clergy. Mulugeta Wadajo asks the question "How is one to explain this paradox? Why despite hundreds of years of church education, Ethiopia's literacy rate is still below 10%...?" (p. 262). It would seem that the church was more concerned with control and the welfare of the priests than the individual literacy needs of its adherents. From Bourdieu's (1977) perspective, "Every established order tends to produce (to very different degrees and with different means) the naturalization of its own arbitrariness" (p. 164). The EOC used such tools of symbolic violence to naturalize the divisions of society and to establish the obligatory elements of clergy-lay association.

For the EOC, the *deges,* or religious feasts, were weapons of symbolic violence that supported the daily operations of the local church and regenerated lay dependency on the clergy. Some obligatory *deges*, such as *tezkar* (remembrance of the dead) were repeated at seven days, 30 days, 40 days, six months, and one year. These remembrance feasts were a form of indulgence paid by the living relatives to ensure that their loved ones enter into heaven. A common Ethiopian saying is "The living pay tribute to the king, the dead pay tribute to the clergy" (Teshale Tibebu, 1995, p. 97). Capitalizing on the salvation insecurity of its followers, local clergy demanded significant economic capital and became extreme financial burdens for most families. Maintaining the monopoly on "salvation goods," the EOC freed the grieving families from what Bourdieu (1991) describes as "the existential anguish of contingency and dereliction or even biological misery, sickness, suffering, [and] death . . ." (p. 16). The irony of this social function of Ethiopian religion is that it further regenerates economic and spiritual dependency. With a *habitus* rooted in a fear of hell, those dispossessed of the goods of salvation look to the church for comfort and direction in an unpredictable world. Adherents misrecognize the compulsory feast as a normalized element of culture, and in turn "reproduce the objective structures of which they are a product" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 73). With each meal, poverty-stricken families relinquish their capital, increase ecclesial dependency, and reaffirm an arbitrary tradition and the legitimacy of their disassociation. Charles McClellan (1988) acknowledges that Orthodox peasants were used to "accepting their fate as God's will." (p. 16). When Selassie became the dominant agent in his association with the EOC, he directly benefited from the social functions of EOC and gained greater control over half of the nation.

Power In Politics

The Church and state appear to be conjoined as a unified force, however, separate lines of legitimation distinguished the political and religious structures of the Amhara system. As an institution, the EOC "possessed its own legitimate authority, independent of the imperial power," (Gilkes, 1975, p. 52) which was most obvious through its ties to the ECC and foreign *Abuna* (Patriarch). The EOC's greatest authority over the emperor-elect comes at the coronation ceremony. The *Abuna* consecrates the Emperor by praying over the crown and anointing his head with holy oil. At this moment of consecration, the church validates the elect Solomonic genealogy of the candidate, and bestows the authority "greatness of the kings" on the new leader. "Emperors who ignored the independent authority of the church," Patrick Gilkes claims, "did so at their peril" (p. 53). In certain periods of the modernization era, the church transubstantiated its religious capital into political capital. As mentioned previously, Tewodros II tested this ability when he attempted to tax the church. Seeking economic capital for his modernization efforts, Tewodros confiscated church land and revenue. The clergy opposed the Emperor's absolute authority and withdrew their support of his reign (Pankhurst, 1990). The EOC had no need to incite a military response to depose Tewodros. By rejecting his modernization efforts, they deteriorated his provincial support and weakened his military power, which led to his suicide during a confrontation with British forces in 1868. Emperors maintained semi-divine status and were the symbolic heads of the Church, but the EOC wielded the power of profanation as well as consecration.

Lij Iyasu[8], the young Emperor-elect, inherited the Menelik's crown in 1913, but

refused the consecration of the EOC and never held a coronation ceremony. Ambivalent

to religious matters, Iyasu "was bright, but also impulsive, cruel, lascivious, prone to

depressions and egocentricities, and politically inept" (Marcus, 1995, p. 251). Within

three years, Lij Iyasu, who was thought be sympatheic to the Muslim cause, was

excommunicated, overthrown, and imprisoned. Gilkes (1975) posits the *Abuna's*

connection with the Shoan nobility expedited his removal. The EOC transubstantiated

religious capital into political capital into order to maintain the *doxa,* its own version of

Ethiopianness. Aware of this power, Selassie leveraged his own capital and employed

symbolic violence to create new political and social structures which would dominate the

church despite a historically delicate association.

Habitus Of The King Of Kings

Born of royal blood, Ras Tafari Makonnen, one-time governor of Harar and Regent of

Ethiopia, ascended to the Solomonic throne in 1930. Tracing his lineage to Sheba and

Solomon, Selassie viewed his position as one ordained by God and "was mindful to

prevent any concentration of authority that could challenge his own preeminence"

(Henze, 2000, p. 238). His absolutist approach was a reflection of his *habitus.* As the

"Lion of the Tribe of Judah," his duty was to protect and lead his Christian nation to a

higher level of civilization. Levine's (2000) socio-cultural model of the Amhara System

not only encapsulates the ancient Abyssinian social structure, but provides useful, albeit

broad, insight into the generation of Selassie's dispositions. Levine determines that

within the Amhara system is a fundamental relational bond, which is a "dyadic tie of the

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[8] *Lij* is the Amharic title given to a child of royal descent. For Iyasu the title is reflective
of his youth as well as his failure to be recognized by the EOC as Emperor.

patron-client relationship" (p. 125). Hierarchical individualism revolved around the accumulation of social and political power, and hence the number of dependent clients determined the social status of the patron. With each loan, favor, or gift, the patron obligated the client and grew more powerful within the community. The Amhara System is highly competitive and the patrons continually restructure their positions, looking beyond for improved economic, social, and religious benefits. Members of this system have an "overarching passion to rule" that is not found in other tribes and were able to channel their motivation into potent action, such as territorial expansion (Levine, p. 150). Selassie assumed the power of the *Kebra Negast* and its legitimation of the monarchy: "Now it is not a seemly thing to revile the king, for he is the anointed of God" (Budge, 1932, p. 64).

For Selassie, the "rules of the game" changed significantly when he was forced into exile from 1936-1941. His divine roles as patron and protector of Ethiopia were interrupted during the Italian occupation. In fact, the zeal of Selassie's modernizing practice can be traced to this period of powerlessness. Analogous to the salvation anxiety of Orthodox believers is the political anxiety of an impotent leader who considers himself the political savior of his God's "chosen." It is through this matrix of perceptions that Selassie saw fit to modernize and assimilate the nation. Selassie's imperial habitus predisposed him to view the world in terms of inclusion/exclusion, association/disassociation, and dominator/dominated. Selassie was a man of the past and was "circumscribed by cultural and historical patterns that he played no part in creating, but which determined the framework through which he had to operate" (Schwab, 1979, p. 16). The inclusive nature of the Amhara system created space for imagining of a single,

Amharatized population by encouraging competing people groups (the "others") to be incorporated and absorbed others into dominant population.

Selassie was an effective leader because he had a broad base of symbolic capital, which was evident in his titles, position within the church, and connections with international community. He adopted his baptismal name Haile Selassie I, which means "Power of the Trinity." His full title was *His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah, and Elect of God.* Coupled with the consecrating power of *Kebra Negast,* as mentioned above*,* these titles were examples of what Bourdieu (1991) would call "*absolutization of the relative and legitimation of the arbitrary*" (p. 14). Through naming, Selassie linked himself to the royal lineage of Menelik I and assumed semi-divine status legitimated by the EOC. The efficacy of such names is evident in the national vow, "Haile Selassie *yimut,"* meaning, *"*I swear by the name of Haile Selassie" (Teshale Tibebu, 1995, p. 127). Even the revised Constitution of 1955 exclaimed that name of the Emperor shall be mentioned in all religious services (Tibebe Eshete, 2009). Throughout the course of Selassie's reign, his name and the titles became increasingly synonymous with the nation itself, a crucial tool in dispossessing the EOC of their cultural monopoly. The personality cult surrounding Selassie, which was discernable even before his coronation (Bahru Zewde, 2001), reached its peak upon his return from exile. One need only look to Trinity Cathedral in Addis Ababa, as a substantive example of his popularity and symbolic power over the EOC. A mural depicting the Selassie's military power adorns the sacred space of the cathedral (see figure 1). Marking the end of the Italian intrusion, the Emperor ascends the Ethiopian flag at Omedla, flanked by a contingency of soldiers, priests and peasants. He

concretizes himself as liberator of and patron to the nation. Harnessing the power of the

Solomonic line and his unique place in history, Selassie amassed much of the EOC's

political capital.

Figure 1. <u>Haile Selassie Mural at Trinity Cathedral.</u> Haile Selassie is raising the
Ethiopian flag at Omedla in the Gojam province, marking the end of the Italian
occupation. Photograph taken by Galen Frysinger. Adapted with permission.

Historically, the Egyptian-born *Abuna* of the EOC reserved the right to consecrate

bishops and priests, but his being detached from Ethiopian culture meant that he actually

wielded little cultural power. Although Selassie had no influence in the selection of the

Abuna, the revised Constitution of 1955 gave him control over valuable episcopal

appointments (Gilkes, 1975). One such appointment was the *Ichege* (Elder), who was one of the top five church officials serving at the pleasure of the Emperor. As the head of the monastic order, the *Ichege* wielded the greatest influence in the EOC as administrator of church land, church discipline and clergy disputes (Sundkler and Steed, 2000). This single appointment gave Selassie considerable control over the temporal affairs of the church. Gilkes (1975) points to a trend: "Government control in the higher ranks of the Church has increased just as Church influence of government decisions had steadily decreased" (p. 59). Although the EOC was tied to Alexandria throughout the first third of Selassie's reign, his power to manipulate the church's purse and policy gave him unprecedented political capital.

In addition, Selassie acquired a reputation as a diplomat even before his coronation. Ras Tafari accumulated political capital and exerted significant influence throughout Europe. He sent young Ethiopians abroad for study and traveled considerably, exposing himself to Western business practice, and in 1923 helped Ethiopia win admission into the League of Nations (Schwab, 1972). Ethiopia's entry into the League of Nations occurred after much debate over the perceived incivility of its people for continuing slave trading. The Emperor-elect committed to abolishing the slave trade and convinced Western powers that Ethiopia was on the path of modern nationhood. Bahru Zewde (2001) notes that Selassie returned from Geneva "with his international stature enhanced and his commitment to introducing European ways of administration strengthened" (p. 131). Furthermore, Selassie gained substantial international and political capital as a result of his five-year exile in England, following Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia in 1936 (Loukeris, 1997). This forced exile was not only an

opportunity to engender international favor, but also the impetus for an aggressive agenda of remaking Ethiopia. It is plausible that this period advanced his idealized visions of a unified Ethiopian state, coinciding with his patron-client *habitus*. The accumulated symbolic capital associated with his title, church position, and international connections, translated into substantial power upon his return to the throne in 1941, which enabled him to inculcate modernization into the national *collusio*.

Tension In The Field

To create a more centralized, modern state, Selassie needed to monopolize the production of political capital, reflective of Bourdieu's (1989) claim that "in the symbolic struggle for the production of common sense . . . agents must put into action the symbolic capital they have acquired in previous struggles…" (p. 21). Although widely regarded as an absolute monarch, Selassie had to contend with a number of conflicting power groups, notably his beloved Church (Gilkes, 1975). As shown, the church retained the ability to transubstantiate capital and interrupt imperial rule. So, Selassie's greatest challenge in this delicate field of tension was to acquire the political capital of the EOC without forfeiting his religious power as the symbolic head of the EOC. One of Selassie's early contestations for power concerned the *tezkar* rituals of remembering the dead. In 1933, Selassie proclaimed *tezkar* should be discontinued for moral and economic reasons, and when Princess Tsehay died in 1942, he refused the ritual as a part of her burial (Tibebe Eshete, 2009). His defiance not only signaled the need for reform within the Church, but also diminished the EOC's capacity to employ a weapon of symbolic violence on its population. Tibebe Eshete interprets the "evolving tension between the imperial authority and the church," as evidence that the emperor was subtly dislodging himself from the

EOC (p. 42). While this may be true, one should not discount Selassie's overt movements to dispossess the EOC of its historical grip on the culture.

There was a general sense of tension in the Ethiopian field of power as the forces modernization clashed with the traditional elite and the EOC over the land tenure system. Through the *gebbar* system, the EOC extracted taxes and tributes from peasant land-owners, and acquired massive landholdings through *gult* grants, giving them power over the producers and the modes of production. The complicated nature of land ownership rights makes exact percentages difficult to calculate; however, Gilkes (1975) believes the church possessed approximately 25% of the best land in the country, while Peter Schwab (1972) estimates the church owned 18% - 30% of the land. Although, Selassie was fulfilling a legacy, true to his *habitus*, by restructuring the economic and social order for the "common good," the EOC was obviously resistant to any change that would inhibit their power. Selassie's approach to church reform was slow, calculated, and, at times, ambiguous. He preferred to execute more covert practices to bend the EOC toward modernization.

Symbolic Violence And Imperial Agency

By leveraging his capital into action Selassie won the position of principal patron. He consolidated his own power by systematically transubstantiating his accumulated capital and employing symbolic violence to displace the EOC as his client. Returning from exile, after the period of Italian rule (1936-1941), Selassie began to alter the *gebbar* system, and replaced it with the machine of the modern state. He expropriated local rulers, including clergy, from the means of rule and the producers from means of production (Teshale Tibebu, 1995, p.106). Although he failed to completely eliminate the

land-tenure structure, he was able to gain greater control by taxing the nobility's holdings. To alleviate tension in the religious field, however, Selassie appeased his client. According to Land Tax Proclamation of 1944, the Church retained all imperially granted land, their tax-free status, and continued to collect revenue from tributes (Schwab, 1972). Although nationalizing the taxation system, Selassie allowed the church to operate in a manner equivalent to the traditional *gebbar* system. He sustained the EOC's flow of economic capital in order to weaken the EOC's political resistance to modernization. Despite such imperial advocacy, "The state always maintained material control over the church through its sizeable land grants" (Teshale Tibebu, p. 81).

Selassie employed symbolic violence to dispossess the Church from its political and cultural capital. Four instances of symbolic violence appear as modernization projects: the court system, public education, the Amharic Bible, and the EOC liberation from Alexandria. Selassie's modern courts contained four levels, ranging from local judiciaries to the Supreme Imperial Court, which undercut the church's juridical power and expropriated them settling civilian affairs. Redden (1968) claims,

> The Ethiopian Orthodox Church was deprived of all jurisdiction in civil matters in 1942. Thus, a Church court . . . cannot bind private persons in civil matter, though in practice, it may function as a court in ecclesiastical matters…" (as cited in Teshale Tibebu, 1995, p. 125).

Although the EOC and was free to settle religious disputes, the result of this symbolic violence revolutionized the social position of the church. There was now a clear juridical line between secular affairs and religious affairs. Selassie transubstantiated his religious capital into political capital, which permitted him to act without fear of reprisal. His

covert practice displaced the EOC from official authority in the civil arena, allowing the throne to absorb their previously held political power.

The public education system was another tool of symbolic violence wielded by the King of Kings. Ecclesial education was devised in the seventeenth century, although its genesis coincided with the establishment of the EOC (Binns, 2005). The church's monopoly on education was a key component in reinforcing lay dependency, so Selassie's skillful replacement of the parochial model was an extraordinary accomplishment. Two notable secondary institutions were the Haile Selassie I Secondary School and General Wingate Secondary School, each becoming producers of urban elites (Bahru Zewde, 2001). In the post-1941 era, public schools were limited to urban centers such as Addis Ababa, and, as will be shown, mission models expanded modern education to the periphery. The EOC did not reject these modernization efforts, in part because "Selassie did not prohibit Church education but let it fade away with time" (Loukeris, 1997, p. 213). In a calculated manner, the Emperor mitigated the EOC's social power and expanded his own ability to inculcate the nation with forms and functions of a new bureaucracy. Although the "political institutions of the modern state and the cultural institutions of modern education ate away... the old order" (Teshale Tibebu, 1995, p. 106), the EOC retained its economic capital. Inclined to play Selassie's "game," the EOC formed an *illusio—*a fundamental misrecognition of the legitimacy of the dominant power (Rey, 2007, p. 91).

Yet another measure of misrecognized control was the imposition of the Amharic Bible. Versions of the vernacular Bible appeared as early as the 1840s, from the work of Abu Rumi, a progressive Orthodox monk. Johann Ludwig Krapf, a German missionary

linguist, completed and revised the Amharic Scriptures in 1878 (Sundkler and Steed, 2000). Selassie, however, brought such efforts to the mainstream of the EOC and "personally guided the work until it completion" (Tibebe Eshete, 2009, p. 43). With its publication in 1961, the once "organized corpus of secret knowledge" (Bourdieu 1991, p. 9) became more accessible to the common person. The fog of religious *mester* lifted and religious specialists lost some of their cultural capital. The sacred nature of *Ge'ez* was demystified as Amharic shifted the knowledge center of Christianity from the priestly class to the ordinary people (Tibebe Eshete, 2009). The EOC religious specialists were slowly relieved of their hegemonic control over the laity. With each mechanism of modernization, Selassie would take responsibility for the "unity" of the nation and gain greater social capital as an educator and liberator.

Finally, Selassie's efforts to free the EOC from the external control of Egypt proved to be his most effective use of symbolic violence and transubstantiation of capital. To effectively dominate the political field, the EOC needed to become autocephalous. Selassie's contribution to the emancipation process began before his coronation. Then Regent to the throne, Ras Tafari, played a leading role in creating an Ethiopian delegation, which appealed to Alexandria for the right to name native bishops. Five meetings, beginning in 1924, resulted in the full consecration five Ethiopian Bishops in June 1928 (Brahana Selassie, 2000). Even before his coronation, Ras Tafari's political capital, associated with his international connections, was substantial enough to influence this ecclesial triumph. As a result, Ras Tafari acquired ample religious capital to bring to the throne. Through diplomatic travel during exile, Selassie became the beloved face of

Ethiopia and successfully accumulated and leveraged his political capital to dislodge the EOC from Alexandria. Kostas Loukeris (1997) explains his precise timing:

> After World War II, a glorious Haile Selassie, enjoying full support from the victorious Allied forces, negotiated with the Egyptian Coptic Patriarchate of Alexandria the right of the Ethiopia Orthodox Church to choose her own religious head. In 1950 the Holy Synod of the EOC chose their first Ethiopian leader (p. 213).

The Lion freed the Tribe from foreign control, bringing it greater honor and legitimacy. The patron won independence for his client—therefore greater religious status and political power. In the milieu post-war nationalism, however, the *illusio* of ecclesial independence was misrecognized obligation. By exerting political power, Selassie won additional religious capital from the EOC and further obligated the church to the throne.

Selassie was successful at dispossessing the church of its cultural grip on the population without disassembling the structure itself and making it completely impotent. The church became more materially powerful, but it was also increasingly dependent on the state. During Selassie's reign "the power of the state reached a limit unprecedented in Ethiopian history" (Bahru Zewde, 2001, p. 201). Selassie often proclaimed, "The Church is like a sword, and the Government is like an arm, therefore the sword cannot cut by itself without use of the arm" (as cited in Lipsky, 1962, p. 323). This not only illustrates the obvious intimacy between the two entities, but more importantly Selassie's passion to rule. As mentioned earlier, the EOC accrued enough cultural capital in a sixteen-century existence to become synonymous with the notion of *Ethiopianness*. When Selassie assumed the role of primary inculcator, he replaced the EOC as the axis of Ethiopian

identity. Bahru Zewde remarks, "Ethiopian life was dominated by the personality of Hayla Sellase [*sic*]. . . Not only the state but also the country came to be identified with him" (p. 201). Teshale Tibebu (1995) agrees that, "Ethiopia and Haile Selassie became identical expressions; *Ethiopia was Haile Selassie"* (p. 128). In classic Bourdieuian terms, Selassie's symbolic violence was exercised in its elementary forms and "disguised under the veil of enchanted relationships" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 191). This technique of accumulating capital by obligating and controlling the client was fundamental to the Abyssinian *habitus* and became Selassie's *modus operandi* as he consolidated the nation. It was essential "for Haile Selassie's scheme of modernization to have a revitalized and nationalized Church under his control" (Tibebe Eshete, 2009, p. 40). Although Selassie's cultural impact may have been unintended consequence of his cult-like popularity and patrimonial rule, it provided initial evidence of the successful inculcation of the virtues of modernization in the national *collusio*.

The EOC reproduced Selassie's structures of domination and allowed modernization to take its place in the *doxa*. Emerging from isolation, the EOC joined the World Council of Churches in 1948 and the All Africa Conference of Churches in 1963 (Brahana Selassie, 2000). Among its institutional innovations, the EOC opened a theological college at Haile Selassie University, promoted Amharic in numerous arenas of church life, and revised outdated sections of liturgy (Gilkes, 1975). Moreover, Theophilus, the EOC Patriarch during the later years of Selassie's reign, was seen as "a progressive figure who made considerable efforts to modernize sections of the Church…" (Gilkes, p. 61). Numerous scholars, such as McClellan (1988), oversimplify the association of the monarchy and church, referring to them as "symbols of unity" (p. 4).

Although the Emperor and the EOC naturalized the arbitrariness of each other's respective positions within Ethiopian culture, Selassie maintained a subtle but firm grip on the EOC throughout his reign. Bourdieu (1991) believed the function of reinforcement was one of the most significant elements in the sociological study of religious interest. In "Genesis and Structures of the Religious Field," Bourdieu describes reinforcement on a religious field; however, it also appears applicable in describing Selassie's political structures. As a result of Selassie's systematic domination, the EOC sustained an *illusio* of modernization and eventually reproduced the imperial structures by joining the international community, assuming the national language, and updating education and liturgical practice.

It should be noted that as the EOC reproduced the structures of the modern state, Selassie maintained religious capital by mobilizing against common heresiarchs— practitioners of traditional religion and Islam. The complex developments of these antagonistic relationships are beyond the scope of this thesis; however, a brief summary is helpful in illustrating how the profanation of Islam and traditional religion reinforced modernization. Selassie's claim that the Church is the "sword" of the state is reflected in his dealings with the Muslim population. The Italian occupation provided Selassie a motive to dispossess the Muslim community of much of its political and cultural capital. During this period, the Italians granted Islam official recognition, built mosques and schools, and promoted *sharia* law in local areas (Ahmed, 1994). After the "King of Kings" reclaimed the throne in 1941, the Muslims were branded as traitors and collaborators with the Italian enemy (Ahmed). With little effort, Selassie amplified a historically antagonistic relationship to inculcate modernization into the south and west.

According to Rashid Moten (1993), Selassie confiscated much of the Muslim-owned land in the south and redistributed it to Christian nobility and Orthodox clergy. Selassie also placed the traditional southern hierarchies, ethnically Oromo and religiously Muslim, under the control of Christian governors (Markakis, 1973). He accomplished two objectives by rallying common heresiarchs. First, he appeased (and ingratiated) the Church with increasing amounts of economic capital (land) and symbolic power, thereby deepening their dependency on the throne. Second, he imposed the Church's modernization *illusio* to regulate and by proxy dominate the non-Orthodox south. The Emperor also played a significant role in creating the Department of Mission and Evangelism in 1963 (Tibebe Eshete, 2009). The purpose of this department was to direct and strengthen the church's impact in the periphery and among those who practiced traditional religions and Islam. Promoting social integration in the south, Selassie built churches and funneled missionaries to evangelize the uncivilized areas. He decreed, "the church should sponsor mass baptisms in the south" (McClellan, 1988, p. 145). For the EOC, evangelism was synonymous with mass baptisms land grabs in the periphery. For Selassie, it was a tool for homogenizing and consolidating his culture. Compliant southern elite were awarded titles, jobs, *gult* grants, access to education, and tax exemptions, and those who converted to Christianity were awarded even more privileges (McClellan, 1988). Although the baptisms and bribery had only nominal effects in terms of Christian conversion, they played a significant political role in reshaping the Muslim communities. Even Selassie's symbolic violence against the southern elite appeared on the surface to be religiously motivated, but below the surface were tools used to

consolidate political power. While the EOC and throne may have appeared to have a reciprocal association, there is little doubt the arm controlled the sword.

Chapter Conclusion

Selassie generated the mechanics of modernization especially by centralizing the bureaucracy and advancing education. One of his greatest achievements though, was his manipulation of the EOC, who had been a prevailing force in the political culture since the thirteenth century. By employing symbolic violence, Selassie reduced the Church's ritual power, political power, economic independence, and eliminated its foreign lines of legitimation. The Emperor challenged the EOC's capacity to provide salvation goods by positioning himself as a salvific figure, with the power to redeem the people through modernization. Selassie's efforts to expand the Amhara system beyond the imperial center, however, would be a much more difficult challenge.

CHAPTER 3

TAMING THE LION: FOREIGN MISSIONS IN THE PERIPHERY

On September 12, 1974, His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I, Conquering Lion
of the Tribe of Judah, King of Kings of Ethiopia and Elect of God, was ousted by a secret
military junta and escorted past his palace servants to the backseat of a Volkswagen
Beetle. A mark of humiliation, the small car was somewhat emblematic of the later years
of his reign: slow with an awkward shape. Selassie had successfully imported several
institutions from the West, but he had also created an insatiable appetite among many of
his clients. In addition, he had yet to completely incorporate the periphery of the country.
For Selassie, modernity and uniformity were inextricably linked. The development of his
nation demanded that a standardized Amhara culture embrace the mechanisms of the
West. Bahru Zewde (2001) referred to Selassie as the "architect and physical
embodiment of the absolutist order" (p. 201). Each system, structure, and policy
institutionalized domination and gave the Emperor unprecedented power. Selassie (1967)
speech entitled "Modern Ethiopianism" reveals the significance of popular support to the
success of modernization:

> The ultimate resource of a nation are its people. Unless the resource is employed
> for the benefit of the nation, unless the latent good which it represents is exploited
> to the maximum extent for the common good, the nation will languish, poor in
> spirit, lacking in achievement (p. 460).

Selassie had two distinct challenges in bringing modernity to the rural periphery of Ethiopia. First, ethnic groups such as the western Oromo and southern Maale,[9] although under Selassie's control via provincial governors and oppressive northern landlords, resisted conversion and assimilation into Orthodox culture. Second, regions such as Welega and Gama Gofa lacked the basic structures of a newly "civilized" Ethiopia, such as modern education and healthcare. Hoping to remedy these two dilemmas, Selassie allowed foreign organizations such as the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) and Swedish Evangelical Mission (SEM) to function as his subcontractors for civilization by building schools, establishing medical stations, and evangelizing the non-Orthodox populations. What Selassie failed to anticipate, however, was the community-generating power of these structures as well as identity-creating power of conversion. The school, the clinic, and indigenous church denominations, such as SIM's Kale Heywet Church (KHC) and SEM's Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, (EECMY) formed communities of solidarity and new forces on the field of power to resist Selassie's attempts to absorb the Oromo system into the Amhara system.

This chapter examines Selassie's traditional mechanisms of peripheral control, as well as his motivations for encouraging foreign missions to penetrate the southern and western regions of Ethiopia. By applying principles from Robin Horton's (1971) classical treatise on conversion in Africa, "African Conversion," I will show how the presence of the school, clinic, and indigenous church became the loci for the empowering of the

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[9] The Oromo, of Cushitic descent, represent the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia and fit succinctly within Levine's Oromo system, while the Maale, an Omotic ethnic group are one of the smaller and on the boundary the Oromo paradigm. Both were impacted by the presence of foreign missions.

subaltern tribes, enabling them to generate "unconventional" Ethiopian identities, which resisted Selassie's traditional power structures.

Disseminating the mechanisms of modernity (including Christianity) to the periphery, while maintaining absolute power, were Selassie's principal motivations. The Emperor often echoed that Ethiopia was an "island of Christianity in the ocean of Muslims" (Moten, 1993, p. 224). The least Christianized peripheries of the nation were also the most susceptible to the disrupting force of foreign influence, so it was imperative that he fortify the south and west. As shown in the previous chapter, Selassie successfully transubstantiated political and religious capital and employed symbolic violence in an effort to limit the political resistance of the EOC during the modernization push. In a similar manner, Selassie hoped to capitalize on his power and position to introduce the structures of domination to the periphery.

Selassie had two traditional tools at his disposal, the civilizing force the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) and the political control of the Abyssinian elites governing the land and ruling local bureaucratic structures. Concerning the Oromo, Lambert Bartels (1983) effectively summarizes the peasant condition in the periphery:

> Under direct Amharic rule approximately two-thirds of the land was taken by the state; one third was left to the local population…Traditionally to the Matcha [Oromo] all land had been clan land; now all of them became tenants of a landlord for whom they had to work and via whom they paid taxes to the emperor (p. 25).

This is a classic illustration of the interaction between Levine's two social systems. Backed by the codifying beliefs of the *Kebra Negast* and historical expansionism from

north to south, Selassie created a bureaucracy around the existent hierarchy of oppression. The Emperor taxed the northern governors and landowners of the south without disrupting the *doxa* of the Amhara system. The egalitarian collectivism of the Oromo and Maale, made them nearly ideal clients with little motivation for power and "little pressure to escape from subordinate positions…" (Levine, 2000, p. 149). Just as Selassie's spiritual and political motivations intertwined, so too did his notions of civilization and domination. In an era of post-occupation nationalism, and in an attempt to appease the EOC, Selassie issued of government directive in 1944, which held that all indigenous people should be converted to the Orthodox faith (Tibebe Eshete, 2009). It's worth noting that this directive came the same year in which he officially allowed foreign missions into the periphery. Such ambiguity and idealism provide a glimpse into the Emperor's complex motives. He was enamored with the mechanisms of modernity, but stood behind archaic religious system as the key to national unity. As his previous speech submitted, the resource of the people should be exploited for benefit of the "common good," a modern nation. In the periphery, however, social control rarely translated into conformity.

Although a veritable arm of the state, the EOC failed to generate a uniform cultural identity on the periphery. Despite being an integrating force in the urban areas and Christian north, the EOC "did not have the resources in trained clergy or structural organization to assimilate all the peoples" (Eide, 2000, p. 46). The church's failures were, in part, tied to its mission ethos. Historically, the EOC exerted pressure on the peasantry to build churches, baptize family members, bury their dead in Christian cemeteries, and pay the priest's annual taxes (Bartels, 1983). The church placed a stronger emphasis on

action rather than proclamation (Tibebe Eshete, 2009). Believers were encouraged by their clergy to demonstrate Christian virtue, such as giving alms to the poor and modeling hard work. So, for the ordinary member of the EOC, who you were and how you acted were of greater significance than what you preached or the content of your theology. Calvin Shenk (1972) terms this the "silent witness of the worshipping community," spreading their faith through simple faith and "respectable" living (as cited in Tibebe Eshete, p. 41). Spreading Christendom to the periphery, however, was problematic among the Oromo and Maale tenant farmers, who viewed this "silent witness" alongside the hegemonic force of their Christian landlords. Moreover, EOC membership, for those who did convert, had such unproblematic requirements that it was highly-syncretic with traditional religious beliefs. In fact, their influence was so anemic, that the Maale and Oromo who did convert never abandoned their traditional beliefs (Eide, 2000). The Oromo retained *Waqa as* their creator god, sacrificed to their lesser spirits, and sought direction from the *Qaalluu* religious specialists who mediated the spiritual realm. Among the Maale in Bola, the EOC was practically non-existent and Selassie himself, by mid-century, was only a distant king, in the image of their own kinship (Donham, 1999). The *Kati* (ritual king) continued to ensure fertility in land, women, and animals, and stood as the lone mediator to the ancestors. The church's marginal success appears to be limited to superficial integration. Donald Donham's interview with an anonymous convert to the EOC, (later becoming Protestant) reveals the impetus behind such conversion.

> I was baptized as a young man in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. It was not
>
> because I believed in Jesus…It was modern or should we say civilized…We

wanted to be like the Amhara. They were rulers. We were peasants. We tried to

look like them (p. 128).

Contributing to an *illusio*, such converts misrecognized the social order as legitimate, and

were inclined to play an Amhara game in order to prevent increased persecution and

oppression.

Horton's (1971) theory of African conversion, to be applied later in greater detail,

is helpful here in understanding the social impact of the EOC. Mass baptisms and

prohibitions of polygamy did little to allay the quotidian concerns of the lower class, but

the EOC effectively placed Christianity "in the air" (p. 104). Missionary achievements

were constructed on a field where basic Christian principles had already been

disseminated by the EOC. Neither the local evangelists nor the people to whom they

were preaching were operating in an "unfamiliar religious space" (Tibebe Eshete, 2009,

p. 87). Although the EOC and Selassie's northern elites failed to be cultural

revolutionaries in the south, they enabled the forthcoming missionary presence to

generate considerable social change.

Although groups such as SEM and SIM maintained a presence in Ethiopia during

the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the zenith of foreign missions occurred

in the three decades following the Italian occupation. The *Imperial Decree on Foreign*

Missions in August 1944 materialized a formal relationship between foreign missions and

the Ethiopian empire. Principally, the decree defined "open" and "closed" areas for

mission practice and prohibited missionaries from converting Ethiopian Orthodox

Christians. They were encouraged, however, to establish hospitals and other non-

religious projects within the Orthodox areas (Eide, 2000).

The alliance between Ethiopia and foreign missions was not without controversy and tension. For one thing, Selassie treated missionization as a political matter and did not involve the EOC in the formulation or implementation of the decree (Tibebe Eshete, 2009). As mentioned previously, in the politically dominant Amhara system, *Ethiopianness* was inextricably linked with the Orthodox faith. And for another, the rumbling of increased nationalism following the Italian occupation caused some within the hierarchy of the EOC, to call for complete suppression of all non-Orthodox faiths (Donham, 1999). For the Orthodox, allowing an inferior form of Christianity into the religious field would contaminate the culture of God's "chosen" people. Selassie, however, was a political realist and recalled how Mussolini's army subdued their nation with humbling ease (Donham). Foreign missions, with their cache of symbolic and economic capital, carried the keys to modernity and the promise of a fortified periphery. Western medicine and modern education were powerful instruments of control and inculcation, capable of drawing the uncivilized periphery toward the Abyssinian center. Donham asserted, rather bluntly, Selassie's modernist goal was to "wring as many hospitals and schools as possible from the missionaries—not to mention threshing machines and Ford automobiles" (p. 94).

Such observations, though, should not be taken to mean that Selassie was obsessed with innovation. This was about control. The decree was two-tiered attempt by Selassie to create new patrons. By formalizing the relationship between the mission and the throne, Selassie hoped to make use of their resources while limiting their evangelical fervor (Norberg, 1977). This delicate balancing act "aimed at limiting the influence of the foreign missions to the greatest possible extent…without making them loose interest in

supplying medical and educational staff" (Norberg, p. 79). In addition, by defining areas such as Gama Gofa and Welega as "open," the decree targeted ethnic groups such as the Oromo and Maale for deeper levels of control. Selassie desired cultural assimilation through a *collusio* exchange: "the erosion, whether partial, gradual or complete, of one's participation in an original or objectively expected *collusio* and one's adaptation of or entry into another" (Rey, 2007, p. 89). The Emperor attempted to modernize and homogenize the nation by harnessing the civilizing forces of western Christianity as the second sword of the Ethiopian state.

Expatriate missionaries from Sweden and North America planted themselves in areas ideologically and geographically furthest from the political center. As long as SIM and SEM built buildings and disseminated Amharic culture (i.e. Amharic language) while saving souls, they could expect royal support. Numerous missionaries were greatly impressed by Haile Selassie and had little doubt that "he was an evangelical Christian at heart" (Bakke, 1998, p. 162). Awe for some was palpable frustration for others who, zealous for sharing the gospel, felt considerable pressure from Addis Ababa to build and staff schools and hospitals (Donham, 1999). Although the missionary goals of promoting evangelical revivals, baptizing and building churches did not align precisely with Selassie's modernizing ethos, they shared a common desire to impact the "unreached" periphery. The imposition of foreign missions may have been Selassie's most dramatic examples of symbolic violence to the uncivilized periphery, however as will be shown, this sword was far more difficult to swing.

Missionary Habitus

Before detailing the influence of the mission structures and the power of conversion, it would be beneficial to analyze the *habitus* of the missionaries who ministered to the Oromo and Maale. Although these Westerners were an undeniable force commanding access to education and healthcare, the missionary ethos appeared to be rooted in hard work, justice, and democracy. Many were unprepared for the social challenges of working in a foreign land, but they were a hearty group with a cultural and religious heritage that greatly facilitated their work (Bakke, 1998). Consider the following exchange between interviewer Britta Koch and Bonnie Adolph, former SIM missionary to southern Ethiopia during the 1960s and 1970s:

> **Koch**: Did the mission go into...give you preparation how to deal with each of the different types of religious groups?
>
> **Adolph**: No. Not particularly.
>
> **Koch**: Do you think that's something that might have helped you or would it have made much difference?
>
> **Adolph:** I think...I think having a...a more widely read background of the religious groups in a given country...
>
> **Koch**: Uh-huh.
>
> **Adolph**...certainly would help a missionary going in. And I don't feel like we were anywheres [*sic*] prepared along that line. I don't fault the mission for that (Koch (Interviewer) and Adolph (Interviewee), 1984, "Bonnie Jo Adelsman Adolph collection 282: T2 transcript").

Fueled by zeal to serve God and bring Christian "truth" to "unreached" populations, numerous missionaries were unshakeable pioneers, who were directed by personal

promptings from God. In the same interview, Adolph reflects on the moment she knew she must go to Ethiopia. She recalls,

> …it was like I was face to face with the Lord again. And it was just as clear as I'm talking to you…. And He just came to me in a very real way, and the voice couldn't have been any clearer than I'm talking to you, and He said, 'Whatever assignment the mission gives you will not conflict with your role as wife and mother.' I could never have gone without that kind of assurance. I knew I had to go… (Koch and Adolph).

Although several mission stations had trained doctors and surgeons, most were agrarian by nature. Mouths that preached the gospel belonged to bodies whose hands worked the soil. Such Christian workers expected resistance both from the physical and spiritual realms, and, in some capacity, welcomed those experiences as opportunities to grow stronger in their faith. According to Donham (1999), the impetus for Christian mission work revolves around two competing eschatological doctrines. Postmillennialism, a positivist stance, maintains that a millennium of peace and Christ's return would begin when the gospel had reached the entire world. Premillennialism emphasizes the negative view that the world was in a state of constant deterioration and Christ could return at any moment. Both outlooks motivate evangelical practice. Postmillennialists desire to usher in the return of Jesus by spreading the gospel, and premillennialists sense the urgency of Christ's immanent return and the damnation for the unrepentant sinners. Missionaries were most concerned with acquiring enough social capital to transubstantiate into religious capital via conversions. The church, clinic, and school were social structures that gave the missionaries and early native evangelists a

voice to be reckoned with. Missionaries aimed at internal transformations, which would

reform external sinful behaviors and transform the socio-religious structure of families,

villages, and tribes. The missionaries were indeed agents of social change, but on

Selassie's meta-field of power they did not intend to be political revolutionaries.

As the missionaries settled into the Ethiopian religious field and established social

services as well as competing churches, they were subjected to a particular form of

Orthodox oppression. Despite imperial blessing, the EOC rejected such competition in

the religious field "by denouncing as 'heretical' any alternative worldviews that

competitors [sought] to propagate among the same laity" (Rey, 2007, p. 57). For

example, in 1953, nine years after Selassie's 1944 decree, local authorities in Boojjii,

Welega suppressed SEM's work by closing churches and schools, prohibiting preaching,

and even excising a new Evangelical tax, payable to the EOC. In this case, religious

intolerance became a matter for local and national courts, and was curbed only after

direct involvement by Haile Selassie, 14 months later (Eide, 2000). This above example

not only highlights the popularity and threat of Protestant presence in Welega, but also

the depth of imperial support. For the converts and missionaries, northern oppression

fostered a sense of what Victor Turner (1969) calls *spontaneous communitas*: moments of

human interrelatedness wherein members in a marginalized social space experience

unstructured spiritual equality. *Spontaneous communitas* arises "in the intervals between

incumbencies of social positions and statuses" (p. 138). Although such instances of

Orthodox oppression paled in comparison to the subsistence livelihood of the peasantry,

the mission stations and their structures became centers for common resistance and a

refuge for the oppressed. The religious tension between Selassie and the EOC created a

fissure in the social system, allowing Protestant Christians increasingly favorable positions in the religious field. Removing the EOC from the power to check or restrain foreign influence, Selassie weakened the Amhara system by creating an exception in the patron-client model.

<div align="center">Maale And Oromo Habitus</div>

Consideration of several notable elements of the Maale and Oromo religious *habitus* also helps explain how Protestant Christianity successfully impacted the Oromo system. For example, nearly all ethnic groups in Ethiopia traditionally believe in a single, supreme deity and with few exceptions, the name of their preeminent God is derived from glosses of *waq, tosa, or zar* (Levine, 2000). Although the religious fields of the south and west were peppered with Muslims and practitioners of traditional religions, nearly all believed in a second-tier of localized spirits, which inhabited trees, streams, and hillsides. For the Orthodox and Muslim populations, such spirits took the forms of revered saints. In addition, throughout most of Ethiopia there was a universal fear associated with the power of the *buda* (evil eye) as well as the *zar*, a class of intrusive spirits or demons that can take possession of anyone and make them sick (Levine). Furthermore, both the Maale and the Oromo valued the spiritual efficacy of the few who could intercede in the world of spirits. For the Maale, the *Kati* was a ritual king, responsible for the wellbeing of the people, through sacrifices and invocations to the ancestors, for the fertility of land, women, and livestock (Donham, 1999). Among the Oromo were the *Qaalluu* were ritual diviners, who had a supernatural ability to access the spirit world with specialized talents such as rainmaking (Eide, 2000). Dependency on religious specialists and belief in a high God ingrained in the traditional *collusio* made

hierarchical features of the Protestant Christianity easier to accept. Additionally, itinerant prophetic figures similar to John the Baptist emerged from the countryside in the 1920s that claimed to have received revelations from God that the people should forsake ancestral worship, server ties from the diviners and worship the one true God (Tibebe Eshete, 1999). Raymond Davis (1966) claims one such prophet, Esa, even foretold the coming of the foreigners who would bring "the Book" (as cited in Tibebe Eshete, p. 43). As foreign missionaries entered the religious fields, the essence of Protestant Christianity was far from a foreign concept to the Oromo and Maale *habitus.*

Horton's (1971) theory of African conversion is helpful in understanding the development of unconventional Ethiopian identities and their subsequent resistance. He defines pre-modern African cosmology as a "two tiered arrangement of unobservables," with the lesser spirits concerned with the affairs of the microcosm and the omnipotent Supreme Being ruling the macrocosm (p. 101). In his "thought-experiment," Horton suggests a model by which one might predict how traditional cosmology will react to significant social change. His model maintained that an adherent does not abandon his or her system of explanation, but instead reshapes an "instrument of explanation-prediction-control" (p. 102). As large sectors of the population depart the microcosm, a more elaborate theory of Supreme Being develops and the lesser spirits become impotent. Furthermore, the single deity moves from a position of moral neutrality to one of moral concern, and a cult of the Supreme Being takes a more distinct shape. Horton is careful to point out that such changes or "conversions" within a mission context are not necessarily the result of successful proselytizing, but of the tangible offerings of modernity. For Horton, acceptance of Christianity is "due as much to development of the traditional

cosmology in response to *other* features of the modern situation as it is to the activities of the missionaries" (Horton, p. 103, emphasis mine). So, along these lines, numerous Maale and Oromo experienced early disintegration of their microcosms during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century EOC hegemony, but a made more complete transition into the macrocosm with later mission movements.

Commanding powerful resources, the social benefits of health, education and church were likely significant *other* factors in conversion. Structures such as the SIM clinic in Bola and SEM school system in Welega, along with the concomitant growth of native evangelists and the indigenous churches, enabled Maale and Oromo to adapt to the macrocosm of modern Ethiopia. Instead of functioning as Selassie's tools of symbolic violence, however, such institutions became sources of individual and communal empowerment and broke the EOC's cultural monopoly over the definition of *Ethiopianness*.

<div align="center">Clinic And Conversion In The Southern Periphery</div>

The oppression of the Abyssinian power structures prepared the Maale for social transformation. Although Selassie viewed himself as a great modernizer, he failed to completely disassemble the traditional *gebbar* system and emancipate the "others" from a life of subsistence farming. Instead he increased the bureaucracy in the periphery and established a modern tax structure in order to control those (Abyssinian elite) who controlled the "others." Oyvind Eide (2000) remarks,

> In spite of the emperor's efforts to modernize Ethiopia, the condition of the
>
> peasants worsened. They were reduced to cash-crop producers, exploited to the

limit of their capacity in order to provide the financial means necessary to sustain

the dominating structure (p. 86).

Selassie's power structure meant calamity for the Maale. Selassie was the distant ruler

who agitated the soil of the periphery with political oppression, but offered no comfort to

his people. Harold Adolph, surgeon to the neighboring Walayta tribe, recalls the spiritual

efficacy of the heath care structures where there were previously none.

We had one fellow, that I remember very well, who had walked for fourteen days

to get to the hospital….He had a very bad cancer in his hand from shrapnel

wound during the Italian invasion. When he came to the hospital, he was very

belligerent, a very hostile man, caused a lot of trouble…. God saved him

miraculously and he was one of the nicest gentlemen you'd every want to meet

in the world. He went back to his area and started seven churches in his area. He

came back later for a...a second operation, which was successful, and told us all

the wonderful things that God had done for him and through him (Mercer

(Interviewer) and Adolph (Interviewee), 1981, "Collection 169 - Harold Paul

Adolph: T2 transcript").

The mission structure during the 1950s and 1960s was far less imposing than the imperial

regime. In fact, the missionaries were able to capitalize on the cracks and fissures caused

by preexisting social tension. By providing for the needs of the subaltern tribes, the

missions acquired greater amounts of religious capital and clinics became an *axis mundi*

of restoration and life-change.

Sime, a Maale elder, reflects Horton's thought-experiment by revealing how the

presence of a clinic affected conversion. In Donham's (1999) extensive interview, he

details Sime's conversion at an SIM clinic in the Gama Gofa town, Bako. To begin, Sime

had recently lost his son, his wife, and numerous members of his village to a mysterious

illness, which later afflicted him. He remarked, "But I was sick and sick and sick. When I

had been defeated, I heard that a doctor had come to Bako" (Donham, p. 110).

Understandably desperate, Sime's testimony revealed the stress marks on his pre-modern

cosmology. For Maale, the *tsosi,* or the collective of ancestors, (Horton's "lesser spirits"),

were of greatest concern, as they blessed and cursed the living. If a Maale faithfully

observed clan customs and taboos, the ancestor's *baliti* or "forehead" would give him or

her great fortune, health, and fertility (p. 113). So, for Sime to be "defeated" implied that

he was unable to assuage the curses of his ancestors and was in the process of

reorganizing his belief system. Donham notes, when calamity piled on top of calamity

and ritual confession failed to provide relief, "the limits of Maale religion were reached"

(p. 115). Sime departed the insulation of his microcosm for the modern promise of the

SIM mission clinic. Upon arrival, a female missionary continued to challenge the

ancestors, and brought the Supreme Being to the forefront. She told him, "Believe in

God! (*tsosi amane!*)," and Sime responded, "Where is God that one may believe?" (p.

110). In those moments, as the lesser spirits appeared to retreat, Sime brought the

Supreme Being from the background to the forefront of his cosmology. Sime's

conversion and entrance into the macrocosm was, at minimum, recognition that a single

deity, not the ancestors, had the ability to bless and curse his existence. An inoculation

and a new moral directive from the Supreme Being accompanied his conversion. The

missionary exclaimed, "Don't smoke tobacco. Don't drink beer. Don't drink anything

that makes you drunk…stay away from prostitutes" (p. 110). The following day, Sime, in

restored health, walked to Jinka to pay two tax bills, and realized he only needed to pay one. Believing God was beginning to bless him, Sime remarks, "I returned home feeling really strong. Then I lived and lived" (p. 110). Empowered by a reordered belief system of explanation-prediction-control, Sime converted members of his family, sent his children to an SIM school, and won numerous converts from his village and the neighboring lowlands. Donham notes the lines of power associated in the power of conversion: "When Sime converted, the efficiency of rituals carried out by all of the junior kinsmen was automatically affected…" (p. 112). The intricate system of lineage taboos, which upheld the power of the eldest brother over the younger brother, was now in decline. Sime effectively modeled the potential of the clinic to function as a vehicle for social transformation with the conversion of just one Maale elder. Horton supposed Christianity's success in any African context was linked to its ability to improve the modern situation. Although Horton's theory repudiates phenomenological elements of conversion, it is helpful in viewing how Sime's exposure to modernity caused the walls of the microcosm to crumble and led to a new sense of Christian solidarity within his tribe.

New Maale Christians benefited from improved health, pre-colonial dignity, and empowerment in community. As Abyssinian landlords continued to invent land claims over the Maale, reducing them to tenant farmers, missionaries and the community of converts rose up in defense. Protestant Christians became educated in the Amharic language (used by the courts), and in Ethiopian law, and in some cases missionary advocates even interceded in the court system (Donham, 1999). Before long, northern landlords experienced pushback from newly empowered Maale Christians. Donham

interviewed one such landlord, Manakule, who noted a correlation of resistant attitudes with the appearance of the native evangelists. Manakule recalls, before the evangelists, "landlords were getting cows, money, honey…[then] the evangelists told the Maale that they should only pay money; they advised them that they should legally pay only 10 birr[10] when they had been paying 20 or 30" (p. 118). Such examples of passive resistance revealed how conversion created the social networks necessary to challenge the limits of northern hegemony, from home to courtroom. Newly empowered, communities once "at the bottom of the powerful structures, without any means of protecting themselves," (Eide, 2000, p. 47) were now forming a densely populated center around the mission station in Bako. Slowly the clients were breaking free from the Amhara dyad, and Selassie's goal of complete Amharatization became all the more difficult.

<div align="center">Mission Education In The Western Periphery</div>

Oromo peasants, facing similar oppression as the Maale, suffered under an unjust land tenure system for half a century, as well as the forced conversions and social sanctions of the EOC. From the instigation of northern domination, traditional Oromo elders lacked the overall perspective of nationhood and were unable to articulate communal aspirations or mobilize nation-wide movements of resistance (Bulcha, 1996). As a result, socially organizing features of the *gada* system began disintegrating when confronted by Amhara dominance during era of early modernization. Levine believed the gada system to be "a brittle assemblage of complex social forms tied to a rigid calendar of prescribed activities" (Levine, 2000, p. 145). So the various novel pressures on the

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[10] 10 Ethiopian Birr is approximately 1 USD.

gada system, such as the imposition of the Ethiopian state and the structural power of mission education, accelerated its deterioration.

The establishment and proliferation of modern education was undoubtedly one of Selassie's greatest initiatives following the Italian occupation. The Emperor's ever-increasing bureaucracy required a new class of educated elites. Glancing again to "Modern Ethiopianism," Haile Selassie (1967) regards educated individuals as the "fundamental prerequisites" and "indispensable" to the development of a modern nation (p. 460). He continues, "Man must be educated: he cannot come to grips with or cope with or understand the modern world unless he has been taught about it" (p. 461). Reminiscent of the EOC's shortcomings, the public education system lacked the institutional capacity to disseminate its culture and linguistic components widely among its new subjects, especially in the periphery (Bulcha, 1996). A 1924 report made by the African Education Commission concluded "foreign missions were responsible for most schools of any significance at that time" (Norberg, 1977, p. 68). Although a modest number of secular government schools in 1941, grew to 650 by 1960, most were centralized in Addis Ababa (Milkias, 2006). Selassie directed missionary zeal to the outlying and more tenuous areas of the empire. Donham (1999) estimated by the early 1970s, SIM alone had 363 mission schools nationwide, enrolling 30,000 students. SEM's Western Synod, maintained 10 specialized schools (i.e. Bible, handicraft, school for the blind, teacher-training, and trade schools), one secondary school, two junior secondary schools, 20 elementary schools, and 207 literacy schools (Eide, 2000).

The accomplishments of SEM's school structure should be assessed on three levels: its ability to appease the Emperor's requirements; its capacity to function as a tool

for evangelization; and, its inadvertent contribution to Oromo nationalism. While the

substance of mission education varied between organizations, most experienced tension

with the throne over the definition of "civilization." Missionaries were expected not only

to teach academic subjects but also to indoctrinate the people with Selassie's view of

national unity; otherwise they were deported (Marcus, 1987). Whereas missionaries

viewed education as a means of Christianization, the Emperor's greater agenda was to

create a more uniform Ethiopian culture, centered on the proliferation of the Amharic

language and the incorporation of all as his clients. From Selassie's perspective,

education would function as a tool of symbolic violence and the people would

misrecognize such opportunities as institutions for advancement in the new Ethiopia.

Modern education would liberate the "backward" peasants from their tribal microcosm.

Although mission education was promoted to strengthen Christian life, "it often furthered

a social and political consciousness and a critical attitude towards political structures and

conditions" (Bakke, 1998, p. 162). The religion of Protestants became the religion of

freedom from Abyssinian oppression, and as traditional Oromo cosmology adapted, the

schools also functioned as an unintended loci of empowerment and resistance.

Eide (2000) juxtaposes two leaders within the EECMY to illustrate the complex

effects of modern education on the Oromo society. Emmanuel Abraham, born in 1913,

was educated in the Tafari-Makonnen school, one of Selassie's public institutions. His

education afforded him access to the ruling elite and he even worked alongside Selassie

in exile and was appointed director general of the Ministry of Education and Fine Arts in

1944, and later become a member of Selassie's cabinet. Among other achievements,

Emmanuel also served as the president of the EECMY from 1963 to 1985. Emmanuel's

unique position "is of crucial importance in understanding the church's strong position within Ethiopian society" (Eide, p. 59). In fact, his influence not only mitigated EOC persecution of Evangelicals, but also was the chief reason why the EECMY achieved government recognition (Eide). Emmanuel was able to give this indigenous form of Christianity a permanent place in the religious field by using political power he had acquired through modern education. One must not look past the paradox, however, that such accomplishments were not untainted by what Bourdieu calls "misrecognition"— a perception of the arbitrary principles of division and domination as being natural. Emmanuel was a member of the educated elite because he was inclined to play Selassie's game and thereby legitimated the dominant social order.

Gudina Tumsa, meanwhile, was born in 1932, in Boojjii, Welega. SEM trained him as a medical assistant initially, but after demonstrating a capacity for leadership, he was sent to the United States for theological training (Eide, 2000). Motivated by the persecution of evangelists and the political exploitation of ordinary peasants, he was an outspoken advocate of political responsibility and church independence. Although he never held a government office, Gudina became General Secretary of the EECMY and opposed Haile Selassie for his blatant disregard of the oppressed of the periphery. "During the reign of Haile Selassie I, at a time when everyone flattered the emperor," Eide states, "Gudina made a point of being severely critical, especially with regard to feudalism and land reform" (p. 61). Gudina was less inclined than Emmanuel to legitimate the moral and religious authority of the dominant order. In fact, his religious capital was used to promote an ecumenical movement wherein a single voice could speak with religious power to the wayward government. The formation of the Council for

Cooperation of Churches in Ethiopia (CCCE) in 1976, (outside the historical scope of this study), revealed a heightened ecumenical interest among Ethiopians in general, and a growing concern with self-determined notions of *Ethiopianness*. Most notable here is the explosive power of mission education in creating intellectuals like Gudina, who led Oromo Christians to resist imperial domination and moved beyond the limits of denominationalism.

Numerous Oromo embraced the vehicle of mission education to achieve greater dignity and a renewed sense of community identity. Mekuria Bulcha (1996), points to the organizational efficacy of the modern education structure: "Traditional leaders were not able to articulate Oromo ethnic identity….The role of articulating, defining and promoting Oromo identity was assumed by a fledgling intelligentsia beginning in the mid-1960s" (p. 49). Johnny Bakke (1998) expands,

> it is quite astonishing to note how many of the influential secular leaders in Ethiopia…express their indebtedness to these schools. Through their many schools the missions had a much greater impact on future Ethiopian leaders and models of leadership than the numbers of missionaries might imply (p. 164).

Mission education helped to generate a class of educated elite who were both hungry for increased educational opportunities and eager to expand the *doxa* beyond the ethnic constraints of the Amhara System. Selassie initiated a momentum and a hunger that quickly grew beyond the confines of his own bureaucracy. By the end of the 1960s, the student population of 700,000 (Bahru Zewde, 2001) realized the widening educational gap between Ethiopia and neighboring African states. As the public assumed greater financial responsibility for new school construction in the 1960s and 1970s, the

government was unable to satiate the needs of the country. Speaking to the All African Lutheran Conference in October 1965, the Emperor misrecognized the depths of mission influence and praises the EECMY:

> Evangelist missionaries have greatly assisted many thousands of Ethiopians. Moreover, it is also a fact that they have brought up and educated many Ethiopians among whom We are happy to see, many are placed in responsible posts and are serving their country with diligence and devotion (Haile Selassie, 1967, p. 642-3).

As Selassie heaped praises on the mission agencies for their service to the nation, an "implacable opposition" of university students took to the streets, beginning in 1965, holding "ritual annual demonstrations, daring to defy a political order that had managed to secure the cowed submission of a large part of the population" (Bahru Zewde, 2001 p. 220). Ironically, the Ethiopian Student Movement, emerged as the greatest threat to the emperor's later reign. Selassie may have been viewed as a modernist and a progressive autocrat in the 1950s, but by the mid-1960s the newly educated had staked their claim in the macrocosm. They rumbled with dissatisfaction over issues such as famine relief, civil liberties, and educational reform, and the rights of nationalities to self-determination (Bahru Zewde). In fact, the mounting chorus of frustration contributed to the attempted *coup d'etat* of 1960 as well as the 1974 revolution (Bulcha, 1996).

Thus, regardless of Selassie's intention to use mission structures to subdue the nation, such structures were in fact the platforms for political resistance. New generations of educated Oromo men and women, came to an understanding of their modern world,

and resisted Selassie's attempts to reduce the entire population into a single social system.

National Evangelical Churches

Generally speaking, the independent evangelical churches emerging out of the SIM and SEM were a fascinating result of missionary innovation and historical accident. Emperors Yohannes and Menelik had restrained SEM, and other mission organizations, from functioning within Ethiopian borders. In fact the Lutheran missionaries did not enter Welega until the mid-1920s. A seemingly chance encounter, however, with zealous evangelical EOC priests living in Eritrea allowed SEM to build a foundation of native missionaries in the west. Envoys Gebre-Ewostateos, Ze-Michael, and Daniel Dabala settled in Welega in 1898, equipped with a vernacular Oromo New Testament and a hymnbook (Eide, 2000). In addition, SEM trained former Oromo slaves in Eritrea to function as agents in the periphery. They brought the early messages of Christian freedom to the oppressed periphery even before SEM could establish an official presence (Tibebe Eshete, 2009). Before SIM engaged the Maale in the 1950s, they well aware of the potential for indigenous empowerment and ownership of Christianity. Just fifteen years prior, SIM missionaries in Walayta were forced out by the Italian invasion, and upon their return were surprised to discover that their fifteen converts had exploded to some 15,000 during their seven year absence (Donham, 1999). Although little is known about its ecclesiological or theological dimensions, this explosion speaks to the efficacy of these communities of solidarity as well as the convert's ability to regulate Christianity independently. "While leaders of the local evangelical Christian community warmly welcomed the SIM returnees and new recruits," Tibebe Eshete (1999) notes, "they

insisted on retaining administrative control of the new church movement" (p. 36). The Italian occupation appeared to be a watershed experience for evangelical Christians in Ethiopia. Native leaders acquired sudden autonomy, and new Christian collectives were bound together through Amhara and Italian persecution. Religious oppression not only promoted solidarity but also polarized Protestants from mainstream culture.

SIM and SEM approached the religious field with distinct pastoral objectives. SEM's primary goal was to reach the populations beyond the EOC, and reflected no intent to create a separate institution. Their hope was to proselytize the Oromo masses and place them in the care of the church. The distinguishing feature of believers in Welega was the construction of a school, not the building of a church (Eide, 2000). A secondary goal, however, was to bring reform to the EOC. Oromo evangelists such as Onesimos Nasib initially embraced his Orthodox membership, but clashed with priests over his elevated view of the Bible and preference for preaching in the Oromo vernacular (Tibebe Eshete, 2009). Such reformers also challenged the need for *tezkar* and the saints, stressing that salvation came through the work of Jesus Christ alone. As early as 1898, the EOC began excommunicating evangelical Christians (Lande, 1998). Slowly, SEM realized these insurmountable divides and created a separate institution. In 1941, the EECMY became the first national evangelical church denomination, but was not officially registered by the government until 1969. SEM, realizing the cultural capital and political capital of the EOC, had hoped to "save" Ethiopia through its pre-existing institutions. However, the inevitability of fracturing was due to a conflation of several factors: the EOC's patron role within in the Amhara system, pride associated with the

perception of unchanged doctrine, and suspicion of foreign influence during a period of political instability.

SIM's church-building goal from the beginning was to form social communities separate from the EOC. Their early work among the Maale began with the establishment of a mission station in Bako in 1954. Nearby, Walayta Christians settled among the Maale and functioned as evangelistic agents for SIM. The spread of Christianity resulted in the formation of new social groups among the Maale. According to Jacobus Van Aswegen (2008), "Who you work with says who you are and where you belong….Christian converts stopped participating in their former social work groups and established their own work group" (p. 5). Converts called themselves *Amagnyoch* (Believers) instead of Christians, so as not to incite persecution from the EOC or Selassie's northern bureaucrats. Foreign missionaries stressed that evangelism was the responsibility of all Christians and not to be limited to the mission compound. Early church communities sprung out of small, informal Bible studies rather than large revivals. Instead of forming a visible institution, SIM "wanted to spread the Gospel quietly without arousing the untimely attention and resentment of the established Orthodox Church" (Tibebe Eshete, 1999, p. 40). Eventually, a network of Kale Heywet churches grew more organized from these movements. The autonomous congregational structure of the KHC inhibited the authority of the individual pastors, empowered laity with organizational power, and allowed the periphery church to remain independent from a central institution (Tibebe Eshete). By the end of Selassie's reign in 1974, the highly-organized network of Maale congregations were sending representatives to monthly district meetings, and to larger area council meetings in Bako, and forming women's associations, and holding

annual conferences featuring baptism, preaching, and business meetings (Tibebe Eshete).

Conversion meant regaining a voice and achieving greater social mobility within the macrocosm.

Two interrelated concepts of equality and democracy, promoted by missionaries and early church movements, appealed to large segments of Oromo and Maale populations. Within missionary circles, the field directors were first among equals, and missionaries made important decisions by way of committee (Bakke, 1998). The fundamental social structure of the Oromo system was itself consensus-building. Protestant theology was grounded in the idea that "regardless of sex and tribal status, each person had the same direct relation to God" (Bakke, p. 164). For the impotent Oromo of the periphery, the promise of restored status under the intense conditions of northern hegemony formed the underpinnings of *communitas* and resistance. For some, including most of the traditional elites in Welega, Christianity was a boundary separating them from the conquering Abyssinians and an expression of resistance (Bulcha, 1996). For others, access to the vernacular Bible, restored dignity of women and men, and an emancipating Christ figure also had "a profound effect on the imagination of the Oromo…" (Eide, 2000, p. 89). The developing EECMY church struggled for nearly two decades the right to define its own identity. The EOC leadership, pressing the Selassie, "managed for some time to prevent the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus from including the adjective 'Ethiopian' in its name" (Bakke, p. 156). Redefining the term "Ethiopian" to include Protestants worshipping in the Oromo language was a powerful act of resistance that weakened Selassie's efforts to inculcate the periphery with

Orthodoxy and Amharic. This instance of passive resistance reflects new increasing

religious capital and political power of these non-Orthodox Ethiopians.

Among the traditional Maale, the eldest brother maintains the great ritual power.

For example, when a younger brother's cow has a calf, taboos dictate that the eldest

brother perform a tribute ceremony, wherein he and the dead ancestors receive the first

milk, before anyone else (Donham, 1999). Christian conversion stirred up the

imagination of the younger brother. Elders in one KHC congregation summarized

Christianity's appeal to the younger brothers. Christians are free, "simply eating and

drinking….Whatever we farm we can use it ourselves. Whatever we own, we can control

it for our own use…" (Donham, p. 117). By expanding the social category "older

brother" to include Selassie and northern domination, and "younger brother" to include

the oppressed Maale, one can see how conversion contributes to a desire for individual

freedom. Maale Christians as a social group became some of the most educated and

successful in the region, and by the end of Selassie's reign supported forward-looking

social changes (Van Aswegen, 2008). Most importantly, though, they identified

themselves as "Ethiopians," rather than simply as Maale (Donham). The indigenous

church formed a powerful, sustainable new way to be Ethiopian, free from the ethnic and

religious constraints of the dominant power.

As the periphery was fortified by the expansion of the indigenous churches, it

experienced in greater tension with the imperial center. As strong players on the religious

field, the KHC and EECMY challenged Selassie's efforts to function as a manipulator of

religious capital. The explosion of the indigenous church movements had a destabilizing

force on the imperial center. Although the missionary societies often supported Selassie's

policies, native Christians were now empowered with access to information that fostered

the understanding that progress and development did not have to originate from the

imperial center (Bakke, 1998). During the later years of Selassie's reign, the evangelical

movements grew from the periphery to the center. Charismatic movements such as *Mulu*

Wongel (Full Gospel) were fiercely independent from foreign influence and formed a

second wave of evangelical Christianity in Ethiopia's turbulent 1960s. Pentecostals

influenced all corners of Ethiopia, including Addis Ababa, and enraptured large

populations of young people who were frustrated by the slow growth of education and

general alienation from mainstream society. Threatened by their urban success, the EOC

and Ministry of Interior commenced a crackdown in the 1970s, which included raiding

local chapels, disrupting revivals, and imprisoning leaders (Tibebe Eshete, 2009).

Selassie, appearing ambivalent, granted audience to Pentecostals on several occasions,

but implored them to work within the boundaries of the EOC. Tibebe Eshete interprets

this to mean "the emperor's heart was divided between sympathy to the young

Pentecostals and loyalty to the established church" (p. 180). Within the sea of young

Protestants, Selassie likely saw his modern Ethiopia: young, educated, and civilized.

Unfortunately, his silence on their persecution won him no favor and weakened his

religious capital. Alternative Christian identities spread to the urban centers. As they

emphasized religious freedom through the Bible and the Holy Spirit, the role of the

priests weakened and the EOC's ability to naturalize the arbitrary became more difficult.

Selassie's project of cultural Amharatization was failing, and the battle for religious

capital exhausted his arm and dulled his sword.

Horton (1971) believes Christianity brought nothing new to the African belief system. He claims monolithic religions such as Islam and Christianity were, "triggers for reactions in which they do not always appear in the end-products" (p. 104). His term, "catalyst," however is a tenuous descriptor of Protestant missions in the Ethiopian context. *Catalyst* obscures the social and religious impact of the missionary societies. Although missionary Christianity's theology was indeed rigid, it appears to have been absorbed into the early churches without creating "breakaway sects" (Horton, p. 105). "Missionary theology interacted with Oromo spirituality," Eide (2000) posits, "and presented itself as a contextualized Ethiopian Evangelical theology in its own right" (p. 89). He goes as far as to say, "the Mekane Yesus Church developed and grew from indigenous witness, initiative and leadership, aided by the missionaries" (p. 53). The theology of the missionaries may remain static, but both sides were changed by the presence of the other. Whatever intentions SIM missionaries had for southern Ethiopia following the Italian occupation, their strategy changed dramatically after some fifteen converts grew to 15,000 without their direct influence. SIM responded in 1942 with a policy that all churches must be self-supporting, self-propagating, and self-governing, just as the missionaries within the society (Donham, 1999). Although foreign presence and structures propelled numerous Oromo and Maale into the macrocosm of modern Ethiopia, indigenous church development was a joint venture from the outset. The indigenous churches from the small collection of early *Amagnyoch* to the urban Pentecostals represent important manifestations of Ethiopian identity formation. As the local church movements developed into denominations and became increasingly independent from the parent missions, the KHC and EECMY contextualized a distinctly

Ethiopian Christianity without eschewing the evangelical theology of the missions. Horton's charge that missionaries were merely the spark of social change appears to be an oversimplification in an otherwise nuanced piece on African cosmology.

In addition, Horton's reductionist view discounts the mission's role in creating resistant, non-Orthodox, Ethiopian communities. In fact, it is conceivable that SIM and SEM contributed to an amalgamation of, or at least a bridge between, the two Levinian social paradigms. The traditional Oromo system contained no specialized political roles, nor any extensive vertical hierarchy of statuses that could generate power for the system (Levine, 2000). The foreign missions' structures and churches brought together the consensus-building elements of the Oromo system, with the hierarchical individualism of the Amhara system. The indigenous church's focus on individual success produced more patron-like achievers, who continued to stress the structures of northern domination.

Chapter Conclusion

Hoping to extend his authority by capitalizing on missionary zeal and resources, the Emperor formalized a partnership with foreign mission agencies in 1944. Underestimating the radical potential of foreign missions, Selassie directed their work to those places both geographically and culturally distant from the Amhara center. Upon entering the Ethiopian religious field, SIM and SEM provided the loci and means for generating a new way to be "Ethiopian." Conversions challenged Amhara hegemony while modern education and healthcare created new forces on the field of struggle. The "ultimate resource" for Selassie's modern nation were his people, but new generations of Ethiopian Protestants were unwilling to be "exploited" by Selassie for a "common good" that reinforced the archaic structures of the Amhara system.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

To inculcate modernity into the national Ethiopian *collusio*, Haile Selassie

reduced the political and cultural power of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, an archaic

institution of Abyssinian tradition. Employing weapons of symbolic violence, Selassie

used his modern courts to dislodge the Church from its position of juridical authority,

public education to limit its cultural influence and Amharic to reform outdated elements

of Ge'ez tradition. In addition, by breaking the Egyptian link to the EOC, Selassie

increased his religious capital and further obligated the Church to the state. Selassie's

seizure of power strengthened the centralized government and, in part, fulfilled the legacy

of his predecessors by creating "a more closely knit and unified" Ethiopia (Selassie,

1967, p. 460). In his autobiography, Selassie (1976) asserts his hope that "western modes

of civilization," would help his people "attain a higher level" (p. 5). Although he

propagated the institutions of modern education and healthcare, Selassie failed to

synthesize the ancient and modern forces that plagued the periphery. He updated the

gebbar system by replacing tributes with taxes, but retained the land-tenure structure to

please the Amhara landlords and to reinforce the traditional patterns of peasant

oppression. The Emperor repeatedly sacrificed justice for his people to achieve a "higher

level" of power for himself.

Funneling foreign missions into the "open" areas of the religious field, the Emperor

expanded his control and incorporated "others" into his modern society. Despite the

nationalistic fervor of the post-Italian era, Selassie welcomed SIM and SEM into the periphery, while severing the EOC ties to Egypt. By displacing the EOC as the primary producer of cultural meaning, the Emperor limited the Church's ability to defend itself against a Protestant explosion. In fact, Selassie's positioning of foreign missions in the EOC's weakest areas allowed the societies and the subsequent indigenous churches to build significant momentum with little direct competition. He permitted SIM and SEM to determine the menu of modernity, misrecognizing the clinic and school as instruments of assimilation and obligation.

Donald Levine (2001) portrays the Oromo system as composed of numerous tribes with distinct identities and a "keen sense of alienation" from each other (p. 135). Historically, localized religious rituals and social structures promoted inclusivity that precluded a sense of nationhood and ultimately contributed to the success of Amhara expansion. I posit that the mission presence in southern and western Ethiopia generated new conceptions of nationhood that defied the Oromo system paradigm. As bands of *Amagnyoch* mobilized into large indigenous denominations, new religious rituals and additional specialists emerged with an exportable form of Christianity. Non-Orthodox believers competed for space in the religious field, and new voices surfaced on the political field. National Evangelical churches, including the Pentecostal movements, intensified Oromo and Maale ethnic awareness and redefined the terms "Ethiopian" and "Christian" apart from their Amhara roots. Additionally, the indigenous denominations "equipped the periphery with the tools necessary for comprehending the structural aspects of oppression and so forming the basis for political oppression" (Eide, 2000, p. 61). In the context of Abyssinian oppression, the mission structures and the identity-

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generating power of conversion provided the Oromo and Maale with dissenting voices to confront injustices, such as the *gebbar* system.

At the end of his reign, Selassie's authority, "based in the shifting sand of charisma, tradition, and feudalism, was not adequate to maintain the loyalty of significant groups within the population" (Schwab, 1979, p. 142). For centuries, the patron-client dyad served as the fundamental form of control in the Amhara system, but as resistant communities emerged from the periphery, Selassie lost the power of obligation. Ironically, the educated elite, whom Selassie called "indispensable" to the development of a modern nation, would prove to be "the grave diggers of the old regime and the generators of the Ethiopian Revolution," (Bahru Zewde, 2001, p. 220). In an unsustainable balancing act, the Emperor attempted to satisfy traditional forces, such as the EOC, and the modern forces of mission Christianity. His ambiguous political decisions delivered schools, clinics, and the Amhara language to the periphery, but did little to increase his overall power.

Oromo Christians such as Gudina Tumsa represent the transformative potential of missions in Ethiopia. Although groomed by the EECMY and educated in the United States, Gudina looked beyond the categories of mission and denomination to propose a theology tailored to Ethiopian needs. His vision contributed to a Christocentric theology that influenced the Oromo in western Ethiopia (Eide, 2000, p. 60). In a memorandum to the President of the EECMY, Emmanuel Abraham, Gudina explains his approach:

> Theology must grow out of the daily experiences from our dealing with ordinary affairs of life as we experience them in our situation, in our cultural setting, in our economic life, in our political experience and in our social practice….An

indigenous theology in the Ethiopian context may be defined as a translation of

the Biblical sources ... to the pattern of our people that they may feel at home with

the Gospel of love (as cited in Eide, p. 277).

Gudina viewed human needs such as "healing" and "restoration" through the lens of

Ethiopian "wholeness," which integrates the material and spiritual needs of men and

women. Criticizing western missiology, Gudina challenged the distinct civic and

religious spheres within the Lutheran church and critiqued the "old emphasis" of mission

societies that treat education and medicine as mere avenues for conversion (Eide, 2001,

para. 39-41). For Gudina, notions such as "Jesus saves," which are central to all Gospel

proclamation, should also be essential to social action because "there is no distinction

between curing from malaria, pneumonia and saving from sin" (para. 20). To say "Jesus

Christ saves," Gudina continues, "means that He literally cures from physical diseases as

well as from the burden of sin" (para. 20). As an advocate of the "whole man," Gudina

emerged as one of the most respected voices in the contextualization of Protestant

Christianity for Oromo Ethiopians. During the early, volatile stages of Ethiopian

revolution (1974), Gudina promoted human rights, advocating that the Church serve as

the model for the state (para. 57). Disputing the atheist ideology Mengistu Haile

Mariam's revolutionary government, Gudina challenged those on the metafield of power

and, consequently, was executed. Considered a prophetic voice and martyr within the

EECMY, Gudina provides one example of how foreign missions contributed to the

creation of powerful forces in the religious and political fields.

Tensions among mission societies affected the ecumenical trajectory of their early

church movements. In one example, SEM and the EECMY encouraged infant baptism in

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accordance with their Lutheran origin. Conversely, SIM and the KHC reserved baptism for adults who made conscious commitments to Jesus Christ. Dissention also extended into the quotidian behavior of new converts. SIM discouraged the consumption of *tella*, *tej* (homemade beer and honey wine), and tobacco, but SEM acquiesced to such cultural practices. Failed collaboration over doctrinal and behavioral differences not only promoted denominationalism but also quenched the ecumenical movement that originated from the explosive growth during the Italian occupation. Despite the mission tension, churches made independent attempts to organize the like-minded voices on the religious field. Originating in Welega in 1944, the Conference of Ethiopia Evangelical Churches (CEEC) drew delegates irrespective of their denominational backgrounds, but excluded any missionaries (Launhardt, 2004). Convening annually until 1963, members attempted to form a united Evangelical church with a common confession. As missions flourished in modern Ethiopia, and additional organizations entered the religious field, denominational distinction overcame "the impulse for a nationwide pan-denominational movement" (Tibebe Eshete, 2009, p.100). The CEEC failed to form a single evangelical denomination or even a permanent federation of churches (Launhardt). The ecumenical spirit that had once swept through the periphery faded as the Ethiopian government recognized the EECMY and KHC as denominations.

Aasulv Lande (1998) traces the development of denominationalism to the fundamental pressures placed on the mission societies by their leadership and donors. In the early years, societies reveled in conversion numbers, which "made the building of congregations almost irresistible…" (p. 189). Although the extensive details of the ecumenical movement in Ethiopia require further study, I am left considering the

potential political power of a national ecumenical movement. What if the mission

societies and national churches had recognized the transformative power of this

ecumenical impulse and encouraged Protestant Christians to form a united Evangelical

body in the 1960s, altering the volume and strength of their resistance? Consider the

radical potential of an organized movement, accumulating symbolic capital to

transubstantiate into political power during an era of famine, war, and political instability.

Such Ethiopians, "employed for the benefit of the nation" could even have hastened

Selassie's departure for the sake of their "common good."

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