Dr Jörg Haustein, SOAS University of London
joerg.haustein@soas.ac.uk

# Theorizing Pentecostal Historiography: Persecution and Historical Memory in Ethiopia

History has always been an important subject in Pentecostal studies, but the scholarly representation of Pentecostal narratives about the past routinely runs into two major difficulties: 1) how to represent the multiplicity and divergence of the movement and its historical accounts, and 2) how to accommodate the Pentecostal claims of divine intervention.

With regard to the first issue, scholars of Pentecostalism have increasingly sought for multicentric and poly-linear modes of writing history, in order to accommodate the fragmented and plural historical relations of Pentecostals and Charismatics. Allan Anderson, for example, has argued that the dominant North American Pentecostal histories are marked by certain biases, and therefore have largely been unable to recognize and to take into account the many voices and origins involved in the history of global Pentecostalism. (Anderson 2004, 2005, 2007) A predominantly white, male, and US-American perspective has eclipsed the contributions, interests, and even names of Pentecostal pioneers worldwide, leading to a geographically centered and hagiographic tale of Pentecostal spread: from an American Jerusalem (usually Azusa Street) to the ends of the earth. Anderson has therefore called for a revision of Pentecostal history from a global perspective, which would take into account the "many 'Jerusalems'" (Anderson 2004, 171) in the story of Pentecostal origin and would recover a Pentecostal "history from below" by "reading between the lines" (Anderson 2005, 158–9) of the early Western Pentecostal missionary documents. These multiple and parallel beginnings of Pentecostalism are not meant to denote a providential origin of Pentecostalism, and Anderson has laboriously traced many links and connections between these places in early Pentecostal history. (See esp. Anderson 2007) However, a central problem of relating the multiple sources of Pentecostalism remains: the early global network of Christians and missionaries was a fluid configuration without a fixed identity, which of course conflicts with the historical interest of identifying the origin(s) of "Pentecostalism." Instead it would seem as if it was the writing of Pentecostal history itself that reified Pentecostalism as a subject for historical inquiry, since historians began to project a fixed group identity into this fluid network of Christians and in the course "adopted" certain revival movements as the point of origin. (Bergunder 2010, 56–64) Furthermore, Anderson's interest "of reading between the lines" of the dominant historical source

archive also comes with some difficulties. This proposal is not only a methodological appeal which "calls for caution," (van der Laan 2010, 210) but it also invites an important theoretical challenge from post-colonial philosophy. For as Gayatri Spivak has argued, attributing a certain subject position and intentionality to unrepresented individuals, tends to reproduce the very colonial configuration a historian aims to criticize, because "letting the subaltern speak for themselves" the historian's text is an effective way of hiding the subjectivity and political intentions of the representing power. (Spivak 1988)

The second historiographical issue, namely how to accommodate the frequent assertions of God's intervention in history, has been discussed most extensively by the Pentecostal historian William Kay, who argued for a providential approach. In an earlier pursuit of the problem, Kay contended that "any historical account must be recognisable by its original participants," because otherwise "we assume that the interpretation of primary sources [...] may legitimately be alien to the providers of the primary source." (Kay 1992, 59) However, this seems to be too much to ask of the historical ethos, since historians must retain the ability to criticize ideology and thereby to differ from their primary sources. More recently Kay has offered an interesting philosophical approach to the possibility of providential historiography by drawing on Karl Popper's theory of science. (See Kay 2010) On the one hand, Kay utilized Popper's rejection of historicism for criticizing historical approaches to Pentecostalism that rely on functionalist explanations, cultural categories, or the identification of "historical roots," since they are all organized by larger theoretical frameworks: either a certain function, a "broad and slippery concept" of culture, or the identification of the phenomenon of Pentecostalism.[1] On the other hand, Kay saw a certain convergence of providential historical accounts with Popper's rejection of inductive reasoning and his affirmation of the necessary perspectivity of history. However, while the rejection of functionalism, culturalism, or essentialism may easily be based on Popper, it may be doubtful whether he would have liked to see them replaced, of all, by a providential history. Popper saw the natural sciences "as one of the greatest spiritual adventures that man has yet known," (Popper 2002, 50) he refuted a foundational distinction between the laws of physics and history,[2] and he rejected any notion of historical

---

1  The mentioned types of Pentecostal historiography are based on an article by the Pentecostal historian Augustus Cerillo (1997). Cerillo basically argued that all four approaches (including the providential approach) have their strengths and weaknesses and therefore "[t]aken together they promise a way toward a more comprehensive and historically satisfying synthesis of the story of the emergence of the American Pentecostal religious tradition." (Cerillo Jr. 1997, 52)
2  See esp. Popper (2002, 96–132) While Popper argued against the existence of historical laws that could explain the regularity or historical necessity of certain events, he upheld that the causality of a single event could be described by natural science. Providential historiography, however, tends to offer causalities for single events that transcend the realm of physical description.

foresight.[3] Moreover, he probably would not have been a friend of Pentecostal providentialism, given his awkward fictional hypothesis, that one day scientific progress may be stopped by an "epidemic of mysticism." (Popper 2002, 145) More importantly, providential histories do not simply argue for the epistemological possibility that God caused the Pentecostal revival, but they usually come with an eschatological outlook and a theological narrative of why and how God works in certain situations. However, both of these features are uncomfortably analogous to Popper's definition of historicism, namely, having a principal aim of historical prediction and attaining the same by "discovering the 'rhythms' or the 'patterns', the 'laws' or the 'trends' that underlie the evolution of history." (Popper 2002, 3) Altogether, Kay has raised an eminently important issue for historians of Pentecostalism by looking for adequate theories and methods for accommodating and not just sidestepping the Pentecostal assertions of divine intervention. This historiographical task, however, ultimately cannot be solved by reproducing the encountered stories in a phenomenological account of Pentecostal experience, or by arguing for the epistemological possibility of providential history. Providential accounts are first and foremost *theological* narratives about the past, and should be interpreted accordingly.

So with regard to both issues central to the writing of histories of Pentecostalism the analysis of Pentecostal historiography emerges as a central point: The Pentecostal sense of origin (and identity) arguably rose within a later historical debate, and the Pentecostal assertions of divine intervention should be understood as theological assertions about the past which in turn determined the movement's outlook and developments. The primary task for the historian, therefore, is one of interpretation. Rather than simply mining his or her sources for factual data about past events, historians of Pentecostalism are faced with a multi-layered archive of narratives, which need to be read as what they are: meaningful stories about the past.

This postulate about the task of the historian converges with a number of recent theories about history which are inspired by post-colonial and post-structuralist philosophy and call into question the realism of the historiographical operation by focusing instead on the literary, political, historical, and philosophical aspects of the encountered discourses about the past. This article seeks to initiate the conversation between these theories and Pentecostal historiography, illustrated by way of a specific example from the history of Ethiopian Pentecostalism. The article will provide a brief and synoptic historical orientation about Pentecostalism in Ethiopia, introduce a specific example, and

---

3   Cf. Popper (2002, 37–40) Popper rejected any kind of large-scale historical prediction, given that the "human factor is the ultimate and wayward element in social life and in all social institutions." (Popper 2002, 146)

then discuss the same in light of four theoretical insights from the above-mentioned background. The overall aim is to show that by giving central room to the analysis of historical narratives, histories of Pentecostalism can better incorporate the plurality of the movement as well as its providential outlook, and yet stay true to the academic rigor of the historical methods.

## *Ethiopian Pentecostalism and Persecution[4]*

Ethiopian Pentecostalism began fairly late with the arrival of Finnish and Swedish mission initiatives that entered the country in the 1950s. The most important early centres were the Finnish mission work centre in Addis Ababa, and the Swedish Philadelphia Church Mission in Awasa. In the 1960s a growing number of young Ethiopians sought and experienced Spirit baptism, not only at these mission centres, but also in independent revival groups who had been in contact with Ethiopians at the missions and with Pentecostal literature. Most of these mission-independent initiatives later converged in Addis Ababa, where the young Christians founded the Ethiopian Full Gospel Believers' Church (EFGBC) in 1967. The church selected its first leaders and invited two Swedish missionaries to ordain them as elders. However, despite this early missionary involvement, the EFGBC mostly kept its distance from missionaries and asserted its independence.

Only a few months after its foundation, the church applied for registration as a religious association. This was a bold attempt reflecting the modernizing impulses of the young Pentecostal leaders, given that in public sentiment and political reality the Ethiopian Orthodox Church was the only acceptable representative of Ethiopian Christianity. All Christian groups outside of the Orthodox Church were operating under the "Regulations Governing the Activities of Missions" from 1944, and the first legal provisions for religious freedom had been put into place only very recently. The 1955 revision of the constitution for the first time had provided some measure of freedom of religious practice, and consequently the Civil Code of 1960 created the possibility of religious associations outside the Orthodox Church, followed by guidelines for the registration of such associations in 1966. When the EFGBC explicitly invoked these guidelines less than a year later, they became the first religious group to test this new legislation. However, the Ethiopian government was not prepared for this, and after some months of internal deliberations the application was rejected by the Minister of the Interior, which also entailed the closure of the church's meeting places. (See Haustein 2011a, 2–7, 138–151)

---

4   For a detailed history of Ethiopian Pentecostalism, see Haustein (2011a).

The EFGBC at first complied with this ruling and relied on smaller meetings in private homes and on mission property. However, the closure did little to stop the growth of Pentecostal groups and the government again began to pressure Pentecostals from the end of 1971 onward, culminating in the arrest of approximately 250 worshippers on Sunday, 27 August 1972. The legal and political aftermath of this incident did not turn out in favour of the Pentecostals, even though they had managed to bring their case to the attention of the international press[5] and found some Lutheran supporters who brought about an investigation by the World Council of Churches. Nevertheless, the EFGBC and other Pentecostal groups were not able to gain official recognition under Haile Selassie's reign and remained underground until the revolution of 1974. This revolution at first came with the promise of more civil liberties and the EFGBC almost immediately resumed public meetings and set up a new national structure. However, the revolution soon turned toward scientific socialism. The revolutionary leaders violently co-opted the Orthodox Church and Islam and pressured other religious groups. By 1978 the last EFGBC church had been closed. During this time, the Pentecostal missions were also forced out of their projects and their churches were closed as well.

After the regime of the Derg had been brought to an end by a coalition of guerilla liberation movements in 1991, the new government allowed Pentecostal churches and missions to resume public meetings and returned much of their dispossessed estate. All churches reported significant gains when they reopened, and continued to grow at an astonishing rate. Between 1984 and 2007 the Protestant share in the Ethiopian population grew from 5.5 to 18.6 percent, with most Protestant churches adopting Pentecostal theology and practices.[6] The two largest evangelical churches in Ethiopia, the Kale Heywet Church (Baptist) and the Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (Lutheran), have theologically accommodated the Charismatic movement and are often indistinguishable from their Pentecostal counterparts in popular beliefs and worship practices. (See Haustein 2011b)

As a result there is now a vivid landscape of churches, smaller ministries, evangelists, etc., which one needs to study when investigating Ethiopian Pentecostal history. In such a diverse landscape, there are many claims to stake in telling history, and the stories encountered in interviews, archives, grey literature and publications are accordingly diverse. Moreover, due to the political difficulties the movement encountered, there is little contemporaneous material and most of the publications,

5   A number of newspaper and journal articles reported this case, the most prominent being an article in the international edition of Newsweek. (See Anon. 1973)
6   Cf. Haustein (2011a, 18) Much of this growth has come at the expense of the Orthodox church, which has contributed to the already strained ecumenical relations in Ethiopia.

reports and historical commemorations date to the past two decades. In consequence, there is a sizeable pool of narratives to be sorted, many of which are tied to denominational or individual interests driving a certain aspect of the story. The challenge therefore lies in how to understand and accommodate the many sources and their differences in a history of the movement, without reducing the narrative abundance to a skeleton of facts. Instead histories should preserve the political thrust of informants as part of a historical analysis which goes beyond merely reproducing the plurality of encountered assertions.

The following theoretical considerations about such a history will be exemplified using a specific document that is related to the oppression of Pentecostals during the Haile Selassie years. In 1971, the Imperial government's Chief Officer of Public Security sent a circular letter addressed to the mayor of Addis Ababa, the 14 provinces of Ethiopia, the Ministry of Education, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, and the police headquarters.[7] He reminded the executive authorities that Pentecostal meetings had been forbidden in 1967 and insisted that all Pentecostal meeting places must be shut down, and that anyone operating outside of this order should be brought before the law. Much of the letter is based on slanderous gossip and stereotypes about Pentecostals: they engage in sexual orgies with young boys and girls who are failing in school, they stage fraudulent miracles, they disrespect the national flag and they show their disregard for Ethiopian traditions, since they "let their hair grow, which is against the culture, wear tight pants, and stand in groups in the public places in people's way, insulting the elderly people, which is totally outside cultural custom."

## *Narrativity: Framing the Story of Persecution*

When comparing how this letter is used in different accounts, enormous differences appear. The earliest and arguably most influential history of Ethiopian Pentecostalism was written by the Norwegian missiologist Tormod Engelsviken in 1975. Engelsviken had served as a Lutheran missionary in Ethiopia from 1971 to 1973, and thus was in Ethiopia when the arrests of 1972 occurred. In the following months he was personally involved by facilitating international contacts for the Pentecostals, studying their movement and seeking to solicit support for Pentecostals in the Lutheran Mekane Yesus Church. In 1975, while he was teaching in the USA, he compiled his research in a so-called "Documentary Report"(Engelsviken 1975). This report contained a full-fledged persecution account, which presented the story of an oppressive regime discriminating

---

7   A facsimile of this letter can be found in Zewde (2001, 139–142).

against Pentecostals in an unjustifiable church-state alliance with the Orthodox Church. (Cf. Haustein 2011a, 139–142) The above-mentioned letter was centrally featured in Engelsviken's account. He quoted it in full, devoted some time to discussing its "absurdity" and "obvious inconsistencies", and finally noted that "maybe the most disgusting aspect of the whole letter was the official seal of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church."[8] Engelsviken concluded that

> the letter resembles in its groundless accusation of immorality and political and religious corruption the suspicions among the pagan people in the Roman Empire in the early days of Christendom. Now as then these rumours were used as a pretext for persecution.[9]

Overall it can be said that Engelsviken set up a strong narrative of systemic persecution, for which the letter was an important supporting document. It was connected to the two institutions Engelsviken saw behind the pressure on Pentecostals, the Imperial court and the Orthodox church. Moreover, the obvious absurdities the letter contained delegitimized the political rationale of both actors and underscored the observation of systemic injustice.

Quite a different persecution account was provided by the EFGBC itself in a jubilee magazine of 1978. (Full Gospel Believers' Church 1978) The historical sketch provided here mentioned many of the sufferings the church was subjected to, but always asserted that everything was directed or allowed by God for the growth of his church. Even the failed registration bid was presented in such a manner: having accompanied their application with prayers and supplications, the Pentecostals at first were disappointed with God when their registration was denied, but later realized that God utilized the closure of the church for further growth. (Cf. Haustein 2011a, 143–145) Accordingly, the letter by the Officer of Public Security was only mentioned briefly alongside some of the rumours contained in it. However, unlike Engelsviken who used the letter to identify the church's enemies, the EFGBC magazine simply concluded that it was impossible to find out the real political actors behind the gossip and threats. Instead, it was important to remember, that all ministry was established by Ethiopians for the glory of God. (Full Gospel Believers' Church 1978, 17)

A third type of persecution narrative can be found in contemporaneous missionary correspondence, most prominently in letters by the Swedish missionary Tage Johansson. Johansson worked for the Philadelphia Church Mission in Addis Ababa and had good contacts in the EFGBC.[10] He often signalled that the success of the mission depended on its good contacts with the government, and

---

8  Regarding this seal and the overall role of the Orthodox church in the persecution of Pentecostals, cf. Haustein (2011a, 151–160).
9  Ibid., p. 149.
10 For the relationship between Swedish missionaries and the Full Gospel Believers' Church, see Haustein (2011a, 132–136).

therefore he had no interest in the conflict escalating. Accordingly, he deemed that the whole issue called for high-level negotiations, and he repeatedly offered his help in contacting the Imperial family. Though Johansson's correspondence occasionally told of slanderous rumours against Pentecostals, these were never directly connected with the government, and the letter by the Security Officer was not mentioned, despite the fact that he gave a quite extended reports about the events. It is unlikely that Johansson knew nothing of the document, since it was widely disseminated and even quoted in a Newsweek article in the beginning of 1973. (Anon. 1973) Yet by quoting the government's use of unsubstantiated gossip against Pentecostals, Johansson would have undermined his argument that the Imperial court is a reliable partner for negotiating an agreement.

It is important not to level the differences between these accounts of Pentecostal persecution and the role the letter plays therein, but to use them as a point for analysis. For as the historian Hayden White has already argued in his *Metahistory* in 1973, "there can be no 'proper history' which is not at the same time 'philosophy of history'." (White 1973, xi) In this book, White famously subjected 19th century historians (and philosophers) to a literary analysis, distinguishing three types of historical explanation, each with four possible modes. (Cf. White 1973, 7–31) The first way of historical explanation is "by emplotment," for which White proposed the four literary plots of Romance, Tragedy, Comedy, or Satire. The second level is explanation by argument, "seeking to explicate 'the point of it all' " by way of a Formist, Organicist, Mechanistic, or Contextualist approach. Finally, histories must contain some sort of ideological implication for the present, for which White suggested the possible world views of Anarchy, Conservatism, Radicalism, and Liberalism. Based on this structure, he asserted that any historian has to develop an explanatory strategy of selecting and combining the different modes of emplotment, argument, and ideological implication, in a "poetic act which precedes the formal analysis of the field" and in which "the historian both creates his object of analysis and predetermines the conceptual strategies he will use to explain it." (White 1973, 31)

White's clearly structuralist scheme of interpreting 19th century historians may not be directly applicable to the study of Pentecostal history, but his mode of analysis – to study historical sources as literary works by querying their plots, arguments and ideological implications – is useful for mapping out the differences encountered in the sources. Engelsviken created an antagonistic narrative plot: an unjust political regime inflicted persecution on the Pentecostals, who in turn insisted on their fundamental human right of assembly. The argument is that the regime's actions against the Pentecostals were wholly illegitimate and that its actions were of malicious intent. Since

Engelsviken's documentary report already looked back on the demise of the Ethiopian empire in 1975, the ideological implication was clear as well: unjust systems must be resisted and will ultimately fail. The EFGBC, on the other hand, presented a narrative plot of providence. There may be ups and downs for human observers who do not always understand what is happening, but behind the scenes God was guiding his church all along and effected growth. The argument was that history is in God's hands and human actors cannot fully control the outcome of their actions. This is why it was not important to tell who had authored the slanderous rumours and the letter, because what mattered was how God used these hostilities to grow his church. The ideological implication of course was that God is the author of history and that it would serve political regimes well not to oppose what he is doing. For the Pentecostal missionary Tage Johansson in turn, who reported about the events before Haile Selassie's government fell, the plot of the story was open-ended: A conflict between Pentecostals and the political regime had occurred and must be resolved somehow. His argument was that both Pentecostals and the Imperial government were legitimate parties in a conflict of interest and that the future of Pentecostal Christianity in Ethiopia depended on the outcome of their actions. Escalating the conflict would likely bring further trouble for the Ethiopian Christians and even the missions, so the ideological implication was that Pentecostals must respect and work with their governments as much as possible.[11]

The point of these deliberations is not to decide which presentation of the events is more real or accurate, but to show how narratives create the reality of history, i.e. as an antagonistic struggle between freedom and oppression, as God's sovereign hand, or as a political system that must be navigated somehow. As Hayden White pointed out in a later essay:

> [E]vents are real not because they occurred but because, first, they were remembered and, second, they are capable of finding a place in a chronologically ordered sequence. In order, however, for an account of them to be considered a historical account, it is not enough that they be recorded in the order of their original occurrence. It is the fact that they can be recorded otherwise, in an order of narrative, that makes them, at one and the same time, questionable as to their authenticity and susceptible to being considered as tokens of reality. [...] The authority of the historical narrative is the authority of reality itself; the historical account endows this reality with form and thereby makes it desirable by the imposition upon its processes of the formal coherency that only stories possess. (White 1987, 20)

Through this formal coherency, according to White, history delivers a temporary closure to our world, in which "reality wears the mask of a meaning, the completeness and fullness of which we can only imagine, never experience." (White 1987, 21)

11  For a more detailed substantiation of these observations, see Haustein (2011a, 138–151).

## *Discourse: The Empty Signifier of Persecution*

This desire for a closure of the "real" can be connected to Laclau and Mouffe's political theory of discourse, which is motivated by post-structuralist thought. Their understanding of discourse fundamentally rests on the established semiotic insight that "language (and by extension, all signifying systems) is a system of differences, that linguistic identities—values—are purely relational." (Laclau 1994, 168) This relational interdependence of signifiers also means that "the totality of language is involved in each single act of signification," (Laclau 1994, 168) which in turn presupposes its closure, because if "the meaning of a term was purely relational and determined only by its opposition to all the others" then there needs to be a limitation to these relations by way of a closed system in order to fix the meaning of every element.

Laclau and Mouffe insist that not only language but any "discursive totality," like society or history, "never exists in the form of a simply given and delimited positivity," instead "the relational logic will be incomplete and pierced by contingency." (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 110–1) Closure therefore is impossible in a positive or ontological sense, but it is also necessary, because without a "fictitious fixing of meaning there would be no meaning at all." (Laclau 1996, 205) However, the limits of this system cannot be represented directly, because if a discourse is a system of differences, the outside of the system cannot be related to its interior in a mere relation of opposition or contradiction, since these are differential relations themselves and would again collapse the system into an extended flow of differences. Therefore, the outside of a discourse can only be conceptualized as "radical negativity," as the antagonistic subversion of the conceptual system as such. This subversive negativity beyond the system limits, in turn, is represented within the discourse by collapsing the differences within the system into a chain of equivalences: a discourse suggests a fundamental sameness with respect to the outside antagonist. This chain of equivalences, which Laclau calls an "empty signifier," is established in a hegemonic operation, temporarily halting the flow of differences and thereby establishing a discursive identity. The popular articulation of this discursive identity is what constitutes a group, or "the people" in Laclau's terms. (Cf. Laclau 2005, 67–171) All differences between members of the group and their demands are levelled by the overarching antagonism of the empty signifier, which also stands for the legitimacy of "the people" versus the outsiders.

What does this mean for our example? The political context surrounding the letter and the arrests of Pentecostals was sufficiently complex. Pentecostals negotiated with the Emperor and the Orthodox Church, and Pentecostals had sympathizers within the government and the Imperial family.

Missionaries sought to be involved in this process with their own interests, while many Ethiopian Pentecostals strove to maintain their mission independence. Moreover, there were differences of opinion in the EFGBC regarding the right political strategy. Finally, the government not only came out against the EFGBC but other religious communities as well: Jehova's Witnesses, Oneness Pentecostals and even the Finnish Pentecostal mission. This flurry of actors, groups, interests and political relations is difficult to endow with historical meaning, especially in a persecution narrative. So discursive closure is needed in order to clearly identify the persecutors, the persecuted community, and the fundamental antagonism between the two.

Such moments of closure and antagonism can be identified in our letter, when comparing the Amharic original to the English translation provided by Engelsviken.[12] The English translation had two important omissions. First, a sentence was missing from the first paragraph which declared that the church had already been denied a permit in 1967, and stated the reason for this decision as well as the fact that the founders of the church had been told not to work without a permit. By omitting the government's own legal justification, the translation obscured the Imperial court's rationality and ultimately excluded it from sane political discourse, especially since now the presented gossip in the letter was the only point of reference for the government's reasoning. The second omission concerned the identity of the persecuted community. All references to the Jehovah's Witnesses, who in the Amharic original are used almost synonymously with Pentecostals, were purged from the English translation. Thus the homogeneity and theological identity of the persecuted community was established.

Both aspects, the obscuring of the persecutor's political logic as means of totally antagonizing the same, as well as the levelling of differences within the persecuted community can be traced in a number of other sources as well: from the characterization of the Patriarch as the actual arch-enemy of Pentecostals to the concealment of differences within the EFGBC. (Cf. Haustein 2011a, 151–167)

It is obvious, therefore, that the persecution narrative relies on a fundamental antagonism between persecutor and persecuted. The empty signifier representing this antagonism is the persecuted community: the victims of persecution are represented in a fixed and united group identity, which also requires the exclusion of theologically heterogeneous believers. The rationalities of the

---

12  See Engelsviken (1975, 147–8). Engelsviken probably received this translation from Ethiopian Pentecostals themselves, and it may be assumed that the translated letter was part of an "information package" that Pentecostals gave to Western journalists since excerpts of the same translation were quoted in newspaper and magazine articles, cf. Haustein (2011a, 159).

persecutor are obscured since they would undermine the fundamental antagonism and allow relations of difference. Dissolving this fundamental and pre-configured antagonism between persecutor and persecuted, either by allowing the government to be seen as a rational actor or by admitting heterogeneity among the persecuted would have fundamentally undercut the persecution narrative.

The establishment of a persecution discourse therefore is an example of narrative closure, which – like any historical production – relies on the editing of sources, the characterization of protagonists, and the omission of elements not fitting the narrative. This is not to deny the reality of Ethiopian Pentecostal sufferings or to imply historical fraud, but to point out that the telling of history is always a hegemonic and thereby political operation.

## *Genealogy: The History of the Persecution Discourse*

The resulting configuration of historical knowledge has a history in and of itself which also needs to be subjected to historical analysis. This is of course an established point in historical research. Historians explore the genesis of present historical knowledge by following references and searching for veiled or forgotten material, ideally arriving at a plethora of sources and interpretations. However, as Michel de Certeau has pointed out, the practice of writing history then inverts the direction of historical inquiry: the past, which was the vanishing point during research, now becomes the point of origin, whereas the present, from where the researcher departed, becomes the goal of the resulting text. (See Certeau 1988, 86–99) In other words: historical writings propose an origin in the past (i.e. the inviolable identity of events), and aim to speak into the present by way of instruction. According to de Certeau the historical text therefore is a mirror writing obfuscating the historical practice, which, by contrast, originated in the present and spoke its findings into the past.

Against such invented origins and the implicit finality of historical writings, Michel Foucault has proposed the genealogy as an " 'effective' history", which "opposes itself to the search for 'origins'" and rejects "the meta-historical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies." (Foucault 1977, 140) Using Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morality* as a point of departure Foucault sought to "dispel the chimeras of origin" (Foucault 1977, 143) by two related, but entirely different concepts, *Herkunft* and *Entstehung*, descent and emergence. *Herkunft* or descent means

> [...] to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion; it is to identify the accidents,
> the minute deviations—or conversely, the complete reversals—the errors, the false

appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us. (Foucault 1977, 152)

Entstehung or emergence, on the other hand, should not be viewed as "the final term of a historical development," but the genealogy must seek "to reestablish the various systems of subjection: not the anticipatory power of meaning, but the hazardous play of dominations." (Foucault 1977, 148) Thus, descent recovers historical disparity instead of the singularity of origin, and emergence disperses the notion of finality by historicising historical knowledge in the struggle of concrete forces.

In the case of our example, Engelsviken's persecution account now is the established version of history about the events of 1972. However, the archived writings of the Swedish missionary Tage Johansson may help to recover the contemporaneous disparity of opinions and interpretations, since he was a vociferous critic of the political strategy the Ethiopian Pentecostals adopted and therefore cited informants from this group who agreed with him. Writing in the wake of the arrests of 1972, Johansson relayed information by one elder of the EFGBC, which indicated that a certain faction in the church had deliberately escalated the conflict. (Johansson 1972) In a later report, he considered the Ethiopian Pentecostals' attempts at securing press attention and ecumenical support to be naïve and unsuccessful, and he bemoaned that they would not seek a diplomatic solution. (Johansson 1974a) Moreover, Johansson was exasperated about a case where one of the church elders allegedly received 4,000 dollars in private for letting the story go to the press while refusing to seek negotiations, at a time when members of his church were held in prison. However, Johansson's voice of dissent quickly disappeared from the narrative archive, which can be seen in his correspondence with Engelsviken. In 1974 Engelsviken wrote to Johansson in the preparation of his "Documentary Report", and among other questions he asked whether there were any points on behalf of the Ethiopians that needed correction. Johansson, who did not know Engelsviken personally, simply answered that the "leadership of the Full Gospel had [...] very fine teachers," who instructed everyone to behave wisely. (Johansson 1974b) Moreover, he asserted that whatever problems there may have been, they were caused by a group absolutely not belonging to this church. Apparently the as of then still difficult situation for Pentecostals in Ethiopia made it impossible for Johansson to say anything else to an unfamiliar researcher, but in effect he kept his insights out of the historical discourse. A similar observation may be made regarding the providential narrative in the above-mentioned EFGBC jubilee magazine from 1978. Since the church was closed by the Derg soon after this document was produced, it did not have the means to

publish and prominently place further historical writings. Engelsviken, however, was able to make his report available in the relevant seminars, from where it proliferated into seminary theses and other publications and remained the only comprehensive treatment of Ethiopian Pentecostalism for over a decade.

Thus a preliminary genealogical inquiry into the making of the Ethiopian persecution discourse indicates that at the time of the events there was a significant diversity of interpretations, opinions and strategies regarding the political situation. However, due to the political circumstances of the following years, Engelsviken's narrative of systemic injustice became the most important historical interpretation, whereas Johansson's dissent or the EFGBC's providential reading did not remain in the historical discourse.

## Context: A Circular Conclusion

The analysis of Pentecostal historiography and its history therefore is an important and often neglected path to understanding Pentecostal identity and history. As was argued with Hayden White, historiography is not an unavoidable by-product of writing about the past, but a necessary feature in making history real. The selection of events reported, the narrative structure adopted, the arguments implied or made explicit – they all give a certain "closure" to the past, and they make possible the articulation of history as well as of historical meaning. As the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe has shown, such closures are necessary but inherently arbitrary, and therefore they are subject to political dynamics, as different groups, sources, and authors argue for the "correct" representation and interpretation of past events. For the historian, such debates are an important field of study, and Foucault's concept of genealogy can provide a sense of direction in how to navigate this field: On the one hand historical writings should seek to restore the multifarious complexity of the past, the colourful mesh of articulations and actions which cannot be reduced to simple cause-effect relations or one story only. On the other hand they should show how certain interpretations – and thereby reductions – of the historical plurality have become possible and attained a certain hegemony in the historical archive. In this way, history remains an important ally in the critique of ideology.

This historical approach can also provide new ways of dealing with the initially mentioned problems in the writing of Pentecostal history. First, the multiplicity and divergence of sources is a resource rather than a nuisance, because it is no longer necessary to argue for one story of what "actually" happened, but to restore the past plethora of voices and opinions, which would

sometimes make it impossible or even unreasonable to determine whether a certain movement is part of "Pentecostalism", what the origin of a church may be, or how a new religious movement should relate to a regime not offering religious freedom. If this restoration of historical complexity is paired with a critique of uni-linear historical narratives, it becomes particularly effective. One need not "read between the lines" of the dominant historical tale in order to criticize the same; a literary critique of narratives often enough has the same effect. Moreover, carving out the blind spot of histories and leaving it empty may be a better way to represent the agency of the subaltern rather than to attempt to reconstruct their motives and actions from sources that were not interested in them. Similarly, a critical reading of the dominant persecution narrative may uncover how it tends to eclipse the political dimension of the persecuted community, including its own dissent. The goal, however, is not to draw up an alternative tale of how the Ethiopian church should have behaved in its oppressive environment, but to restore the contemporaneous complexity and difficulty of the political decisions that Pentecostals were required to make.

With regard to the second issue in Pentecostal historiography, the representation of providence, the approach sketched above underscores the historiographical relevance of providential narratives to history without needing to speculate about their philosophical or empirical possibility. Instead, the analysis of persecution accounts may delineate the theological and historical circumstances of providential narratives as well as the political power they entail. In a time of political turmoil, only months before the EFGBC was closed, the church articulated its defiance of worldly powers through its providential history of persecution: whatever oppression rulers may bring and however difficult it may be to understand "God's ways," he will use everything to build his kingdom. It is also clear why the providential was less featured in the other accounts: the Lutheran missionary Tormod Engelsviken was interested in a systemic critique of the Ethiopian empire and the Pentecostal missionary Tage Johansson in resolving the situation. Therefore they needed to base their narratives on the rationality (or irrationality in Engelsviken's case) of the political process, and a providential reading would not have helped them to make their argument. Therefore, as Kay has rightly demanded, it is important to include the Pentecostal assertions of providence in the writing of Pentecostal history, but not in order to copy their narrative thrust or to accommodate the feelings of Pentecostal informants, but in order to recover and retain a fuller dimension of the Ethiopian Pentecostal self-understanding, which still governs much of their outlook on politics. Providential history is not just a belief about the origin of historical events, but more importantly a theological compass for navigating the present.

However, what is the epistemological status of such a history based on the analysis of historiography? Is it a meta-history, hovering above the fray about historical truth, liberated from the burden of telling history itself? Quite to the contrary, I would argue that the epistemological position of this kind of history is no different from the others. It is a part of that which it seeks to describe, subject to the same dynamics of narrativity, discursive hegemony and historical contingency. Just like any other, this history also aspires to being referenced in turn, at best altering facets of the historical debate. More importantly though, the analysis of historiography is deeply indebted to its sources, citing and discussing the narratives they offer, the positions they take, and the terms they employ. It is for this reason that Jacques Derrida cautioned against a discourse that presumes to be in an exterior position to that which it describes. In *Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences* he contended that all "destructive discourses [...] are trapped in a sort of circle:"

> This circle is unique. It describes the form of the relationship between the history of metaphysics and the destruction of the history of metaphysics. There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to attack metaphysics. We have no language—no syntax and no lexicon—which is alien to this history; we cannot utter a single destructive proposition which has not already slipped into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest. (Derrida 1978, 280)

In other words: a critical analysis of Pentecostal historiography will easily be subject to the same dynamics it seeks to explain. The deconstruction of the politics of persecution was made possible by introducing a political dimension to historiography. The analysis of the plots, arguments and ideological implications of historical narratives quietly inserted a narrative plot of authorial intent, an argument about the historical context of sources, and the implication that there is no "objective" history. Contesting the notion that the Security Department's letter was based on nothing but malicious rumours has meant to implicate a certain malice on behalf of the translator, who left out the decisive phrases explaining the government's legal rationale. And so on.

However, this referentiality of histories and their sources goes beyond semiotic and structural parallels; it is connected to the production of text itself, as Derrida has also shown. In *Signature Event Context* he argued that all writing supposes a dual absence: that of the addressee and that of the author, since writing must remain legible when the author or any potential addressee are absent. Therefore,

> [t]o write is to produce a mark that will constitute a kind of machine that is in turn productive, that my future disappearance in principle will not prevent from functioning and from yielding, and yielding itself to, reading and rewriting. (Derrida 1982a, 316)

Two consequences follow: first, any writing, any sign must be iterable, capable to be copied, repeated and cited; and secondly by this iterability, all signs "can break with every given context, and engender infinitely new contexts in an absolutely nonsaturable fashion." (Derrida 1982a, 320) The point of this inherent link between repetition and alterity is that a text is not understood by reference to an ordinary context, but because it is a citation of another text, which in turn cites another one, and so on. Histories therefore are recognizable not because of a direct relationship between a text and past physical events, but because they are citations of other accounts. As histories continuously cite previous texts and contexts, thereby also breaking with them and engendering new ones, historical meaning is continuously deferred, altered, permuted, and ultimately postponed. This is the dynamic of the *différance* as described by Derrida. (1982b, esp. 7–12, 20) Just as the incessant differing of signifiers defers signification, the telling of histories continuously postpones historical meaning. Definitive history is no more possible than the deferred presence of the sign.

Therefore, while the analysis of persecution narratives offered above aims to offer fresh insights into the political dynamics of Ethiopian Pentecostal history and historiography, it is essentially no different from the sources it cites – that is to say, it is not the only valid account dictated by actual events, but hopefully a plausible read of its sources.

## *Bibliography*

Anderson, Allan H. 2004. *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

———. 2005. "Revising Pentecostal History in Global Perspective." In *Asian and Pentecostal. The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia*, ed. Allan H. Anderson and Edmond Tang, pp. 147–173. Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies Series; 3. London: Regnum Books.

———. 2007. *Spreading Fires. The Missionary Nature of Early Pentecostalism*. London: SCM Press.

Anon. 1973. "Persecuting the Sects." *Newsweek. International Edition* (January 15): 32.

Bergunder, Michael. 2010. "The Cultural Turn." In *Studying Global Pentecostalism. Theories and Methods*, ed. Allan Anderson, Michael Bergunder, André Droogers, and Cornelis van der Laan, pp. 51–73. Berkeley, California: University of California Press.

Cerillo Jr., Augustus. 1997. "Interpretative Approaches to the History of American Pentecostal Origins." *Pneuma* 19: 29–52.

de Certeau, Michel. 1988. *The Writing of History*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Derrida, Jacques. 1978. "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." In *Writing and Difference*, ed. Jacques Derrida, 278–294. London: Routledge.

———. 1982a. "Signature Event Context." In *Margins of Philosophy*, Jacques Derrida, pp. 307–330. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

———. 1982b. "Différance." In *Margins of Philosophy*, Jacques Derrida, pp. 1–27. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Engelsviken, Tormod. 1975. "Molo Wongel: A Documentary Report on the Life and History of the Independent Pentecostal Movement in Ethiopia 1960-1975." Oslo: Unpublished Manuscript, The Free Faculty of Theology.

Foucault, Michel. 1977. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History. In *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. Donald F Bouchard, 139–164. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.

Full Gospel Believers' Church. 1978. "ሙሉ ወንጌል ቤተ ክርስቲያን ክልደት እስከ ... መቸስ ሰው ጌታ ኢየሱስን ፈልጎ ሲመጣ ተመለስ አይባል!!" *("The Full Gospel Church from Birth Until ... Well, It Is Impossible to Turn Back the People When They Come Wanting Jesus!!")*. Addis Ababa: Unpublished magazine.

Haustein, Jörg. 2011a. *Writing Religious History. The Historiography of Ethiopian Pentecostalism*. Studien Zur Außereuropäischen Christentumsgeschichte (Asien, Afrika, Lateinamerika) 17. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

———. 2011b. "Charismatic Renewal, Denominational Tradition and the Transformation of Ethiopian Society". In *Encounter Beyond Routine. Cultural Roots, Cultural Transition, Understanding of Faith and Cooperation in Development. International Consultation, Academy of Mission, Hamburg, 17th-23rd January 2011*, ed. Evangelisches Missionswerk Deutschland, pp. 45–52. EMW Dokumentation; 5. Hamburg: EMW. http://www.emw-d.de/fix/files/doku_5_encounter-beyond-routine2011.pdf.

Johansson, Tage. 1972. Letter to Bo Hörnberg, August 27, 1972. Ekerö: Tage Johansson Collection, Pingstarkiv Kaggeholm.

———. 1974a. "Angående Förföljelsen i Etiopien" ("Regarding Persecution in Ethiopia"). Internal Report. Ekerö: Tage Johansson Collection, Pingstarkiv Kaggeholm.

———. 1974b. Letter to Tormod Engelsviken, September 8, 1974. Ekerö: Tage Johansson Collection, Pingstarkiv Kaggeholm.

Kay, William. 1992. 'Three Generations On. The Methodology of Pentecostal History'. *EPTA Bulletin* 11 (1+2): 58–70.

———. 2010. "Karl Popper and Pentecostal Historiography." *Pneuma* 32 (1): 5–15.

van der Laan, Cornelis. 2010. "Historical Approaches." In *Studying Global Pentecostalism. Theories and Methods*, ed. Allan H Anderson, Michael Bergunder, André Droogers, and Cornelis van der Laan, pp. 202–219. Berkeley, California: University of California Press.

Laclau, Ernesto. 1994. "Why Do Empty Signifiers Matter to Politics?" In *The Lesser Evil and The Greater Good. The Theory and Politics of Social Diversity*, ed. Jeffrey Weeks, pp. 167–178. London: Rivers Oram Press.

———. 1996. "The Death and Resurrection of the Theory of Ideology." *Journal of Political Ideologies* 1 (3): 201–221.

———. 2005. *On Populist Reason*. London: Verso.

Laclau, Ernesto, and Chantal Mouffe. 2001. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. 2nd ed. London: Verso.

Popper, Karl. 2002. *The Poverty of Historicism*. London: Routledge.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1988. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, pp. 271–313. London: Macmillan.

White, Hayden. 1973. *Metahistory. The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press.

———. 1987. "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality." In *The Content of the*

*Form. Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, Hayden White, pp. 1–25. Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press.

Zewde, Girma. 2001. "**ኢትዮጲስ. አንደኛው**" ("Ethiopis. First Volume"). N.p.