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POLITICS AND RELIGION IN THE FORMATION OF THE ETHIOPIAN STATEHOOD: FROM THE EMPIRE THROUGH THE FEDERAL DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

Abstract

The article intends to present some of the most interesting facts of the development of religious traditions in Ethiopia, and religion influence on the politics and vise verse in the process of the Ethiopian statehood formation. Course of development of the Ethiopian Statehood was inextricably linked to significant and contradictory influence of different religions: Christianity, Islam and Judaism, but Christianity above all. However, it is not only religion influences different sides of the country's political life. From the Empire, later the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (1987 to 1991), and present-day Federal Democratic Republic, religion has been often exploited for the state's benefits. Thus, this influence was mutual, but not always mutually beneficial. Realizing the scale and significance of the designated topic of this study, author limits his research ambitions only by highlighting the most general trends in the interrelations of politics and religion within the conditionally allocated three historical stages. Firstly, from 4th century until 1974, or from building and strengthening the Ethiopian Empire since Christianity until the overthrow of the last emperor Haile Selassie I. Secondly, through the attempts to build the socialist state (1974 to 1991). And finally, through the Federate State (1991 – present days). This article is based on the analysis of the historical events that took place during abovementioned stages of the Ethiopian history.

Keywords: politics, religion, Ethiopian statehood, Orthodox Church, Islam

Why Ethiopia?

Ethiopia has been selected as an object for the study not by accident. On one hand, the country can be seen as a benchmark by which one can analyze the general processes of how the state uses religion in its interests and to what extend could religion influence state-building processes at different historical

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stages. Some of these features can be found as common for other countries in the Horn of Africa. On the other hand, most features of the interactions between politics and religion are in many ways so distinctive that it makes Ethiopian case unique. We emphasize here that Ethiopia was the only region in Africa that survived the expansion of Islam as a Cristian state. This gives an opportunity to look through the topic in comparison of Christianity and Islam in the context of the topic. Last but not the least to mention that Ethiopia has historically been fundamental and strategically dominant in the Horn of Africa from the time of Aksumite Empire.

Ethiopian state is an African phenomenon, which has the one of the longest, most interesting and controversial history on the continent that only Egypt can compare to. However, the history of two main religions and their interdependence with the politics in the process of Ethiopian state building is absolutely unique and incomparable. These facts have evoked enormous wave of academic studies in recent decades. While these studies yielded major facts of religion history and well examined the societal-historical factors in different periods, a more detailed analysis of the interaction between religion and politics at various stages of state building in Ethiopia remain a challenge, especially during period of "Red terror" of Mengistu's regime and country's recent political history. Hope that facts and information in this article will help to overcome these challenges and illuminate some significant aspects of Ethiopian political and religious history.

Early Christianity - the Solomonoid era - centralization and modernization

It is well known that the shaping of Ethiopian Statehood was inextricably linked to significant and contradictory influence of different religions: Christianity, Islam and even Judaism but Christianity above all. However, it is not only religion influences different sides of the country's political life. The politics of the Empire in turn, often exploited religion for its own benefits. Thus, this influence was mutual, but not always mutually beneficial. Ethiopia was one of the first sub-Saharan African countries to adopt the Christianity. It actually happened in the Kingdom of Aksum (in present-day territory of Ethiopia and Eritrea), which officially adopted Christianity as the state religion. Interesting to mention is the fact that Ethiopia was the only region of Africa to survive the expansion of Islam as a Christian state. Orthodox Christians make up the majority of the population in the northern region of the country, specifically in Tigray and Amhara. This sect of Christianity spread quickly after it was adopted by King Ezana the Great who proclaimed it a state religion in 330 AD.

The foundations of multi-faith and religion tolerance of modern Ethiopia that is mostly unique in whole region were laid in the course of historical and

cultural development of its predecessor the Kingdom of Aksum. Orthodox Christianity and Islam have coexisted here since Mohammed's time. In 615 AD the prophet Muhammad encouraged a group of Muslims to seek refuge in Aksum as they escaped religious persecution in Mecca in Arabia. The king of Aksum not only welcomed them and refused demands to send them back to Arabia but he also respected their religion and offered them places to follow their religious rites. They later settled in Negash, east of Tigray, which became the foundation and one of the most important places for the Islamic faith. Islam also spread to the east and south east of the country mainly Harar and Somali administrative regions. In our days Islam making it the second most common religion in Ethiopia where most Muslims in this country are Sunni[2].

However, culturally the Orthodox Church has dominated the political, social, and cultural life of the country, as it has been official religion of the imperial court and hence also of the feudal establishment. The role of the Christian religion in the formation, development and strengthening of Ethiopian statehood cannot be overestimated. This applies especially and certainly to the period of restoration and expansion of the Ethiopian Empire after the decline of the great ancient empire of Aksum. Famous Africanists and scholar of Ethiopian history Richard Greenfield absolutely rightly noted that "modern reunified Ethiopia is the logical inheritor of the tradition of ancient Aksum. That this is so has, at least up until the beginning of in the twentieth century, been due far less for the occupant or even the existence of the imperial throne, than to the Ethiopian Christian Church, dating as it does from the heyday of Aksumite power…"[3]

From the very beginning and for the long period of the history the Church was not only the soil guarantor of divinity of the power of Emperor but as well as authenticity of Emperor's origin. The fact is that, according to the legend associated with idea that first real Emperor of Ethiopia King Menelik belonged to the knee of the famous King Solomon, and only this peculiarities of origin gave the right to fight sometimes brutal and bloody for the throne of the emperor all of Ethiopia. Even despite the fact that Solomonic succession lies rather on the myth and tradition and is not based on history facts. The importance to maintain and strongly protect this tradition was not to force to believe in it mostly uneducated population of the country. Importance lies on the fact that the whole structure of Ethiopian society – Christian Church, state and people was strictly based upon Solomonic succession. Because to this Ethiopia was given a halo of uniqueness and allowed to present itself as the superior over others in the whole continent. Ultimately this allowed Ethiopia to preserve national independence when the other Africa was completely colonized. Thus, in traditional Ethiopia, only two public institutions have tried to formalize and direct the day-to-day lives of the population on a national basis, and only they have had the opportunity to do

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2   *Ethiopia – Christianity, Islam, Judaism*. Editor: Haggai Erlich. Open University of Israel, 2006, p. 51.

3   Richard Greenfield, *Ethiopia: A new political history*, Pall Mall Press, London, 1965, p. 24.

so. These institutions were the tsarist power and the orthodox Ethiopian church headed by the king himself. Since ancient times up to the present, Christianity in Ethiopia has been actively used by almost all the rulers as a tool to strengthen statehood, support and protect the supremacy of the central power. As the country developed, Christianity gradually transformed from a royal and court religion into a religion of the entire state. Emperor Haile Sellassie gave even legal endorsement by fixing Solomonoic succession of Ethiopian Emperor Power in the national constitution in the twentieth century. The politically motivated interpretation of the religious tradition in the interest of strengthening the imperial power can be traced more to the historical period of political and military strategic action of Emperor Zera Yacob (1399 – 1468) and the King Teodros II (1855-1868)[4]. Herewith Yacob regarded by historians of Ethiopia as the most prominent ruler of the entire Solomonoid era, unquestionably the greatest ruler of Ethiopia since Ezana, during the heyday of Aksumite. According to Edward Ullendorff a famous British historian, none of Yacob's successors on the throne – except only the emperors Menelik II and Haile Selassie – can be compared to him[5]. Both rulers started process of unifying and centralizing of the future Empire and both tried to use religion to achieve their political goals.

After that Ethiopia had several emperors and all of them were building relations with religions and always strengthen its leading role in state building processes. These trends even more seriously manifested during the rule of Yohannes IV (1872–89), the great Emperor of Ethiopia Menelik II (1889 -1913)[6] and of course Haile Selassie I, (original name Tafari Makonnen – Emperor of Ethiopia from 1930 to 1974)[7]. All of them continued and strengthened the practice of uniting the crown and the cross and developing an alliance with the church. Mindful of the mistakes in this most important aspect of the state building policy was the main reason for the failure of the rule of the talented and strong military leader Tewodros II. He lost his power because at the end of his reign he pursuing a policy of repression against Ethiopian clergy trying to undermine the role of Ethiopian Church and of western Protestant missionaries.

Abovementioned short characteristics of the most influential rulers of Ethiopia confirms that Christianity has played a special role in the formation of Ethiopian statehood. At the same time, the role of Christianity in Ethiopia's development cannot be absolutized. Many serious researchers rightly noted that Christianity and the church did not necessarily play the role of a faithful spouse of the

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4   "Tewodros II, Emperor of Ethiopia", *Encyclopedia Britannica*, available at: *https://www.britannica.com/biography/Tewodros-II,* (date date accessed:: 5.012021).

5   Edward Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians: an Introduction to the country of people*, 2nd edition, Oxford University Press, London, 1960, p. 69.

6   "Menilek II, Emperor of Ethiopia", *Encyclopedia Britannica*, available at: *https://www.britannica.com/biography/Menilek-II,* (date accessed: 5.01.2021).

7   "Haile Selassie I, Emperor of Ethiopia", *Encyclopedia Britannica*, available at: *https://www.britannica.com/biography/Haile-Selassie-I,* (date accessed: 5.01.2021).

imperial power, but sometimes acted on different sides of the barricades in the struggle for and against the centralization of power. Ethiopia's political history is thus inextricably intertwined with the history of its church, and the crown and the cross as a whole formed the backbone of the country's dominant culture[8].

Poverty and the harsh conditions of the real, not mythological or historical existence of the majority of the ordinary people of Ethiopia have brought up in the Ethiopian character cunning and adaptability. One of the manifestations can be called almost always respectful and ingratiating, and sometimes fawning attitude to the powers that be and the supreme power in general. In many ways, it is the result of the ideological influence of the church, always and under all regimes standing on the protection of state foundations, the basis of which for centuries was the imperial power led by the anointed God. As the well-known Russian historian, Georgi Tsipkin rightly pointed out: "In a limited traditional world, where rarely rumors of events from the outside (we are talking about the Ethiopian rural hinterland) the clergy completely owned the souls of peasants. In the hands of the church was also such a formidable weapon for a deeply religious Ethiopian as excommunication"[9]

It should be emphasized that almost until the very recent past the majority of the population are true believers and are brought up in the Christian tradition of obedience, non-resistance and submission of power. According to the author's personal observations, who has lived in this country for many years, the Ethiopian religious tradition is very harsh. Fasts and religious holidays require full dedication. Clergy, as a rule, in reality - an example of complete self-denial from worldly excess in literally everything - clothes, food, tradition.

Over time, the measured course of the Ethiopian orthodox patriarchal tradition of the Solomon dynasty and the church that strengthened and sprinkled the divine power of the emperor naturally conflicted with the process of world socio-economic development. Gradually, the emperor's power from the pillar of Ethiopia's socio-ideological structure became a "brake on the economic development of the country." Growing internal discontent has been exacerbated by the negative consequences of a series of natural disasters and droughts that have caused famine and shaken a fragile economy. In the end, in the early 70s of the last century there was a social explosion in the country.

Red Terror and the Church (Mengistu's Regime)

Seizing power in Ethiopia, the revolutionary government, led by Mengistu Haile Mariam, announced new priorities for nation-building. Its strategy was based on an ideology based on the basic principles of the Soviet model of so-

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8   *Ethiopia – Christianity, Islam, Judaism*, Haggai Erlich (ed.), Open University of Israel, 2006, p. 30; Richard Greenfield, *Ethiopia: A New Political History*, Praeger Publishers, New York, 1965.

9   Georgi Tsypkin, *Ethiopia: from fragmentation to political centralization (second half of the 19th - early 20th century)*, Publisher Science, Moscow, 1980, p. 65.

cialism, in which elements of Chinese Maoist theory were added at different stages. The wave of brutality and violence that swept Ethiopia was justified by the Mengistu regime's through the statement "fight against class enemies"[10]. An integral element of the theory and practice of "red terror" was the anti-religious campaign, which was conducted throughout the country. At the legislative level, in the Socialist Constitution of 1984 religion and state were separated. Many temples and monasteries were closed, their property and lands nationalized. However, the assumption that during Mengistu's rule the Christian religion had ceased any influence on the state is wrong. The revolutionaries who proclaimed the dictatorship and ideology of Marxism-Leninism perfectly understood the level of popularity of religion and church in the orthodox society of Ethiopia.

The relationship with the church took a special place in the activities of the new Ethiopian rule, known as the Derg (from Ge'ez language - "committee" or "council"). After a brief period of criticism of the church, the military regime moved to find ways to use it to implement its policies, as well as to combat foreign and domestic reactions. Having entered into contact with the Ethiopian Church and the Islamic clergy, the authorities count on the support of religious organizations not only in addressing a number of domestic issues, but also in international relations, in particular with many Arab States. Formally separating the church from the state, the government continued the annual payments for the financial support of the Ethiopian church in the amount of 28 million per year. Land reform has undermined the economic position of the Ethiopian Church, yet it remains a rich institution with vast lands[11].

At the same time, security apparatus of the Derg used Christian religion extensively as instrument of manipulation. While advocating socialism, demolishing churches and killing God believers with one hand and with other they bribed some uneducated priests in countryside areas and successfully applied them to justify the crimes of Red terror. The new ruling regime carried out a strict purge in the leadership of the Ethiopian clerics, eliminating all devotees to the emperor and the former government in the country. In the early years, most of these bishops, priests and monks were persecuted, the most influential and dangerous to the Mengistu's regime were executed. In February 1976 Derg arrested popular and respected with the Ethiopian Orthodox believers Patriarch Theophilos[12], falsely accused him of embezzlement. He was replaced by Abba Melaku (under the name of Abuna[13] Takla Hymanot), an uneducated but social reform-oriented

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10   Mariam Haile Mengistu, *Tiglachin Ethiopiya Hizb Abyetavi Etigl Tarik*, TSEHAI Publishers, Loyota Marymount University, Los Angeles, 2004, pp. 149-191.

11   Georgi Tsypkin, Yagya Vatanyar, *The History of Ethiopia in The New and Modern Times*, Publishers Science, Main Edition of Eastern Literature, Moscow, 1989, pp. 372-375.

12   Theophilos Abune, also known as Abune Tewophilos, (1910 – 1979), was the second Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church. He officially succeeded Abuna Basilios in 1971, having assumed the role of acting patriarch upon Abuna Basilios' death in 1970. See: Graham Hancock, *Under Ethiopian Skies*, London, 1997.

13   Abun (or Abuna) is the honorific title used for any bishop of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church as well as of the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church.

monk from the countryside. Describing new Abuna one of the internal document of the Derg stated: "The true patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church comes from an oppressed class. These people are not very educated. Therefore, they can be manipulated by making an involuntary instrument of an anti-religious campaign. The patriarchy has already stated that Christ himself was spreading socialism. [...] We need to choose priests and church workers who can spread this illusion of Christianity's compatibility with communism and promote them to the inner circle of the patriarch's leadership[14]".

A further change in the Ethiopian regime's policy towards the Orthodox Church comes during the Ethiopian-Somali war also known as the Ogaden war (1977-78). During that period the Mengistu's regime weakened by internal opposition and separatist movements, was in dire need of measures to strengthen the unity of society. In such dangerous situation, Mengistu Haile Mariam had to stop the terror inside the country and tried to play the card of "popular unity". At the same time, the Ethiopian dictator consolidated his power by using "traditional values" - the Orthodox Church and national culture. However, in reality he simply subordinated them by force and bribe to his rigid power.

The formal and informal ideological work of the regime with religious figures gave its results. For example, at a meeting of Christian and Muslim clergy held in early 1978, participants of the religious-ideological forum expressed "unanimous support for the ideas of the revolution and the policy of Derg"[15]. In the late 1970s of the last century, the Ethiopian Church in turn saw in the change of course of Megistu's regime the good chance not only to survive, but also to ensure its control over some previously independent provinces. First, of course Eritrea with its own autocephalous tradition was an out-of-control territory for Ethiopian Orthodox Church. After the victory in Somali, the Ethiopian regime set its sights on a military defeat of the Eritrean separatist movement - the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). In 1980s, Ethiopian Armed Forces using large-scale Soviet military advisory and technical support have been actively advancing deep into Eritrean territory. Now the church leadership of Addis Ababa cooperating with the communist regime got an opportunity to completely subdue the Eritrean flock to itself[16].

Tight state control over the Ethiopian Orthodox Church continued until the very end of communist rule. Takla Hymanot, who fought for the survival of the church, died in 1988. His successor, Abuna Merkorios, who had close ties to the ruling regime during the "red terror" in Gondar province, further strengthened the church's cooperation with the government authorities. Mercorios lasted until the fall of the Derg regime and followed shameful stampede of Mengistu Haile

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14   "Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia", Ministry of Information & National Guidance: The Anti-Revolutionary Nature of Religion [translation of the government directive in Amharic for all political cadres], WCC-archives 42.4.023.

15   Georgi Tsypkin Yagya Vatanyar, *The History of Ethiopia in The New and Modern Times . . .* p. 305.

16   See more details: Paul B. Henze, *Ethiopia in Mengistu's Final Years Until the last bullet*, Sahma Books, Addis Ababa, 2007.

Marim to Zimbabwe through Kenya in 1991 when he fled to the United States[17].

Ethno-federate State and Religion

After the overthrow of Mengistu, power in Addis Ababa was transferred to the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). The basis of this organization was the leadership of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Hegemony in the state passed to natives from the province of Tigray. On July 22, 1991, Meles Zenawi became first the President and later the Prime minister of Ethiopia. He remains Ethiopian leader from 1991 till his death in 2012[18]. The main innovation was the fundamental reform of the administrative and political system. Ethnic federalism was declared a new principle of building a state. Instead of the former traditional provinces, eight unequal states were created, formed on a national basis. Since August 23, 1995, the state has been called the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the country has become a parliamentary republic[19]. New leadership of Ethiopia has taken concrete measures aimed at officially limiting the influence of religion on the state. Therefore, the new Ethiopian Constitution of 1995, introduced by the ethno-federal regime of the ruling party EPRDF, continued the secular statute. The key Article in this context is number 11 – "Separation of State and Religion" This article points out: "1. The Ethiopian State is a secular state. 2. There shall be no state religion. 3. The State shall not interfere in religious affairs; neither shall religion interfere in the affairs of the State"[20].

However, even with the abovementioned official constitutional restrictions on religious influence on the state, introduced by the 1995 Constitution, after the radical political-state and ideological reconstruction after a period of atheism and persecution, the role and influence of the Christian religion, church and abuna in Ethiopian society began to grow again. All of Ethiopia's supreme rulers, both monarchs and new authorities, have informally taken all measures to ensure loyalty to themselves by religious leaders. The new leader of Ethiopia Meles Zenawi was a member of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church from his baptism at birth till his death. New Abune Paulos (born Gebremedhin Woldeyohannes) who was elected to this position in 1992 brought the church in line to meet the challenges of the 21st Century. During the time of Abune Paulos much urban property that had been taken from the church by Mengistu's regime was returned.

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17 Tobias Rupprecht, "African Brothers in Faith: Russia, the USSR and their "Ethiopian politics" (second half of the 19th - end of the 20th century)", available at: *http://www.intelros.ru/readroom/nz/n3-2016/30611-afrikanskie-bratya-po-vere-rossiya-sssr-i-ih-efiopskaya-politika-vtoraya-polovina-xix-konec-xx-veka.html*, (date accessed: 4.01.2021).

18 Araya Addis, *EPRDF Journal*, Special issue, 2012, pp. 67-87, (in Amharic language).

19 For more details see for example: Alex de Wall, The theory and practice of Meles Zenawi, *African Affairs, The Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 112, No. 446, 2013, pp. 148-155.

20 "Ethiopian Constitution of 1995", Art. 11:1, available at: *https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Hornet/Ethiopian_Constitution.html*, (date accessed: 30.12.2019).

Interesting to stress that the political leader of Ethiopia and the religious leader of the country were in a very close personal relationship. Repeatedly, especially during difficult political periods, the Prime Minister has secretly sought the help and support of the supreme cleric. The clergy supported the ruling and the regime and facilitated the corresponding line in the ranks of their congregation. Abuna Paulus was not only personal confessor of Meles but also his personal adviser and friend. Both came in to power almost at the same time and they died at almost the same time in 2012 (Abuna passed away on the 16th August and Meles on the 20th August).

Strengthening the Role and Influence of Islam

It is well known that Ethiopia has played the role of a "Christian island in the sea of Islam" for centuries. In recent years, the situation has been changing more and more markedly. The growing influence of Islam is evident to anyone who comes back to the country. The massive construction of mosques was one of a clear manifestation of the growing influence of Islam. Since 2000 up to now in Addis Ababa and the surrounding suburbs of the capital alone, the number of mosques increased from eight to almost hundred. It is particularly noteworthy that a large number of new mosques have appeared not only in the historically gravitating to the Muslim religion of the south and east of the country, but also in traditionally Christian areas in the north of the country.

The government's stated course for a free economy on market principles also gave new impetus to the flourishing of Ethiopian Islam. The ruling EPRDF party greatly expanded the freedom of trade, which naturally contributed to the prosperity of Ethiopian Muslims, who traditionally controlled much of the retail and wholesale trade of the capital and major cities of the country. More specifically, the new political climate in the early 1990s contributed to the institutionalization of Islam. A first important step was the de jure establishment of the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council EIASC in 1991 with election of the new leadership in the next year. Simultaneously in 1992 the Ethiopian Muslim Youth Association and the Da'wa & Knowledge Association were established • 1992. Both organizations were heavily focused on "reviving Islam" and played decisive roles in making religious literature available, in the construction of mosques and in supporting various forms of Islam.

With reference to the growth in the number of mosques all over the country and the increasing number of Muslims holding governmental and public positions, Christians were becoming gradually worried over Islam's increasingly visible role in public space. The government was similarly showing signs of concern over increased religious activism, which they perceived to be a trend of politicization of Islam. This fear was amplified by a demonstration in Addis Ababa in November 1994, when Muslims demanded that the shari'a should be included as

one of the bases for the national constitution. When worshippers at the al-Anwar mosque in Addis Ababa clashed with the police on 21 February 1995, leaving nine people killed and over one hundred wounded, the government used this as an opportunity to crack down on unwanted developments within the Muslim community. In the following days, hundreds of Muslims were imprisoned, suspected of involvement, and on the 22 February, armed police surrounded the offices of the Ethiopian Muslim Youth Association. All those present were arrested, and the offices were closed. May 1995 to April 1996 – and Ethiopia's retaliation – further fueled tensions. The ruling party's reactions deprived Muslims of much of the freedoms they had acquired since 1991, and with the closure of Islamic organizations, it left the EIASC to emerge as the sole actor claiming to represent the Muslim population as a whole. The council's vast apparatus and its close links with the government have effectively enabled the latter to monitor and control developments within the Muslim community[21]. The steady increase in the number of Ethiopian Muslims provides a basis for strengthening their role in the country's political life and in the Horn of Africa as a whole. However, the increase in the number of adherents of Islam would not be of serious concern, as Ethiopia had always been a multi-religious country and had historically been known for religious tolerance. The real danger lies in a completely different sphere.

Many of the Ethiopian Christians look anxiously at the prosperity of Muslims. They point out that the above-mentioned Muslim newspapers or the construction of mosques are fulfilling through Iranian, Sudanese and later Saudi Arabia money. They are pointing out that many young people often convert to Islam only because of the financial support they receive from the mosque during and after services. Saudi-Ethiopian multimillionaire Sheikh Mohammed Al-Amoudi (his mother Ethiopian) became a bright and ambiguous symbol of Muslim domination in the country's financial system and economy. He was the largest investor in Ethiopia's new free economy in the late 1990s and early 2000s. He controlled entire sectors of the Ethiopian economy. For example, M. Al Amoudi, on the one hand, built in Addis Ababa the Sheraton Hotel, the most luxurious of the capital's hotels (1998). On the other hand, he rebuilt the famous mosque on the grave of Negash, in one of the villages in the state of Tigre, and did so in a way that it was an insult for nearby church.

The emerging process of socio-economic polarization was the result of the privatization of the economy. In turn, this contributed for the development of Islam in the new aspect which was previously unknown for the religion tradition in Ethiopia. The elements of political protest in Islam started to grow and that became to attract the younger generation. As early as the early 2000s, it was widely believed in the wider Amharic intelligentsia that the "Tigry regime" policy of decentralization threatened the existence of multi-ethnic Ethiopia and could

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21 Jörg Haustein, Terje Østebø, "EPRDF's Revolutionary Democracy and Religious Plurality: Islam and Christianity in post-Derg Ethiopia", available at: *https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254312074_EPRDF%27s_revolutionary_democracy_and_religious_plurality_Islam_and_Christianity_in_post-Derg_Ethiopia,* (date accessed: 5.01.2021).

contribute to the radicalization not only of Islam but of other religions. It must be said that such fears were not in vain.

Already in the mid 1990s one can witnesses a general process of revival, and also radicalization, of religious thinking and identification. Numerous Muslims, notably of the younger generation, adopted a discourse of 'correct' scriptural Islam, 'purity', and often also exclusivist claims and dogmatism, with agitation against the established Muslim religious authorities and practices. On the Christian side many global Pentecostals and Evangelicals (re-)connected to local Christians—and vice versa—and started both conversion campaigns as well as social, pastoral and development work. The new Evangelical-Protestant and Pentecostal groups in particular quickly 'indigenized' and generated a new dynamic of tension in the country, strongly activist and expansive, especially toward the Ethiopian Orthodox[22]. Christian radicalism and violence also occur but are less ideologically consistent and less widespread.

Many mistakenly believe that above-mentioned problems are relatively new for Ethiopia. Despite the religious tolerance that we have written above, the complications of inter-religious nature in Ethiopia existed long before these events, but today the situation has a tired tendency to degrade. March 2011 saw another wave of attacks on places of worship and killings in various parts of the country. These clashes and killings in what appeared as a wave of 'religious violence' prompted the Ethiopian government to devise an 'anti-extremist' policy towards Muslims.[23].

In the same context, the example of government military forces activities in eastern and southern Ethiopia is indicative. These areas have traditionally been considered unreliable. For many years there has been an active "low enforcement operation" in which the regular armed forces of the country are involved. According to the Ethiopian authorities, the operation is directed solely against the actions of the illegal military groups, which is formally true. After the installation of the new regime followed a period of political insecurity, various armed movements remained active, as it was in other periods of regime transition in Ethiopia. The most dangerous and active are religion–based ones. One of them was the militant Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromiya (founded in 1985), influenced by Salafist thought. It carried out a radical agenda of furthering the Muslim Oromo cause, including chasing out and killing non-Muslims in Oromo-inhabited areas in 1991–92. The situation was similar in the eastern part of the country, particularly in Ogaden (now Somalia province), where majority of the indigenous people are Muslim. Military and police raids, vehicle searches, restrictions on movement at night, and frequent abuses of power by Ethiopian army units and law enforcement agencies naturally cause discontent and protests of

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22   Jon Abbink, Religion and Violence in the Horn of Africa: Trajectories of Mimetic Rivalry and Escalation between 'Political Islam' and the State, *Politics, Religion & Ideology,* Vol. 21, No. 2, 2020, p. 87.

23   Jon Abbink, An Historical-Anthropological Approach to Islam in Ethiopia: Issues of Identity and Politics, *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 1998, pp. 109-124.

the local population. This discontent is sometimes carried spontaneously and sometimes is provoked by the actions of local Muslim leaders on religious soil. As a result the actions of the central authorities are more considered by local population as unfriendly or even religiously aggressive and all this leads to an increase of tension in interfaith relations.

Thus, back in the mid-2000s, the author had several times been a witness of the looming problems in this sphere. Let me share one just private, but very indicative case. One day, due to technical problems related to one of our vehicles, we had to make an unscheduled stop on the way from Addis Ababa to Hargeisa (the capital of the self-proclaimed Somaliland - formally the territory of Somalia). The breakdown occurred in the evening in Ethiopia in a small provincial town bordering Somalia. In our group, in addition to white foreigners, there was a Djiboutian lawyer (Muslim) and an Ethiopian businessman with his wife (both Christians). We tried to stay in one of the few hotels in the city for the night. To our surprise, the hotel administration, represented by older men with red beards who were dressed in traditional Muslim clothes, categorically refused to provide us with a place to spend the night, although there were many free rooms available. The reason for refusal was that the wife of our Ethiopian escort on the forehead had a visible tattoo of the cross (a common tradition especially among Christian women believers in northern Ethiopia). Moreover, the refusal was expressed in a rigid and rude form and was accompanied by open insults against our companion. Between the Ethiopian and the administrator began an argument, quickly turned into a quarrel. A lawyer from Djibouti, being himself a Muslim, tried to enter into negotiations with the Muslims and to calm the inflamed inhospitable hosts. However, in the hall suddenly began to gather young men - also locals, also in Muslim outfits, which clearly showed an unfriendly mood to us, and they were not confused by the presence of foreigners, nor our diplomatic status. The situation became extremely unpleasant, threats of physical violence were pouring against our whole group, and the exit was blocked by a heated crowd of local Muslims. The situation went out of control. Fortunately, at that moment an armed police patrol appeared in the lobby, accompanied by Ethiopian Armed Forces. As soon as they dispersed the crowd, the authorities escorted us to the street. Expressing regret over the incident, under guard we were escorted to spend the night in the only state hotel in the town, which was on the edge of the city. We spent the night in this closed area, under the protection of armed soldiers of the Ethiopian Armed Forces. Today, an episode from 2006, no longer seems so insignificant. The problem with Ethiopia is that the Christian religion here is also often quite radical. The fact that there are still looming tensions and within the confessional mutual dislike between the Christian relative majority and already almost equal to them in number of Muslims is still teetering on the very edge.

Suffice it to recall how hard it was to quell the wave of vengeance on Christians who threatened to pour blood on the Muslim community of Addis Ababa

after the execution of 30 Ethiopian emigrants caught somewhere in Libya and beheaded live on Youtube in April 2015[24]. Spontaneous, but most likely still someone skillfully planned provocation, caused a terrible reaction in Ethiopia. Local fanatics of "Christian radicals" demanded, in response to the "death of the Christian brothers", to set fire and destroy mosques in Addis Ababa and kill all Muslims indiscriminately in their homes and on the streets. The worst thing is that the call of the provocateurs was immediately supported by crowd. There were victims, which became innocent first counter, the religion of which no longer mattered. The large-scale tragedy, implicated in religious fanaticism, was avoided only thanks to the rapid and very tough measures taken by the security forces, who instantly localized anti-Muslim protests. Today its clear enough that in a country of more than 100 million people, where number of Christians and Muslims are almost equally, any escalating of religious situation can have unpredictable consequences. Moreover, the growing process of politicization and radicalization of Islamic extremism in all East African countries, noted by experts in recent years, is certainly a threat to Ethiopia. A small but growing number of Muslims have adopted more exclusivist interpretations of their religion, thereby changing their relationship with other Muslims, with other faiths, and with the state[25].

These tensions have not emerged suddenly or spontaneously. Rather, they reflect an accumulation of pressure over decades. The genesis of this is largely the externally driven diffusion of Salafist ideology from the Gulf states. Opportunities for East African youth to study in the Arab world steadily expanded. As these youth returned home, they brought with them more rigid and exclusivist interpretations of Islam. The expanding reach of Arab satellite television has reinforced and acculturated these interpretations to a wider audience[26].

Permanent leader Meles Zenawi, who ruled the country since 1991, developing the principle of ethnic federalism, died suddenly in 2012. At the same time, as has often happened in the history of Africa, he did not have time (or did not want to prepare) a strong receiver. From that moment in Ethiopia, the crisis of power began....

The passing away of a strong sole leader left Ethiopia on one side far stronger than when he gained power, but his achievements remain fragile. Successor to M. Zenavi was a deputy Prime Minister, native of the confederation of southern peoples - Hailemariam Desalegn. According to religious views - Protestant, he became the first non-Christian leader of the country. By 2014, the new Prime Minister faced serious internal problems in the country. The official catalyst for the massive unrest and unrest that erupted in the country was the severe drought of 2014-2015. However, other political, economic, social and, including religious

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24   "ISIS Video Appears to Show Executions of Ethiopian Christians in Libya", *New York Times*, April 19, 2015.

25   Terje Østebø, "Islamic Militancy in Africa", Africa Center for Strategic Studies Africa Security Brief No. 23, 2012. Available at: *https://africacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/ASB23EN-Islamic-Militancy-in-Africa.pdf*, (date accessed: 4.01.2021).

26   Abdisaid M. Ali, "Islamist Extremism in East Africa", Africa Center for Strategic Studies, Africa Security Brief No. 32, 2016. Available at: *https://africacenter.org/publication/islamist-extremism-east-africa/#fn11*, (date accessed: 5.01.2021).

reasons were the real problems that led to the failure of Desalegn's brief reign.

The internal political situation in the country has escalated to the limit in October 2016 due to inter alia, antigovernment protests, and popular discontent, ethnically and religiously driven unrest in the Oromo and Amhara regions. The unrest erupted first in Oromia in mid-2014 in response to the 'Addis Ababa and Surrounding Oromia Special Zone Integrated Master Plan', setting out the government's plans for expanding the area of Addis Ababa into the Oromo region to make room for industrial parks, infrastructure development and large-scale agricultural projects. Oromo officials saw this as a land grab by the federal government in violation of federal borders, and argued that the Oromo identity was being subverted in the name of urban and industrial development. The plan was later dropped.

Nevertheless, the plan had sparked demonstrations that tapped into deep-rooted anti-government sentiments among the Oromo people. Demonstrations later came to engulf also the Amhara region, following a dispute where the ethnic and regional borders between Tigray and Amhara did not correlate.

Protests intensified in late 2015 and early 2016, causing riots and the death of 669 people, including 63 police officers. The government imposed the state of emergency in order to deal with the protests and civilian unrest. The state of emergency, which was ended in August 2017, made clear the government's willingness to use force rather than reforms in its dealings with the political opposition and protests[27]. At the same time, another reason for the internal political crisis in the country was that Hailemariam, increased Oromo representation in the cabinet with the November 2016 reshuffle, tensions within the EPRDF remain, reflecting broader concerns about the TPLF-dominated coalition. There were further rumors that TPLF itself is increasingly divided between youthful technocrats and older politico-strategic and ideological heavy weights, who wanted to maintain their dominance in all sphere of Ethiopian politics and economics. It is this «time bomb» was planted during the time of Meles Zenawi's tenure that exploded in 2020.

On February 15, 2018, Desalegn resigned without coping with internal situations. The government of the new Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, who came to power during difficult time of unrest left by the predecessors, are trying his best to stabilize the country. Ethiopian government did a lot on the move to democratic reforms in the country and to normalize relations with the neighbors. New Prime minister Abiy was widely praised for the political and economic reforms, including 2019 Nobel Peace Prize for his work in achieving peace agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea. However, during this time, political, ethnic and religious unrest have also increased in Ethiopia - marked by heightened episodes of violence, the increased prominence of separatist ideas, and an armed conflict

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27   Lie Sande, Berouk Mesfin, "Ethiopia: A Political Economy Analysis Ethiopia", 2018. Available at: *https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325869690_Ethiopia_A_Political_Economy_Analysis_Ethiopia,* (date accessed: 6.01.2021).

against the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) - Ethiopia's previous ruling party.

All this was forced the Prime minister to take unprecedented measures in the wake of the unrest that swept the country. In November 2020, a large-scale military operation was carried out in the province of Tigray with the aim of arresting political leaders and the disarmament of the military wing of the TPLF, which had gone into open opposition to the central government a few months earlier and had in fact launched a military insurgency in Tigray[28]. At the time of writing, the actual results and the current situation in Tigray are not fully clear.

Simultaneously, today, Ethiopia is experiencing many other serious domestic political problems, including the growing complications of inter-religious relations, and tensions between groups of ancient Orthodox Christians and Protestants, as well as between Muslims and Christians. Some experts even calling this process as "genocide of Orthodox Christians and Minorities in Ethiopia"[29]. At the moment we cannot proof or disproof this information. In general, we have to be very careful in final assessments regarding the real reasons for this. Since in the context of extreme politicization of the current in country developments, it cannot be ruled out that the facts of repressive actions against Christian communities can be provoked by anti-government forces and have nothing to do with the religious relations between Islam and Christianity. With some certainty, we can now state only that the Government is actively working to reduce tensions in inter-religious relations and the restoration of constitutional order in the country[30].

Conclusions

Process of formation of the Ethiopian Statehood was inextricably linked to significant and contradictory influence of different religions: Christianity, Islam and Judaism but Christianity above all. However, it is not only religion influences different sides of the country's political life. The politics of the Empire in turn, often exploited religion in its own benefits.

The importance of Christianity in Ethiopia's culture and history is not limited to its antiquity. The Christian religion from ancient times to the present is an integral part of the basic foundations of all aspects of Ethiopian society. However, after the 1990s, Islam began to play an increasingly prominent role. It cannot be ruled out that this trend will continue to increase in the medium term. Many experts say that the danger of radicalization of Islam in the Horn of Africa, in-

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28   Maria Gerth-Niculescu, "Ethiopian PM 'at war' with Tigray", *Deutsche Welle,* November 10, 2020.

29   "Genocide of Orthodox Christians and Minorities in Ethiopia", available at: *http://www.spc.rs/eng/genocide_orthodox_christians_and_minorities_ethiopia,* (date accessed: 6.01.2021).

30   "Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed says a military offensive in the nation's the Tigray region is complete and federal troops control the regional capital, a major development in a three-week-old war that has shaken the Horn of Africa", *ABC news agency*, November 28, 2020. Available at: *https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-11-29/ethiopian-prime-minister-abiy-says-tigray-conflict-is-complete/12931988,* (date accessed: 6.01.2012).

cluding Ethiopia, is on the rise. The growth of Salafist ideology in East Africa has challenged long established norms of tolerance and interfaith cooperation in the region. This is an outcome of a combination of external and internal factors. It includes a decades-long effort by religious foundations in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states to promulgate ultraconservative interpretations of Islam throughout East Africa's mosques, madrassas, and Muslim youth and cultural centers. Unfortunately, Ethiopia's acute socio-economic problems were not solved under the old slogans of the Christian monarchy and scientific socialism with its state atheism. They continue to be acute in today's environment, when the country's leadership declares its commitment to liberalism and Western-style democracy.

Changes and transit of power ongoing in Ethiopia today, as it was many times in Ethiopian history, have always exacerbated problems on traditional axis of social and political tensions, not least these have always been inter-ethnic and especially interreligious relations. While expressing our common hope of overcoming all the extremely complex problems identified, Ethiopia will take advantage of the centuries-old experience of productive interaction between the State and religion. I would also like to believe that the country's central authorities will be able to rebalance the centrifugal tendencies of Ethiopia's federal system, which has always fascinated and surprised the world with its complex and unique but sustainable cultural diversity.

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ПОЛИТИКА И РЕЛИГИЈА У ФОРМИРАЊУ ЕТИОПСКЕ ДРЖАВНОСТИ: ОД ЦАРЕВИНЕ ДО ФЕДЕРАЛНЕ ДЕМОКРАТСКЕ РЕПУБЛИКЕ

Сажетак

Овај чланак указује на неке од најинтересантнијих чињеница у развоју верских традиција у Етиопији и о утицају религије на политику, и обрнуто, на примеру развијања етиопске државности. Развој етиопске државности је био под директним утицајем различитих религија: хришћанства, ислама и јудаизма, али највише хришћанства. Али, овај утицај није био једносмеран. Царевина, па Народна демократска република Етиопија (1987 – 1991.) и данашња Федерална република, су са друге стране користиле религије за своје интересе. Стога, утицај је био двосмеран, али није увек био у интересу обе стране. У овом чланку се приказују само најзначајнији трендови у овом односу, који се деле на три историјска дела. Прво је грађење и јачање царевине од прихватања хришћанства до свргавања последњег цара Хајлеа Селасија (од 4. века до 1974. године). Други део односи се на покушај изградње социјалистичке државе од 1974. до 1991. године. И на крају, бавимо се Федералном државом од 1991. године до данас. Чланак се заснива на анализи најзначајнијих историјских догађаја који су се десили у ова три периода.

Кључне речи: политика, религија, етиопска државност, православна црква, ислам