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Embodying the Spirit(s): Pentecostal Demonology and Deliverance Discourse in Ethiopia.

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ABSTRACT

The article explores Pentecostal embodiment practices and concepts with regard to Holy Spirit baptism and demon possession. The studied material is connected to a specific and highly controversial debate in Ethiopian Pentecostalism, which revolves around the possibility of demon possession in born-again and Spirit-filled Christians. This debate runs through much of Ethiopian Pentecostal history and ultimately is concerned with whether or how Christians can host conflicting spiritual forces, in light of the strong dualism between God and evil in Pentecostal cosmology. The article shows that the embodiment of spirits and/or the Holy Spirit is related to theological concepts of the self, because these concepts define what may or may not be discerned in certain bodily manifestations. Moreover, the article contends that this debate thrives on a certain ambiguity in spirit embodiment, which invites the discernment of spiritual experts and thereby becomes a resource of power.

[Ethiopia, Pentecostalism, Deliverance, Possession, Embodiment]

INTRODUCTION

Spirit possession and exorcism are intriguing subjects for the anthropological reflection about Pentecostalism.¹ On the one hand, they are important for understanding the Pentecostal “cultural process” (Robbins 2010:158). Birgit Meyer (1998; 1999; 2004), for example, studied the demonization of traditional beliefs in Pentecostal rhetoric and practice and showed that the Pentecostal call “to make a complete break with the past” is not really a cultural rupture but a way of continuously relating to traditional beliefs. Instead of denying the power of spirits or adopting them as cultural heritage, Pentecostals assign them to an influential evil past, which continually needs to be scrutinized and exorcized. Meyer concludes that the Pentecostal practice of exorcism is the enactment of an ambivalent link with tradition, since it “provides a bridge over which it is possible to move back and forth and thereby to thematise modernity’s ambivalences” (Meyer 1999:215, cf. Engelke 2004 who makes a similar point about the complementarity of discontinuity and continuity in conversion).

On the other hand, Pentecostal exorcist practices have been of interest to the study of embodiment, notably in the work of Thomas Csordas. Analyzing the account of a deliverance ritual, Csordas (1990) proposes that the anthropological reflection should not begin with the “already constituted object, the Christian evil spirit”, but should understand exorcism as “an embodied process of self-objectification” (ibid.:3). The deliverance ritual, therefore, is a bodily expression of transgression, which may be informed by a certain habitus, but is nevertheless pre-objective in the sense that it is not the acting out of the “cultural object” of demon possession. Rather, there is “too much of a particular thought, behavior, or emotion” (ibid.:16), and Pentecostals objectify this experience of self as an instance of spirit possession and exorcism, typically with the discerning help of a spiritual expert.

Both theories provide plausible explanations for the prominence or even “arbitrary necessity” (Csordas 1990:18) of evil in the Pentecostal world view and ritual practice. However, little work so

far has been done regarding what actually limits the presence of demons in Pentecostal discourse. Is demon possession always a suitable objectification of bodily distress, even for established converts? Can a Pentecostal believer perform the “complete break with the past” over and over again? Meyer seems to confine this problem to the theological debate between mainline churches and Pentecostal churches, in which the former hold that converted Christians cannot be influenced by evil powers, whereas Pentecostals offer diagnosis and treatment of traditional spirit possession for anyone, affirming “the impossibility for born-again Christians to escape from forces grounded in and emanating from the local” (Meyer 2004:457). However, as this paper will show from the Ethiopian context, the controversy about demon-possession among Christians may also take place *within* Pentecostalism itself, with the majority of Ethiopian Pentecostals holding that the Holy Spirit and demons may not cohabit in a human being, thereby understanding possession in Christians as a soteriological relapse.

This issue is also relevant for Csordas’ observations about spirit embodiment. The Charismatic community he studied was introduced to the theology and practice of deliverance by Derek Prince and Donald Dosham (cf. Csordas 1994:41; 1997:80). Both ministers held that it was possible for born-again Christians to be possessed by evil spirits. Prince, in fact, was the most prominent American proponent of this so-called Deliverance Theology and he drew heavy criticism for his position from within the Pentecostal movement.² Since Csordas’ (1990) analysis pertains to a healing service led by Prince himself, the objectification of bodily distress as demon possessions was a very likely (and probably guided) possibility, but in other Pentecostal contexts, this objectification of physical distress may be a more costly assumption, because the salvation of a Pentecostal Christian would be called into question.

Based on original research,³ this paper will analyze this controversy surrounding demon possession in the context of Ethiopian Pentecostalism, aiming to explore the limits of demonic presence in Pentecostal discourse as well as the regulatory role of theology in the embodiment of spirits. In so

doing, I wish to show that the embodiment of spirits is linked to and confined by theological concepts of the person, because they define how bodily manifestations may be objectified. Moreover, I propose that the dynamic of Pentecostal demonology lies in upholding a strong theological dualism while allowing for a certain ambiguity of spirit embodiment, which in turn forms the ground for the discerning powers of spiritual experts.

CONTEXT: PENTECOSTALISM AND SPIRIT POSSESSION IN ETHIOPIA

Ethiopian Pentecostalism has its roots in Finnish and Swedish mission endeavors, which arrived in the country in the 1950s.⁴ The movement gained momentum in the 1960s with a number of mostly mission-independent student revival groups, which largely merged in the formation of the Full Gospel Believers' Church in 1967. Pentecostals were in a precarious political position under the Imperial government as well as during the socialist dictatorship of Mengistu Haile Mariam, with most churches closed and congregating in secret cell groups. After Mengistu's regime was ousted in 1991, religious freedom was established and Pentecostal churches reemerged in public with significant membership gains. Pentecostal growth continued in the past two decades and spawned a number of new denominations. At the same time, Pentecostal theologies and practices entered the mainline Protestant churches, most of which actively accommodated this movement in their theological statements and liturgy. These developments coincide with a general rise of Protestantism in Ethiopia over the past two and a half decades, whose membership grew from 5.5 percent of the population in 1984 to 18.6 percent in 2007.⁵ Almost a fifth of Ethiopia's population therefore is impacted by Pentecostal teaching and rituals in one way or another. This is a significant shift in this traditionally Christian Orthodox and Muslim country, which so far has hardly been addressed by academic research (cf. Haustein 2011:22–33).

Like in many other African contexts, demon possession and exorcism are central features of Ethiopian Pentecostalism and range from a general rebuke of demons at the beginning of Sunday worship to elaborate individual exorcisms in healing services or special prayer rooms (Singleton

1996). For the purpose of this paper, it is important to note a number of characteristics of how Ethiopian Pentecostals have appropriated existing cosmologies and related practices of spirit management.

First, spirit possession in Ethiopia is a considerably variegated phenomenon. In a review of previous studies H. S. Lewis (1984) listed five “variations” of spirit possession, all of which required different treatments: individual possession by a troublesome spirit, ritual *zar* possessions, guardian spirits (*wəqabi*), “seer” spirits (*qolle*), and group possession. Evil eye (*buda*) beliefs could be added to this as well (see Reminick 1974; Tubiana 1991). Lewis does not understand his list as a classification but as a range of variations when dealing with a phenomenon, which is “truly protean, exceedingly variable, capable of all manners of elaboration and recombination” (Lewis 1984:422). Aspen (2001), in his more recent review of Ethiopian possession literature, concurs with this view. He suggests that the different spirit beliefs form a “knowledge buffet,” whose elements are combined according to experience, local knowledge and personal preference. In my observation, Ethiopian Pentecostals simultaneously affirm and collapse this variety, by acknowledging the reality of the different spirits while considering them all as instances of the same demonic power. Ministers often begin healing and exorcisms sessions in the church by naming and rebuking the spirits of *zar*, *buda*, and *wəqabi*, the practices of *qallsčča* (witchdoctors) and their *azim* (magic spells), assigning them to the realm of Satanic influence, along with the curative and protective charms of the Orthodox *debertera* (lay clergy).

This points to the second contextual variable of importance here, the integration of spirit beliefs in Orthodox Christianity. Aspen (2001) found that traditional healers would self-identify as Orthodox Christians, despite apparent contradictions to Orthodox theology and religious symbols. He concludes: “In other words, the conceptual and religious framework for venerating spirited trees, praying for the soul of a carnivorous beast, or conversations with personified, possessing spirits, is Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity” (ibid.:235f.). Ethiopian Pentecostals are very critical of this

conflation of Christianity and traditional spirit management, accusing the church of holding people in demonic bondage. New research suggests that in areas with strong Pentecostal influence this has caused the Orthodox Church to oppose and exclude traditional healers as well (Data 2005).

Thirdly, Pentecostals insist on the superiority and finality of their exorcisms in opposition to traditional practices. This position is illustrated nicely in a prominent tale from one of the early student revival groups (see Bekele 2002:78; Engelsviken 1991:36). In this story, the students are confronted with an “unclean spirit” and try to free the possessed person by applying different established methods. After asking their parents (“tradition”), they first attempt the exorcism rite of a local spirit healer (*awaqi*), next they copy the water treatment of the prominent Orthodox priest Abba Woldetensae, and finally attempt to fulfill the spirit’s demand for coffee grounds, before at last they discover the exorcism in Jesus’ name to be the only effective remedy. This claim of ultimate efficacy of the Pentecostal exorcism rules out other forms of spirit management, most importantly those that may be connected to recurrent spirit possessions such as *zar* rituals, to which elements of this story implicitly refer (eg. *awaqi*, coffee grounds, cf. Kahana 1985; Tubiana 1991; Young 1975).

Finally, a number of studies have emphasized the role of Ethiopian possession rituals for the diagnosis and treatment of illnesses (e.g. Messing 1968; Young 1975; Vecchiato 1993; Aspen 1994, Atalay, Menelik, and Mesfin 1995). Ethiopian Pentecostalism tends to uphold this interrelation of illnesses and (potential) spirit possession. Singleton (1996:81f.) found that physical or mental grievances were a main motivation for seeking help at Pentecostal healing meetings, during which demons may be diagnosed and treated. If the condition does not respond to exorcisms or healing prayers, ministers may refer the afflicted to medical treatment. My own observations of Pentecostal healing services in Ethiopia suggest a similar connection. They all included sessions of exorcisms, which were often combined with “words of knowledge” describing the presence of people with medical or psychological symptoms of possessions, such as headaches, excessive worries, or lack of

sleep. Individuals then responded by manifesting signs of possession, such as loud screaming or uncontrollable movement, and were brought to the front or to designated rooms for further treatment. These exorcism sessions usually precede the actual healing ministry, not only because they are seen as an effective diagnosis of illnesses that might not respond to a healing prayer, but also because they are thought to purify the room in order to maximize the power of the Holy Spirit. In one such meeting, the minister explained that he can only proceed to heal, after all demons have been driven out and then instructed all congregants to place their hands upon their head and repeatedly utter the phrase “in Jesus name,” which was to make any remaining demons reveal themselves.

These four characteristics in the Pentecostal appropriation of their Ethiopian heritage provide the contours for the debate about spirit possession of born-again Christians. On the one hand, traditional spirits and traditional spirit management clearly are re-framed by Pentecostal dualism. The differences between the spirits are collapsed, since all are understood as instances of Satanic power, and any conflation of traditional and Pentecostal spirit management is denied in light of Pentecostal superiority: the exorcism in Jesus’ name drives out the spirits for good. On the other hand, spirits are retained as an important part of the diagnostic repertoire for medical or psychological illnesses, and the indiscriminate and forceful testing of this possibility implicates the omnipresent danger of demonic influence for all believers. It is this tension between Pentecostal dualism and the continuing potentiality of evil that the controversy about demon-possession in Christians addresses. In this debate, the majority of Ethiopian Pentecostals hold that true converts, who are filled by the Holy Spirit, cannot be afflicted by demons. This resonates with a robust cosmological duality between evil and divine and with proclaiming the ultimate efficacy of the Pentecostal exorcism. However, the diagnosis of spirits as cause for medical ailments or certain bodily manifestations in a healing service come at a higher price, since they call into question the spiritual allegiance of a person (cf. Singleton 1996:96f.). Deliverance Pentecostals, on the other hand, conceptualize spirit

manifestations as part of a Christian spiritual battle and thus retain demon possession as a possibility for believers and unbelievers alike. Stories by informants from this group tell of demons causing afflictions such as epilepsy, tuberculosis, impotence, disturbing sexual dreams, and excessive jealousy. However, as the following exposition of the Deliverance debate shows, they too were forced to account for the fundamental duality of Pentecostal cosmology.

THEOLOGICAL CONCEPTS: DELIVERANCE PENTECOSTALISM IN ETHIOPIA

The Ethiopian debate about Deliverance Pentecostalism originated in 1971, when a group of ministers began to emphasize exorcisms more than before, advocating them as a solution to all sorts of sicknesses and teaching new forms of spirit embodiment: vomiting and sneezing, for example, were now read as signs of demons leaving a believer's body. The issue had a peculiar twist in that the most prominent member of the group was an elder of the Full Gospel Believers' Church while another elder of the same church suffered from epileptic seizures,⁶ which the Deliverance group attributed to evil spirits. Soon they adopted the view that it was possible for born-again Christians to be demon-possessed, based on reel-to-reel tapes by the above-mentioned Derek Prince.

In 1971, three of the Full Gospel elders left their positions, among them the leader of the Deliverance group,⁷ who subsequently worked with Swedish missionaries in Jima.⁸ He returned to Addis Ababa in 1972, at a time, when the Full Gospel Believers' Church had been completely shut down by the government (see Haustein 2009). With a number of leaders in jail and the church reconstituting itself in home fellowships, new opportunities arose for the spread of Deliverance Theology.

When the Full Gospel Believers' Church reconstituted itself during the 1974 revolution, it also took up the Deliverance issue in a long meeting, which resulted in the excommunication of ten members propagating this type of theology, including the former elder (Engelsviken 1975:126f.; Schröder 1997:1). The excluded members founded the Gospel Deliverance Church in the same year. In 1976,

another minister was excommunicated, since he had insisted that possession of Christians was not a doctrinal issue, but one of practice: exorcisms must be offered wherever necessary. He soon joined the Deliverance Church and was ordained as the church's first pastor in 1978 (Berhanu 2001), a position he holds to the day.

The Gospel Deliverance Church at first not only attracted new members but also provided deliverance ministry to members of other churches, which hardened the fronts on both sides. However, like most other Pentecostal churches it soon was closed by the Mengistu regime. The church was also torn by another doctrinal conflict at this time, when some members proclaimed that the goal of all deliverance ministry was a state of full salvation, which would result in a fully transformed body, immune to sickness and even death. Membership declined and the remainder of the church congregated in two mainline Protestant churches in Addis Ababa.

After the socialist regime was brought to an end in 1991, the Gospel Deliverance Church reestablished itself as a national entity. Since that time, numerous books by the Deliverance minister Derek Prince have been translated into Amharic and published by the senior pastor of the church. For a while the church continued outside the Evangelical/Pentecostal mainstream, but in the year 2000, it joined the most important Protestant association in Ethiopia, the Evangelical Churches Fellowship, which also contains many of its Pentecostal opponents. This somewhat surprising outcome of over 25 years of exclusion and mutual hostility came after long theological negotiations and a considerable waiting period. The underlying theological compromise appears to be that the Gospel Deliverance Church may employ exorcisms as they see fit as long as they refrain from explicitly stating that born-again and Spirit-filled Christians may be demon possessed.

At about the same time, the senior pastor, Yemaneberhan Endale, published a book about Deliverance, which is important for understanding the theology behind this movement (Yemaneberhan 2000). In this book, he advertizes deliverance as a vitally important and sadly neglected ministry of the church, but with regard to the possession of Christians he makes an

important concession:

This is a point truly requiring careful study: It is not about being under the control of demons or being “possessed”, but about being attacked by demons. With the exception of those who do not obey the Lord, Christians belong to the Lord God and not to Satan. Therefore, Satan cannot control them entirely. To be attacked by demons is to say that Satan can have a direct or a partial influence in a part or parts of life of a Christian or a worldly person (ibid.:9).

It is obvious that Yemaneberhan seeks to affirm the fundamental evangelical dualism which had driven much of the previous debate: a person can either belong to God or to Satan, there is no partial “ownership”. However, this does not entail that Christians are removed and protected from Satanic or demonic influence. Satan may not be able to control them “entirely” but may very well have a “direct or partial influence” upon their life. Yemaneberhan thus attempts to dissolve the divide on two decisive fronts. First, unlike spiritual “belonging,” demonic control is not a binary state of possession, but comes in varying degrees ranging from attack, to “partial” or “direct influence.” Secondly, the assumption of personal unity is dismissed in favor of a segmented anthropology: partial control means that one or several parts of a believer are under demonic influence, whereas others may be controlled by the Holy Spirit.

These two conceptual tendencies can also be observed in Yemaneberhan’s discussion of the process of conversion. He argues that if the old human nature, the “flesh,” still lives on in born-again believers, it can be established that “the Holy Spirit and an unclean spirit can dwell together” (ibid.: 70). Since the apostle Paul exhorts believers in the New Testament to live by the Spirit and not by the flesh (Galatians 5), Yemaneberhan concludes that Christians are subject to an ongoing and unceasing battle between flesh and Spirit: The Spirit fights evil and the flesh fights holiness, as both seek to bring the heart of the believer under their control. Therefore, conversion, first of all, is not a simple swap of spiritual allegiances but a fluid and dynamic process: Christians are engaged in a life-long battle to defeat the flesh and give victory to the Holy Spirit. Secondly, believers are segmented beings. They find within themselves two personal entities fighting over a third, as flesh and Holy Spirit battle to control the “heart”.

When explicitly discussing the issue of demonic presence within Christians (chapter 9), his anthropology and soteriology lead Yemaneberhan to contend that the central assumption of his opponents, namely that the Holy Spirit and Satan cannot dwell together in one person, is simply invalid and unbiblical. There are two basic constellations from which a dual occupancy may result. First, a person may have been subject to Satan before accepting Christ. In the ensuing struggle, Satan does not immediately flee as many suspect, but it takes concerted efforts to drive him out in Jesus' name. Once again the normally clear-cut boundary between unsaved and born-again is dissolved in favor of a continuum. It is not just the flesh that struggles against the Spirit, but a previous evil presence continues to reside inside the post-conversion body until it is confronted directly.

[insert figure 1 here]

(Fig. 1. Yemaneberhan 2000:132, translation J.H.)

The second basic constellation occurs in born-again and fully delivered believers, when due to "heavy sin," Satan may be allowed to draw near again. In order to illustrate this process, Yemaneberhan provides a diagram which depicts the human person in a number of concentric circles (fig. 1). Yemaneberhan explains the graphic as follows:

Satan can only control a believer when he manages to break the three levels of protection that are around every believer. As can be seen in the picture, the three protections are represented by three wavy lines; the first protection is "God's hedge" in Job 1 and 2; the second protection are the holy angels in our surroundings (Psalm 34:7; 91:11–13) the third protection is the shield of faith (Ephesians 6:16). The arrow, which is thrown, crashes into the protection, and returns, represents the kind of attacks Satan strikes the believer with. However, as long as a believer is clean in spirit and heart, the arrows return and are scattered, having done no harm. If we expose ourselves to sin, however, the arrows slowly penetrate the three protections and enter, and, as Paul reveals in Ephesians 4:27, they make us subject to sin. As different spirits enter through this hole, they can control our mind, feeling, and also will, and they may injure our Christian life. However, if the believer enters true repentance, the spirits may be exterminated and driven out one by one (James 4:7–8). However, to do this, the help of a minister is absolutely necessary. Otherwise, a herd of demons will rush through the original open door and control the whole person (131).

The segmentation and fluidization of the human person has reached a new level in this depiction.

There are not just two entities competing for control, spirit and flesh, but altogether six compartments: body, soul/mind, will, flesh, feeling, and spirit. Notes on the diagram indicate the proper state of these elements and imply their different possibilities for sin. Moreover, the limits of the body are dissolved into a spiritual realm. The three-fold protective shell around a believer is not entirely in his or her domain, since the holy angels and “God’s hedge” are remote entities and are only influenced by the believers’ life to some degree. The complexity of this depiction clearly calls for the help of a spiritual expert, because it is not enough to merely repent and expel the demons. Only professional discernment can help to seal the gateways of demonic influx, so that, in an implicit reference to the New Testament (Matthews 12/Luke 11), not a full “herd” of them will return.

Altogether, this concept of spirit possession may be seen as a compromise resulting from a specific Pentecostal debate, perhaps with stronger ties to Western theologies than Ethiopian cosmology. Yet, Yemaneberhan’s discussion also mirrors what Aspen (2001) found for spirit mediums and their allegiance to the Orthodox church. There is a conceptual and religious framework, in this case Pentecostal or evangelical dualism, which forms the base to all other beliefs about spirits. Therefore, Yemaneberhan upholds the evangelical duality of spiritual belonging as a driving force behind a continuous spiritual struggle. However, by compartmentalizing the human person and conceptualizing conversion as a long process of deliverance, he can still give ample room to possession experiences, which in his cosmology indicate a Satanic presence.

EMBODIMENT: SPIRITUAL AMBIGUITY AND THEOLOGICAL CERTAINTY

In the following, I would like to show how this theological debate about divine presence inside the human person is related to the embodiment of spirits and of the Holy Spirit in Ethiopian Pentecostalism. For this, I will turn to an informant who I will call Berhanu. At the time of the interview,⁹ Berhanu was a well-established man in his fifties, who worked for a large international Christian organization. Berhanu is a respected leader of the Meserete Kristos Church, which was

founded by Mennonite missionaries, and he was intimately involved in the beginnings of the Ethiopian Pentecostalism as well as in the emergence of the Charismatic movement in his church.

When asked about his first encounter with Pentecostal experiences, Berhanu gave the following account about the early student revival group he was involved in:

And then we started to pray against the demons, and demons used to leave those who were sick, and at one point – I am coming to my personal testimony – as I was praying, I started speaking in tongues. Before this experience, there was one who was originally demon possessed but who was delivered, but was repossessed by the demon. And this lady, this girl, spoke in tongues. So, that happened some weeks before. When I started to speak in tongues – ‘what’ did I say, ‘what’s happening with me?’ It was spontaneous. And I wanted to check, whether it is of the same spirit or a different one. So I stopped it, because I was the only one, you know. I stopped it and I checked my life, but in my life I see that I had healed sin, I want to give my life to the Lord even up to today, I wanted to testify, and what is in me is all full light. So I said it’s no problem, it’s okay. But I didn’t continue, I stopped it.

The beginning of this story sounds like many other testimonies of Pentecostal initiation: there are bodily signs of God’s power, and the leader of the group finds himself spontaneously erupting into tongues while absorbed in prayer. However, what normally would be considered the initial physical sign of Holy Spirit baptism, became a reason for apprehensive concern, because the bodily manifestation of tongues had been connected with demon possession before.¹⁰ Moreover, this was a case of “repossession”, casting a shadow on the previously presumed efficacy of the group’s exorcisms.

The incident Berhanu alludes to here, is narrated in a number of histories about this group (Hege 1998:150; Tilahun 2002:93f.; Abera 2003:20). A female congregant, out of whom the group had exorcized an evil spirit, returned a few days later, spoke in tongues and prophesied about the imminent return of Jesus Christ. The enthusiastic students took this prophecy to their school, causing quite a commotion and the closure of the school for one day. However, on the following day the group “discovered that the girl had a deceiving spirit” (Hege 1998:150; none of the sources provide the details of this “discovery”), whereupon the leaders of the group concluded that the prophesy was false and informed the school accordingly. They were suspended for some time, and

their group suffered a dramatic decline in attendance.

Berhanu thus invokes a rather traumatic instance in his narrative of spiritual discovery, which casts the full Pentecostal experience into doubt: from the capacity to exorcise demons, to tongues, and ultimately Spirit baptism itself. In consequence, his own bodily manifestations could not be safely objectified as presence of the Holy Spirit. Berhanu attempted to resolve this problem of spiritual discernment in an ethical review of his life, but even though this self-examination yielded a satisfactory result, it did not lend him enough confidence to continue his glossolalic utterances. As he relates in a later part of the interview, he did not resume this practice until he heard of a revival group in Harar where Spirit baptism was also accompanied by glossolalia.

When asked to recount the incident of “repossession” more specifically, Berhanu made some important modifications:

She was demon-possessed, we prayed for her, and she was relieved for some time. But she didn't care to come to our prayer and things like that. She wanted to go away. After a while, she said that she had a special revelation of God, and she has received some prophesy for us, and she came to our meeting. And at that meeting she started to prophesy and also started to speak in tongues. [...] So, I started even to doubt the experience, but at the same time I was afraid. I was asking God: “Forgive me my doubt! And help the others not to doubt like me.” Because, sometimes she used to scream “Oh, I am tormented, I am tormented, I am tormented, I am burning, I am burning!” What does that mean? This used to be uttered by demon-possessed people. [...] The following day we discovered that it was an evil spirit.

The language regarding the exorcism is remarkably toned down in this version of the story: instead of casting out a demon, the youths merely “pray” for the inflicted woman, and far from being delivered, she was “relieved for some time.” This is an important shift: instead of a “repossession” the case might also be seen as an incomplete exorcism. There also are other indicators that something was just not right: the young woman “didn't care” to join the group and “wanted to go away.” Thus, not only the completeness of her exorcism is in doubt but even her Christianity. She received her prophecy under obscure circumstances, and there are even clear signs of demon possession that lead the informant to an initial doubt, which is validated the very next day.

In comparing the two accounts, it appears that Berhanu tells the story on two different levels. When

discussing the later impact on himself, a narrative of ambiguity and uncertainty prevails, whereas in a review of the case itself, theological ambiguity is largely laid to rest: something was not right with the woman's deliverance and her Christian life, and a bolder observer might have resolved the issue earlier. Thus, the clear theological verdict about the woman is not linked up to the narrative of ambiguity regarding the subsequent experience of Holy Spirit baptism. Instead of marking the difference between his case and that of the other student, Berhanu upholds the uncertainty regarding tongues in his Spirit baptism narrative, even when his own self-examination yielded satisfactory results. Moreover, he himself chose to invoke this story for a full exposure of the problem of ambiguity instead of just narrating the end result.

Later segments of the interview reveal, why this initial uncertainty is so important to him: it can be used as a marker for a special competence in spiritual discernment. While Berhanu had to concede that he only resumed speaking in tongues after hearing about glossolalia at the revival in Harar, he uses his experience of ambiguity to reject any authority by this other group:

But when the group from Harar came, they wanted to pray for us. But when they wanted to lay their hands on us, we didn't want them to lay their hands on us, because since we've had deceiving experiences. One of them, who wanted to pray for us, his sister was the one who was possessed with demon. So we had our own question. So, when they came, we used benches in the chapel, when they came to lay their hands, we hid ourselves by going under the bench. You understand. We didn't want them to lay their hands. Even then, they said: "Say hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah! Hallelujah hallelujah." Its a kind of formula. You know, hallelujah. They said "Repeat it, repeat it, fast, fast fast! And then you will speak in tongues." We didn't like that also.

Thus, the informant employs his spiritual crisis of uncertainty as a lesson learned in critical watchfulness and discernment. He refers to the experience three times in order to explain his rejection of Harar influence: previous "deceiving experiences", the family relation of the group leader to the demon possessed, and the possibility of fake tongues. Thus, he fully upholds the ambiguity of spirit embodiment, signified here by a questionable practice of glossolalia and the potential danger of inheriting the wrong power through the laying on of hands.

This observation connects with what Matthew Engelke (2005) proposed regarding the centrality of

uncertainty and doubt in the making of religious subjectivity. Tracing historical narratives about the Zimbabwean prophet Johan Masowe, Engelke shows that “uncertainty can be used to mark a religious figure’s position of power,” because it points to “the extent to which the process of sanctification or transformation is realized”, and as such proclaims this-worldly authority (ibid.:802). Berhanu’s story appears to be a similar narrative. The suffered ambiguity regarding the embodiment of the Holy Spirit marks his own transformation and constitutes a special competence in the discernment of evil spirits. Theologically, Pentecostal dualism allows a clear verdict about the woman’s case. In practice, however, the signs are not always easy to read. It is this crisis of uncertainty that affirms that anything is possible and thereby grounds the discerning powers of the spiritual expert.

CONCLUSION

Berhanu’s narrative clearly points to the body as the primary reference for spiritual presence. Certain physical transgressions, like glossolalia, prophetic speech, or screaming, are taken as indexes of the divine, and in a process of objectification they are understood as embodied spiritual beings, be it a demonic power or the Holy Spirit. In this sense, Berhanu’s narrative resonates with Csordas’ analysis of embodiment: at issue is not the acting out of a spiritual power, but the spiritual discernment of physical manifestations in “an embodied process of self-objectification” (Csordas 1990:3).

However, there are a number of elements in this story, which may enable us to take Csordas’ proposal further. The first relates to the assumption of a pre-objective cultural habitus, with which Csordas explains the common forms of bodily manifestations. While it may be said that Ethiopian Pentecostals connect to a traditional habitus for expressing spiritual presence, the salient feature of Berhanu’s case are the transformations and shifts in this habitus, which render it illegible for a time. In seeking the Holy Spirit baptism based on a hearsay of Pentecostal revival, the group aspires to new forms of physical transgression, but there is no common habitus for such expressions.

Therefore, the blend of glossolalia with screams of torment may indicate divine presence for a while, before it is “discovered” to be an indication of an evil spirit. This renegotiation of Holy Spirit versus evil spirit habitus is continued with the re-introduction of tongues, or the later adoption of vomiting or sneezing by the Deliverance movement as signs for evil spirits leaving. The common cultural forms of the habitus therefore appear to be the result of complex cultural negotiations that not only precede, but take place within and through the process of embodiment.

Secondly, the objectification of physical signs is not “diagnosed” but “discerned”, as Csordas (1990:17) rightly points out, but far from being merely a practice “at the level of preobjective intersubjectivity,” discernment is subject to a controversial theological discourse. Boddy (1994:426) has remarked that informants see spirit possession as an experience which is “embodied and disembodied at one and the same time,” and therefore urged to take the latter dimension into account as well. In the Pentecostal concept of spirit, soul, and body, this means that possession not only raises the question of how a believer's physical and emotional being are affected, but also how their spiritual existence relates to the cosmological entities. This is the realm of Pentecostal spirit theology, which in the Ethiopian case is driven by two opposing claims. On the one hand, there is a strong dualism between evil and divine, between an undelivered past and a sanctified presence, combined with the promise of instant full deliverance from demonic influence. On the other hand, there is the potentiality of an ongoing presence of evil spirits, fueled by the affirmation of certain medical concepts and indiscriminate exorcism rites in healing meetings. This tensions of continuity and discontinuity, elaborated by Meyer (1998; 1999) and Engelke (2004), is not only a way to bridge ambivalence, but also a highly politicized theological discourse, as the Ethiopian Deliverance debate has shown. Certain concepts of the person, of conversion, and of possession are mapped out in this context, and to them the self-objectification of spirit embodiment must answer. The ethnographic analysis of Pentecostal Spirit baptism and spirit management therefore must take theological concepts and debates into account in order to elucidate the possibilities and

impossibilities of spirit embodiment.

Finally, as the employment of uncertainty in Berhanu's narrative has shown, the ambiguities resulting from this debate can be employed as a resource of power as well. Discernment is where the authority of the spiritual expert dwells, and in this sense the overdetermination of bodily transgressions also constitutes the grounds of Pentecostal power. If Pentecostalism is, as Ruth Marshall (2009:45) contends, "a form of 'strategic program,' a specific regime of practices that involves determined prescriptions concerning how institutions should be organized, behavior regulated, narrative structured, an order of knowledge and the rules of its verification determined, authority established, spaces laid out, and so forth," then the politics of Pentecostal narratives are an important part in mapping out the multiple layers of embodiment. Inasmuch as stories of Holy Spirit baptism and deliverance are publicly told, recited, modified, and refuted in the politically charged context of Pentecostal theological controversy and church competition, we are not just faced with instances of self-objectification but modes of objectifying social practice in the embodiment of the spirit(s).

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- 1 Pentecostalism is used here in an inclusive sense to encompass classical Pentecostals, Charismatics, and so-called Neo-Pentecostals. For the use of these different terms, see Robbins (2004:119–123).
- 2 Derek Prince (1915–2003) was a global Pentecostal evangelist of English descent, based in the USA and later in Israel. Aside from his abundant travels and his international radio ministry, he published over fifty books, many of which were translated into other languages and are still in print. Prince’ argument was not simply about the possibility of Christians being possessed by demons, but to understand the Christian life as part of a larger spiritual battle that does not stop at conversion but begins there (see e.g. Prince 1976; 2009).
- 3 The author conducted three field trips in 2003–2005 as part of his doctoral research concerning the history of Ethiopian Pentecostalism. During this time he conducted 115 narrative interviews (usually about 90 minutes) and observed over 60 different meetings. Almost all interviews were recorded electronically and transcribed, the observations were documented with photographs and extensive field notes. The interviews usually began with an uninterrupted narrative of the informants' life story, which the interviewer then followed up on certain points of interest. In this way it was sought to preserve the interests, language, and interpretations of the interview partners as much as possible.
- 4 For an introduction to the history of Ethiopian Pentecostalism, see Engelsviken (1975); Haustein (2009; 2011); Tibebe (2009).
- 5 See Office of the Population and Housing Census Commission (1991); Population Census Commission (2008).
- 6 The story of this elder is somewhat obscure. Opponents of the deliverance movement point out that he was suffering epilepsy as a result of a heavy blow to the head he received in an anti-Pentecostal riot in 1968. However, he is usually not celebrated as a martyr, nor is his story often told. He seems to have withdrawn from the group early on, and informants often note that no one knows where he went or whether he is still alive. The accusation of demon possession, however, lives on in interviews and publications by opponents to the Full Gospel Believers’ Church (see. e.g. Freeman 1994: 62f).
- 7 The earliest mention of this expulsion is found in a letter by the Swedish Pentecostal missionary Tage Johansson from 2 Dec. 1971, PRI Archives Uppsala, Sweden.
- 8 The missionaries raised concerns about his emphasis on deliverance as well, see correspondence Tage Johansson, PRI Archives Uppsala, Sweden.
- 9 30 October 2003, Addis Ababa.
- 10 Aside from a brief mention by Reminick (1974), there is not much evidence of glossolalia being connected to traditional possession rituals. However, it is a frequently encountered Pentecostal trope that demons are capable of speaking in tongues.