




BRIEFING ARTICLE

# The religion of Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed: Pentecostalism, prosperity gospel and the power of positive thinking

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## Abstract

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's religious rhetoric and policies stand in sharp contrast to his predecessors during the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Front (EPRDF) period, who carefully and deliberately kept the political discourse free of any religious references. Many were taken by surprise by his pronounced Pentecostal faith. This surprise is arguably a reflection of how scholars and observers have ignored developments within Ethiopia's Protestant community – and religious dynamics in general – that Abiy is a product of. This paper examines how religious developments within Ethiopia's Protestant community produced and shaped Abiy as a Pentecostal politician. The paper also seeks to understand some of the main characteristics of the prime minister's religious ideas and the possible impacts they may have had on his political decisions. My discussion centres on two major aspects. Countering the claims that Abiy aims to 'Pentecostalize' Ethiopian politics, I examine what possible implications he might have for Ethiopia's secular framework and demonstrate how he uses religion in an inclusive way, viewing it as a resource to bring prosperity to Ethiopia. Secondly, to understand the actual content of the prime minister's religious worldview, I analyse the affective affinities between the so-called prosperity gospel and positive thinking teachings.

**Keywords:** Ethiopia; Abiy Ahmed; Pentecostalism; religion; politics

## Introduction

Abiy Ahmed, Ethiopia's prime minister who came to power in 2018, presents himself as a born-again Pentecostal. He has been open about his faith, invokes religion in his political remarks and emphasises religion as an important resource for the country's development – and prosperity. This is a sharp

departure from his predecessors during the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Front (EPRDF) period (1991–2018), who carefully and deliberately kept the political discourse free of any religious references.

Many were surprised by the PM's pronounced Pentecostal faith. This reaction reflects a broader neglect by scholars and observers of the developments within Ethiopia's Protestant community – and of the general religious dynamics over the last decades. This oversight has fuelled much speculation and concern about how the PM's religious worldview might influence his policies and what it could mean for Ethiopia as a secular country. Few, however, have explored in detail the tenets of his religion – his sources of inspiration and how he has appropriated them.

'Pentecostals' involvement in politics in Africa have been discussed by many scholars (Obadare 2018; Marshall 2009; Meyer 2011; Englund 2011). Ruth Marshall has pointed to how Pentecostal political engagement takes the form of disciplines of the body and mind 'as an explicit strategic program that responds to and engages with the context of epistemological, normative and ontological insecurity' in the postcolonial era (Marshall 2009: 2). Ebenezer Obadare (2018), for his part, argues that a 'theocratic class' of Pentecostals has risen to prominence and are influencing state politics in Nigeria. There has also been a debate about the political potential of the prosperity gospel version of Pentecostalism, with some arguing that it causes believers to disengage from politics (Marshall 2009; Gifford 1990), while others claim that it increases socio-economic and political engagement (Haynes 2015; Gaiya 2015; Heuser 2016).

This paper builds on this literature in trying to make sense of Abiy's religious worldview and to understand the circumstances and religious developments that have made him into a Pentecostal prime minister. My discussion centres on two aspects. First, I discuss the nature of Abiy's Pentecostalism and what political implications it may have. I remain sceptical of claims that he aims to 'Pentecostalize Ethiopian Politics' (Lefort 2020; Balehegn 2021; Hardy 2023) and I concur with Jörg Haustein and Dereje Feyissa who argue that the new prime minister is not a typical 'narrow "Pente" politician' (Haustein and Feyissa 2022).<sup>1</sup> While this paper, to some extent builds on their arguments, I also elaborate on how Abiy views religion in a somewhat *sui generis* way: as an indigenous, inclusive heritage that transcends Protestant and Pentecostal boundaries.

Secondly, I discuss the extent to which Abiy draws inspiration from the so-called prosperity gospel. Many have argued that the prosperity gospel theology is the key to his worldview and determines much of his politics. Claims of such connections are, I argue, often tenuous with little or no hard evidence. I do not deny that there are certain linkages between Abiy's religious worldview and the prosperity gospel. However, a particularly important and largely overlooked aspect is the inspiration he draws from so-called positive thinking teaching – which to some extent has links with prosperity gospel theology. My aim here is to examine the confluences of these ideas and to analyse how Abiy appropriates them in his own manner.

One important point needs to be made. Tom Gardner (2024) has in his recent biography of Abiy referred to him as an enigma, pointing to how difficult it is to fully make sense of him as a politician and as a person. The same is true for his religious worldview. We should therefore not expect that an analysis would uncover a coherent script. Both his religious worldview and politics often seem eclectic, ad-hoc and disjointed, in turn making it hard to determine any causal relations between ideas and practice and how his worldview actually shapes his policies.

I therefore find it useful to draw upon Max Weber's concept of 'elective affinity', most famously used in his *The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2002 [1905]). For Weber, the goal was to examine the elective affinity between the Protestant ethics of calling and asceticism and between the spirit and form of capitalism. While the term remains ambiguous, it can be understood as the relationship between things, and how ideas relate to other ideas in a non-deterministic and non-causal manner. Elective affinity may involve similarity and difference, and the key here is that it is about connections, relations and attractions between things.

The paper draws upon data collected from conventional media, social media, official documents and in-depth interviews. These sources contain statements from the prime minister, and data about important religious developments and political dynamics. I also make use of analyses of the prime minister's speeches, which provide additional insights important for the paper. All these sources are carefully triangulated with existing secondary literature. The paper moreover draws upon over two decades of research experience in Ethiopia, which has enabled me to carefully analyse the data in a way that takes into account 'the unspoken' and deeper contextual dynamics.

### **The making of Abiy as a Pentecostal politician**

About ten years ago, I was invited to give a presentation about contemporary Islamic discourses in Ethiopia at what was called at that time Ethiopian Foreign Relations Strategic Studies Institute (EFRSSI), a think-tank affiliated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and led by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) veteran, Sebhat Nega. As I was getting ready to start, another TPLF veteran in the audience muttered: 'What is it with religion? We thought it would go away, but it keeps popping up again and again'. This brief anecdote aptly illustrates how the TPLF-led EPRDF government viewed religion; as something reluctantly recognised as part of the Ethiopian socio-cultural fabric, but which, with muted references to theories of modernisation and more explicitly to EPRDF's teleological developmentalist policies, would become redundant.

Coming to power in 1991, the EPRDF confirmed Ethiopia's secular arrangement that guaranteed religious freedom and ended the Derg's restrictions on religious practices. This opened the space for religious actors to practice, proselytise and position themselves in public space and led, contrary to the party's expectations, to a boosting of activities among all religious constituencies. People flocked to churches and mosques, displaying

their continued adherence to the tenets of their respective traditions, and religious reform currents emerged within the different religious communities. Unable to grasp the sincerity of these developments, the EPRDF government came to interpret them as increased radicalisation – particularly among the Muslim community – and thus sought to curtail and control religious activities, and to co-opt main religious institutions. True to its Marxist-Leninist heritage, the EPRDF believed that so-called extremism was a product of poverty and backwardness and was convinced that this inevitably could be eliminated by socio-economic development. The claim was that ‘sectarian forces are historically spent forces and would not, in the wake of accelerated development and good governance that is unfolding, pose a formidable threat’ (Gebre Ab Barnabas 2003: 11).

Ongoing religious dynamics on the ground had, meanwhile, ‘taken on a dynamic of its own’ (Abbink 2011: 255). However, scholars, diplomats, journalists and observers of Ethiopian politics in general were largely oblivious of the rapidly changing religious landscape. Hence, the arrival of Abiy as a self-proclaimed Pentecostal, who spoke boldly about his faith and about what God could do for the country, was somewhat unexpected.

Abiy’s ascension to the premiership in 2018 was a direct result of the EPRDF government’s failure to curb widespread ethnic-based demonstrations and a product of decades-long simmering internal divisions within the EPRDF coalition and increasing resistance to TPLF’s dominance (Tronvoll 2021). Immediately after taking power, the new prime minister promised widespread democratic reforms, which created high expectations and widespread support among the people. An important goal was to undo much of what the EPRDF had done, and in December 2019, he dissolved the EPRDF and established the new and centralised Prosperity Party (PP). Due to his failure to deliver on these promises and the lack of a coherent political program, his popular support soon started to wane. Thus far, his tenure has been difficult, to say the least, with a devastating pandemic and a subsequent global economic crisis, a war with Tigray, ongoing armed insurgencies in parts of Oromia and in the Amara region, increasing inflation, record numbers of internally displaced people and a general state of insecurity across much of the country. By making and shifting alliances and carefully balancing different constituencies, he has shown a shrewdness which has enabled him to stay in power.

Abiy joined the Oromo People’s Democratic Organization (OPDO) – the Oromo party in the EPRDF coalition – in the early 1990s and soon nurtured ties with the Oromo political elite. One important figure was Abadula Gemed, a founding member of OPDO and one of Ethiopia’s most important Oromo politicians. He spent much effort in strengthening Oromia’s political institutions and the Oromo political elite, and from the middle of the 2000s, he recruited educated young Oromo, groomed them, and placed them in key positions. These included Lemma Megersa, Shimeles Abdisa, and Workeneh Gebeyehu. Abiy soon became close to Abadula Gemed and emerged as one of his proteges, climbing rapidly in the ranks. There are even those who claim that ‘Abiy owes his rise to Abadula’ (Gardner 2024: 40). When the OPDO changed its leadership in 2016, Lemma Megersa and Abiy rose

through the ranks and formed what became known as ‘Team Lemma’ which was key to the latter’s appointment as prime minister in 2018 (Tronvoll 2021: 25).

Abadula was conscious of the heterogeneity of the Oromo and made sure that Oromo from different parts of the region and people with different religious backgrounds were equally represented in the OPDO and in Oromia’s government institutions. He was, in particular, attentive to religion and by bringing more Christians onboard, he sought to rectify the Western image of the Oromo political elite as dominated by Muslims.<sup>2</sup> A significant portion of them were Protestants, such as Lemma who was a member of the Assemblies of God, Shimeles Abdisa, the current president of Oromia, Adanech Abebe, the current mayor of Addis Ababa and, of course, Abiy himself. Abadula, who was born an Orthodox Christian, also adopted Protestantism around 2009,<sup>3</sup> and in 2016, when he was the speaker of parliament, he was photographed, sitting in the speaker’s chair, with two American ministers from the Southern Baptist Church laying their hands on him and praying.<sup>4</sup>

Born in Jimma, in southwestern Ethiopia, Abiy was raised in a multi-religious family with a Muslim father and an Orthodox Christian mother. Very little is known about his religious upbringing, other than that he attended Quranic school as a child (Gardner 2024: 44). In 2000, he adopted Protestantism and joined the Ethiopian Full Gospel Believers’ Church (FGBC), the oldest and one of the largest Pentecostal churches in Ethiopia (Haustein 2011). As a Pentecostal and ascending in the ranks of OPDO, he became part of a network of Oromo Protestant politicians, pastors, as well as businessmen and entrepreneurs who emerged as a result of a changing political economy.

Protestantism was brought to Ethiopia by Western missionaries in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and grew steadily during the imperial period, mainly in the south, yet experienced setbacks during the Derg period. Pentecostalism arrived in Ethiopia in the 1960s, and soon faced obstacles from the Imperial Government and, in particular, during the Derg period. Subject to direct persecution, Pentecostal churches were closed, which in turn meant Pentecostals found their way into the mainline churches, thus contributing much to the Pentecostalization of Ethiopian Protestantism (Haustein 2011; Eshete 2009). This is important for understanding the Ethiopian case: While Pentecostalism is usually considered a distinct sub-section of Protestantism (Attanasi 2012), it is, in Ethiopia, often difficult to distinguish Pentecostalism from the larger Protestant community.

Protestantism, and Pentecostalism in particular, experienced a significant growth after 1991. Accounting for only 10 percent of the population in 1994, the number rose to ca. 18 percent in 2007 (Central Statistical Office 1994, 2007). While recent statistical data is not available, it is likely that over 25 percent of the Ethiopian population is Protestant. The post-1991 period saw the mushrooming of Protestant churches throughout the country and with the door open for proselytisation in traditional Orthodox areas, the number of Orthodox Christians dropped from ca. 50 percent in 1994 to 43 percent in 2007 (Haustein and Østebø 2011).

Protestants in Ethiopia were at the outset more adept than other religious communities to accommodate and participate in the processes of modernisation that took place during the 20th century, mainly because of exposure to mission-based modern education and engagement in development schemes (Donham 1999). Pentecostals emerged out of this context, yet brought socio-economic change in a new direction by underscoring the individual's role in economic growth, encouraging entrepreneurship and investments (Freeman 2002, 2013). Politics were, however, largely viewed as 'dirty' and unsuitable for the true believer – sentiments produced by their negative encounters with previous governments, and with the Derg in particular.<sup>5</sup>

The history of Ethiopian Protestantism post-1991 can be divided into three periods. The first is the 'Great Commission period', from the early 1990s until the early 2000s, which was characterised by strong focus on evangelisation and church planting.<sup>6</sup> The second period, the 'Calvinist period', continued roughly until 2013, and was characterised by 'taking the church to the community'. The believer was to be a good steward, contribute to the transformation of society through hard work and demonstrate self-discipline and good work ethics.<sup>7</sup> This dovetails closely with Emanuel Fantini's (2013) findings, where he points to how a new generation of Pentecostal leaders during the 2000s actively sought to expand the believers' public presence. For example, pastors in churches such as the Unic 7000 Church and the Exodus Apostolic Reformation Church encouraged Christians to engage in societal and political life. The idea was that politics could be purified 'through the active involvement of righteous people' and that being honest, hardworking and incorruptible could transform society (Fantini 2013: 220f.).

The third period, from around 2013, was characterised by a focus on healing and wealth, on direct interventions from God and on a theology analogous to the prosperity gospel. While the message during the second period was that hard work would be rewarded by God, calling people to wait for his intervention, 'people during the third period didn't want to be patient, they wanted change here and now, and that was what these preachers promised'.<sup>8</sup> Fantini (2016) also notes that from the middle of the 2000s, a more explicit prosperity gospel theology emerged in Ethiopia. This trend has continued, and in recent years, the prosperity gospel has made significant inroads in Ethiopia, resulting in the establishment of many new churches and the emergence of individuals labelling themselves as apostles or prophets (Fantahun 2019). One of my respondents claimed that the prosperity gospel 'is everywhere, even within our church [a mainline Protestant church]. Everyone is talking about *biltsignina* [prosperity]'. He explained the rapid expansion with reference to rising inflation and increased economic hardship: 'People are looking for change in desperate times'.<sup>9</sup>

The similarity between the expansion of the prosperity gospel and economic transformations in Africa and elsewhere in the global south has been noted by several scholars (Miller and Tamamori 2007; Attanasi and Yong 2012). In Ethiopia, a changing political economy led to the growth of urban, middle- and upper-classes which in turn correlated with religious developments (Fantini 2015). The process was relatively slow and could be characterised as an

'unintended consequence' of EPRDF's policies. While the party acknowledged the role of the private business sector, its main focus remained on alleviating rural poverty, and it did little to actually stimulate private initiatives in urban areas (Di Nunzio 2015; Sande Lie and Mesfin 2018). Moreover, the developmental state model dovetailed poorly with a Pentecostal emphasis on individual spiritual growth and private entrepreneurship.

The elective affinity between religious and economic change is evident by the way aspiring urban Pentecostal businesspeople and entrepreneurs found the prosperity gospel appealing, giving them a spiritual basis for their economic aspirations and allowing them to 'display economic success as sign of blessing' (Fantini 2016: 72). These Pentecostals also underscored entrepreneurship and many of the churches organised seminars on finance management, leadership and marketing, along with spiritual topics (Fantini 2016: 72). The result of this was professional networks which, as noted, connected young entrepreneurial Pentecostals – networks that gradually extended to the political sphere.

The affinity between God's promises of wealth, entrepreneurship and upward mobility is reminiscent of what Kate Bowler has called the 'soft prosperity gospel' – a trend that emerged in the United States in the 1990s. Different from a 'hard prosperity gospel', which was more uncompromising on the causal links between faith and wealth, the soft prosperity gospel had a more therapeutic approach and a stronger focus on personal wellbeing (Bowler 2013: 110). This soft version was '[c]harming though not effusive, polished but not slick' (Bowler 2013: 5). This version found an audience among urban, upward mobile middle- and upper-classes in Ethiopia, and it was from this context that Abiy emerged. Smooth, well-dressed, polished, smiling, confident and eager to please, he found himself at home here, carefully nurturing the image of the successful, and not shying away from incorporating these ideas into his politics.

### **Abiy's pentecostalism and the secular**

With Abiy as the first Ethiopian leader since Emperor Haile Selassie to openly have declared himself religious, one could ask if religion has 're-emerged' after decades of secular rule. I do not believe this to be the case, simply due to the fact that religion never left or has ever been absent from Ethiopia. The country has never been secularised – in the sense of religion losing its relevance in people's lives. On the contrary, Ethiopia has witnessed a significant resurgence of religion over the last decades. There has also been speculation about whether the prime minister would undo Ethiopia's secular order, but here it is important to keep in mind that while Ethiopia formally has a secular political framework, the separation between state and religion has never been respected. The state has never been afraid of interfering in religious affairs, a fact underscored by the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi when speaking about perceived Muslim extremism: 'We recognize that religion and state should be separated. . . . But this does not mean that the government would sit idle while destructive forces incite religious unrest' (Dereje Feyissa 2011: 13). Abiy has made similar remarks, albeit in a less confrontational manner. Meeting with Protestant church



leaders, he reportedly said: 'The constitution says church and state should be separated, but that doesn't mean they shouldn't work together' (DeCort 2022).

There are also – somewhat alarmist – claims that the PM is influenced by what is called Dominion teachings or so-called 'Seven Mountains' theology (Gardner 2024: 47; Hardy 2023). This theology has its root in the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) movement in the United States and has in recent years gained ground among conservative evangelical Christians and right-wing politicians in the United States.<sup>10</sup> Their main message is that Christians should infuse politics with Conservative Christian values and for Christians to take control over government institutions (Hardy 2022; Brockman 2016). While Seven Mountain theology appeared in Ethiopia in the early 2000s, those familiar with developments during those years argue that it was not about asserting Pentecostal domination over society.<sup>11</sup> Girma Bekele has, in a pointed response to Andrew DeCort's (2022) claim that Seven Mountain theology was taking over Ethiopia, demonstrated that it had a different character from what can be found in the United States. He referenced the Seven Sphere Conference organised yearly since 2018 by the Youth Ministry of the Zetseet Apostolic Reformation Church that sought to 'inspire and equip young professionals to live as ambassadors of God's Kingdom in their respective vocations', and argues that the Ethiopian version of Seven Mountain theology is not about Christian domination of society but rather about preparing youth to contribute to the development of the country as good citizens (Girma Bekele 2022).<sup>12</sup>

Abiy's use of religious references makes him, as already noted, very different from his EPRDF predecessors. For example, he ends many of his addresses with the phrase 'May God bless Ethiopia and all its people' – something that would be unthinkable during the EPRDF period (Haustein and Feyissa 2022: 486). Similar to how difficult it is to fully demarcate what Ethiopian Pentecostalism is, the important point is that Abiy himself does not fully fit the category. He is not, as noted earlier, the typical exclusivist Pentecostal Christian, who divides the world into good and evil and people into saved and damned. Instead, his religious language is marked by an inclusivism that aims to transcend religious boundaries and where religion – in rather general terms – is presented as inherent to Ethiopia's heritage and national character – almost as a sort of an Ethiopian civic religion (cf. Bellah 1967). One important detail here is the word he uses for God in his 'May God bless Ethiopia and all its people' reference. Speaking to a general Ethiopian audience, he never uses the word *Egzabeher*, which is the Amharic word for God used by Christians, and nor does he use *Allah* or *Rabbi*, the Arabic terms used by Muslims. Instead, he uses the word *Fetari*, or creator – a generic Amharic term used by followers of all religious traditions.

Visiting different religious communities and giving remarks on religious holidays – Christian and Muslim – he seeks to identify himself with the different audiences, citing both the Bible and the Qur'an. Such pragmatism has also made many suspect that he deliberately tries to placate each and every one. There are those within the Protestant community who feel he goes too far in validating other religions and thus betraying his own faith (Haustein and Feyissa 2022: 489). People are also often left confused by the ways he addresses the different



religious communities. Speaking to an Orthodox audience shortly after assuming power, he left both Muslims and Protestants bewildered when he underscored EOC's importance for Ethiopia at the expense of other religious groups, saying that 'we cannot think of Ethiopia without the Orthodox Church, the Orthodox Church is in itself a country'.<sup>13</sup> On the streets of Addis Ababa today, it is not uncommon to hear claims that he is favouring one community over the other, and Orthodox and Muslims often argue that his real goal is to promote Protestantism. While many of Abiy's close friends are Protestants, his cabinet and leaders of government agencies are a mix of Orthodox Christians, Muslims and Protestants. Particularly noticeable is his appointment of Daniel Kibret, a Mahabere Qidusan-affiliated deacon and activist as a key advisor in the prime minister's office (Gardner 2024: 210).<sup>14</sup>

Abiy's inclusive approach is also demonstrated by his active involvement with different religious communities – with the aim to mend divisions. Soon after taking office, he took it upon himself to end the schism between the EOC in Ethiopia and the exile synod based in the USA. The prime minister played a similarly active role in mending fractions among the Muslims, overseeing the formation of the new Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council (EIASC) in 2019, and again in 2022 (Haustein and Feyissa 2022: 488; Haustein *et al.* 2023: 34). Abiy, moreover, got involved with the Protestant community, where he played a central role in the establishment of the Ethiopian Council of Gospel Believers' Churches (ECGBC), an umbrella organisation of Protestant churches – and an alternative to the existing Evangelical Churches' Fellowship of Ethiopia (ECFE).

### Abiy exceptionalism?

Abiy's inclusivity is about Ethiopia as a country and its future prosperity. Some have referred to this as an expression of Christian nationalism (DeCort 2022) similar to ideas found among other Pentecostal politicians in Africa. The most obvious example here is the late President Frederick Chiluba of Zambia, a devout Pentecostal, who sought to introduce into the constitution the notion of Zambia as a 'Christian nation' (Haynes 2015: 12). Yet, I believe the concept of Christian nationalism is unfit to capture Abiy's image of and vision for Ethiopia.

There is an interesting parallel to Zambia in the sense that Frederick Chiluba spoke about the country as 'blessed whenever it enters into a covenant with God' (Haynes 2015: 12). Such 'covenant paradigm' (Wariboko 2012) has, as Naomi Haynes points out, clear references to the Old Testament pact between God and the Israelites: Zambia is imagined as the children of Israel and is, consequently, 'the recipient of the blessings that must follow from it' (Haynes 2015: 17). This resonates with the idea of Ethiopian exceptionalism as discussed by Haustein and Feyissa (2022). Ethiopian exceptionalism is central to Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity and can be traced back to the *Kebre Negast*, Ethiopia's national epic, which highlights God's covenant with Ethiopia, and which proclaims Ethiopia's status as God's divinely ordained promised land and as uniquely blessed.

Informed by this exceptionalism, Abiy repeatedly speaks about Ethiopia's uniqueness, something particularly noticeable in his second inaugural speech.

Referring to Christianity's early arrival in Ethiopia and to the country's early contact with Islam, he went on to speak about Ethiopia as the 'cradle of civilization . . . and an astonishing country', similarly characterising Ethiopians as 'wise and endowed with a golden culture . . . and an astonishing people' (Ayalew Nigatu and Tadesse Admassu 2023: 22). Effectively transcending religious boundaries, Ethiopia is a blessed country for all. There is also a somewhat transcendental dimension to this, as he in his speech also said: 'We Ethiopians, while alive, we are Ethiopians; when we die, we become Ethiopia' (Habtamu TekleSillasie 2019: 111).

Abiy's references to God's blessings and protection of the country were particularly evident during the war with Tigray. In the remarks he made during 2021 Easter holiday, at the height of the war, he compared Ethiopia's troubles with Christ's suffering and crucifixion, and proclaimed that Ethiopia would, like Christ, resurrect and be victorious.<sup>15</sup> In a leaked audiotape of a phone conversation between Abiy and the famous Prophetess Birtukan Tassew in 2021, the latter told the prime minister that God wanted him to defeat the Tigrayan forces, calling upon him to 'be cruel with them . . . and not to negotiate with them'.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, after the war he claimed that victory was '[b]ecause God is in our company' and that it 'wouldn't have been possible had my Creator not been with me' (Gardner 2024: 314). One of my interlocutors argued that Abiy sees Ethiopia's recent and current tribulations as part of God's masterplan and that Ethiopia inevitably will rise as a new nation. Moreover, he sees current suffering as necessary for this new Ethiopia, and he often refers to an Amharic proverb saying 'the night will darken before the dawn' (Gardner 2024: 343).<sup>17</sup>

What stands out is how Abiy elevates himself when he speaks about Ethiopia's tribulations, victory and future prosperity. This notion of Abiy embodying Ethiopia was evident during the launch of his *Medemer* book, when he proclaimed, 'Abiy and Ethiopia are inseparable; two sides of the same coin' (Gardner 2024: 218). This raises the question whether we should not only speak about an Ethiopian exceptionalism, but also about an *Abiy exceptionalism*; not in the sense that that Abiy is objectively exceptional, but in that he perceives himself to be.

Similar to Meles who had his own Messiah-complex, Abiy seems to have an unshakable faith in his own ability to rule. The difference between the two, however, is that Abiy is convinced that he is Godsent and divinely chosen to lead. The clearest testimony to the claim of divine selection is the story of his mother's prophecy during his childhood, when she foresaw that he would become Ethiopia's seventh king.<sup>18</sup> Several Pentecostal preachers have reinforced such notions, and in addition to endorsing him, they have bestowed upon him prophetic and messianic qualities. Israel Dinsa, for example, called him a 'Moses' and proclaimed him to be a 'prophet'. The former prime minister, Hailemariam Desalegn, also a Pentecostal, similarly proclaimed that Abiy's arrival was 'ordained by God' (Haustein and Feyissa 2022: 487). Pastor Guillermo Maldonado, a Honduran American prosperity preacher and founder of the El Rey Jesús church in Miami, Florida, prophesied, while speaking to a large congregation in Addis Ababa a few days after Hailemariam Desalegn had tendered his resignation as prime minister in 2018, that God 'will raise up a new

government . . . to do my work and to bless my people'. He continued saying that 'the Lord says, Ethiopia, you are my people, you have suffered, but I heard your prayer. I will bring prosperity upon this nation. The Lord says, Ethiopia, you are a peaceful people. I will raise young leaders, and they will be a fire for my spirit'.<sup>19</sup>

The idea of divinely ordained political leaders is not new to Ethiopia. It goes back to the *Kebre Negast*, which traces the Solomonic Dynasty back to the Israelite kingdom of David and as chosen by God. The status of the monarch as divinely ordained continued into the 20th century, with the 1955 Revised Constitution declaring Emperor Haile Selassie as the 'elect of God', and that 'the person of the emperor is sacred'.<sup>20</sup> While the imperial monarchs' divine selection was rooted in descent, dynastic heritage and authorised in the teachings of the church, Abiy's selection has a Pentecostal twist. It is based upon direct revelations from God, confirmed by Pentecostal preachers. While this assertion may be powerful – for those who believe – it is also tenuous. Similar to how the EPRDF's fall was a result of a lack of democratic reforms and its failure to deliver development at the pace expected by the people, so may Abiy's claim to divine selection, to being exceptional, be determined by whether he is able to deliver on his promises of prosperity.

### The prosperity gospel

It is often claimed that the prosperity gospel is central to Abiy's religious worldview (Gardner 2024: 205; Hardy 2023; DeCort 2022). There are those who believe that the name of his party, the Prosperity Party, is evidence of this (Balehegn 2021). While I do not contest that there are certain connections, I believe it is important to understand the different – and changing – varieties of the prosperity gospel, to empirically examine to what extent Abiy draws inspiration from this theology, to carefully analyse what aspects of the prosperity gospel he is influenced by and how he interprets and appropriates it.

A detailed discussion of the prosperity gospel is beyond the scope of this article, and I will here just outline some of the main characteristics. Sometimes referred to as the 'Health and Wealth Gospel', the prosperity gospel is a subset of Pentecostal theology focused not only on the believers' spiritual wellbeing but also on physical and material welfare. A key aspect is that God does not want people to be sick or poor, and that God's abundant gifts in the form of health and prosperity can be realised by the believer's faith, prayer and by what is referred to as 'name and claim' (Coleman 2000b; Bowler 2013). The roots of the prosperity gospel can be traced to the USA, where Oral Roberts, John Osteen, Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland and T. L. Osborn are some of the key figures. The teaching gradually spread globally, gaining receptive audiences in Africa and elsewhere in the global south (Jenkins 2011). While the prosperity gospel is said to be a 'transposable message' that easily travelled from its American origin and simply picked up in different localities (Heuser 2016), Karen Lauterbach (2019) has cautioned against reducing the prosperity gospel to a 'script' or a coherent system of thoughts. It is also important to recognise the dynamic character of the prosperity gospel as something being enacted,

produced and reshaped through a variety of encounters in different local contexts (Lauterbach 2019: 117).

While Abiy makes frequent references to prosperity (Amharic: *biltsgigna*), a term that has nearly replaced the EPRDF's concept of development (Amharic: *lemat*), he has never explicitly announced any adherence to the prosperity gospel; neither has he made any references to its main tenets or to any gospel prosperity theologians. He does not talk about health and wealth in typical prosperity gospel lingo as something that each believer can claim from God. The prime minister has moreover never been a member of any of the new emerging prosperity gospel churches. While it is no secret that Abiy has ties to prosperity preachers like Pastor Yonatan Atkilu, Tamrat Tarekegn and Eyu Chufa, he also draws inspiration from more established Protestant figures, like the late Pastor Belina Sarka from the mainstream Lutheran Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) and Pastor Bekele Wolde Kidan from the FGBC.<sup>21</sup> As much as Abiy draws inspiration from the prosperity gospel, there is some evidence that he appropriates certain aspects of it in a rather idiosyncratic 'Abiy fashion'.

It has been argued that the prosperity gospel's rugged individualism means that prosperity gospel churches both in Africa and beyond have shown little interest in material welfare beyond the individual believer and remained unengaged in socio-economic development beyond the walls of the church (Gifford 2015). Marshall (2009) has argued that the prosperity gospel's focus on individual health and wealth has reduced Pentecostalism's political potential. These claims have been contested by others who suggest that the prosperity gospel embeds believers in the socio-political life of their communities and equips them to participate in producing political and socio-economic change (Haynes 2015; Heuser 2016; Attanasi and Yong 2012). Musa Gaiya (2015) has labelled these churches 'centripetal churches' actively engaged in social developments of their contexts.

Abiy ties individual prosperity with that of the nation, viewing the former as dependent on the latter. These are ideas that did not necessarily emerge with Abiy. They have a longer history within Ethiopian Pentecostalism where growth and prosperity were underpinned by a prophetic language which connected individual success with the prediction that an 'era of glory of Ethiopia' was coming (Fantini 2016: 73). A fundamental aspect, and very different from the EPRDF's notion of development, is how Abiy sees Ethiopia as a blessed country and prosperity as divinely mandated and thus inevitable. This is a central theme in many of his speeches, in which, for example, he has claimed that 'Ethiopia will prosper ... By 2030 Ethiopia will be one of the top economies in Africa. There is nothing that can stop this'. Comparing Ethiopia with the Israelites fleeing the Egyptian Pharaoh, he said that Ethiopia 'surely would prosper ... God is a good God' (Haustein and Feyissa 2022: 487).

Prosperity is, however, not free but requires hard work and sacrifice. This reflects what has been labelled as *prosperity ethics* which emphasises entrepreneurship, skills, individual efforts and a distinct work ethic (Cornelio and Medina 2021, 2020). Hard work has been a common theme in Abiy's rhetoric. In his first inaugural speech, for example, he repeatedly called

upon people to 'strive tirelessly to return the country to its past glory and to ensure . . . that prosperity is extended to all its citizens' (TekleSillasie 2019: 36). Different from the EPRDF which saw the party as the vanguard in charge of development, Abiy spoke about the sacrifices of the past generations and appealed directly to the people, emphasising their common responsibility in bringing change (Chekol 2019: 131). This echoes Abiy's notion of *medemer*, which can be translated as 'synergy' or 'adding to the other', and in which the need to 'work together for the sake of the nation' is underscored (TekleSillasie 2019: 129).<sup>22</sup>

A similar prosperity ethic has been championed by prosperity gospel preachers elsewhere in Africa, most notably Bishop David Oyedepo of the Winners' Chapel in Nigeria. Combining notions of patriotism, professionalism and prosperity, Oyedepo emphasises the need for people to come together and work hard. Similar to Abiy, who has stressed the importance of youth for the building of a prosperous Ethiopia, Oyedepo aspires 'to raise a new generation of leaders who will positively impact their nation, the African continent and the world at large' (Wariboko 2012: 44).

Another interesting aspect of Abiy's notion of prosperity is that it is something that awaits the people, as something to be realised (Ayalew Nigatu and Tadesse Admassu 2023: 8). It is the past generations' sacrifices that have brought Ethiopia to where it is today, and simultaneously as he calls upon the people to continue to sacrifice, to donate their time, money and lives – either to the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam or to combat insurgencies – he promises them a prosperous future. The idea of prosperity as something that waits to be realised is inherent to the prosperity gospel – and evident in the already-mentioned soft prosperity gospel. Preachers like Joel Osteen of the Lakewood Church in Houston have emphasised the importance of 'positive declarations' which speaks to the psychological dimension of prosperity as something the believers already have, and which just waits to be made manifest. God does not want people to be poor and his abundant gifts are there already to be realised. The believers are thus supposed to make positive statements such as 'I am blessed, I am prosperous, I am healthy' (Bowler 2013: 125; Cornelio 2024).

In Weber's proposed elective affinity between divine calling and Protestant asceticism, or what he called ascetic rationalism, the latter was characterised by hard work, frugality, rational use of wealth and the disapproval of excessive consumption. How does this Protestant ethic relate to the prosperity gospel? While the prosperity gospel, in its soft version, values hard work and sacrifice, it does not promote economic prudence but sees accumulation of wealth as an end in itself, calls for the enjoyment of the good life and celebrates consumption (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000; Kirby 2019). Peter Berger has argued that the prosperity gospel departs from Weber's ideas around the Protestant ethic in that the socio-economic consequences of this ethic were unintended – the chief goal was not making people rich. Introducing the term 'intentional Weberians', he points to how the prosperity gospel turns this upside down. By emphasising God's readiness to shower the believer with abundance, intentional Weberians 'consciously intend the consequences that earlier Protestants brought about unintentionally' (Berger 2008). Embedded in a capitalist economy, the prosperity

gospel embraces market forces, profit and entrepreneurship, thus forming 'an elective affinity between contemporary Pentecostalism and the latest phase of neoliberal capitalism' (Kirby 2019: 16).

### The power of positive thinking

A particularly intriguing aspect of Abiy's religious worldview is the elective affinity between prosperity gospel theology and positive thinking. The influence of positive thinking upon Abiy can be seen already in the 2000s during his time in the Information Network Security Agency (INSA). According to his former colleagues, he constantly spoke about 'mindset' and 'wellness', he sent colleagues to positive thinking seminars and attended a month of mindfulness training himself in San Francisco in 2009 (Gardner 2024: 66). This reflects a broader trend. Self-help and personal development teaching has made inroads into Ethiopia over the last decade or so, and expanded in recent years.<sup>23</sup> Aspiring life-coaches and inspirational speakers have emerged and groups like 'Positive Thinkers Club of Addis Ababa' are organising regular events.<sup>24</sup> Important figures include Dawit Dreams, Dr. Wodajeneh Meharene, a psychologist and former Pentecostal pastor, Dagamawit (Dagi) Dawit and psychiatrist Mehret Debebe, who Abiy has had close connections with.<sup>25</sup> While many of these figures are Protestants, some come from the Orthodox and Muslim communities.

In general, positive thinking and notions of self-development and personal growth have today become popularised by a myriad of secular self-help gurus, books, videos and seminars and appear independent of prosperity gospel theology and religion as such. There is, however, a historical elective affinity between these ideas and American Protestantism. This can be traced back to a metaphysical movement called New Thought that emerged in the USA during the 19<sup>th</sup> century where Swedenborg theology, spiritualism, theosophy and psychology were important ingredients (Haller 2012). It became central to the Christian Science movement and gave rise to mind-power and positive thinking and was further developed and promoted by figures like the Methodist preacher E. W. Kenyon, Fred Bosworth and Norman Vincent Peale of the Marble Collegiate Church (where Donald Trump grew up), and reached an increasingly broader audience in the post-war period (Bowler 2013). Health and wealth were a key part of this teaching, which postulated that positive thinking and faith in God would unleash healing and prosperity. God's abundant gifts was something that would be realised through positive affirmation, declarations and spiritual claims.

Positive thinking also appeared within American Pentecostalism in the 1940s, with mind-power being combined with divine principles promising health and wealth. From there, positive thinking found its way to the prosperity gospel, influencing preachers like Kenneth Hagin and T. L. Osborn who drew inspiration from both Kenyon and Bosworth (Barnes 2009: 1). Within the prosperity gospel, positive thinking became 'positive confession' and turned into 'a spiritual discipline' (Bowler 2013: 66). 'Naming and claiming' became speech-acts directed to God who would bestow health and wealth upon the



believer. Conversely, poverty was a result of deficient faith and of the evil which could be eradicated through the same speech-acts (Coleman 2004, 2000a).

Towards the end of the 20th century, the approach gradually changed, as noted, and positive thinking became 'positive declarations', and the elective affinity between positive thinking and prosperity gospel contributed to sacralise self-help programs (Cornelio and Medina 2020: 69). Prosperity preachers often appear as life-coaches and wellness mentors, detailing practical steps towards achieving success, happiness and prosperity. The already mentioned Joel Osteen emphasised how positive statements would change a person's life, telling his congregants that these words would 'permeate your heart and mind, and especially your subconscious mind, eventually they will begin to change the way you see yourself' (cited in Bowler 2013: 125). Accordingly, 'the transformative power of positive confession could be demonstrated psychologically, rather than appealing to the forces of faith (Bowler 2013: 125; Cornelio 2024). Parallels to the prosperity gospel are also observable in Ethiopia, where a commentary in *Addis Insight* pointed to how motivational speakers, 'dressed in sharp suits and adorned with confident smiles and gleaming watches' were promising people 'instant success and quick fixes'.<sup>26</sup>

Again, it is interesting to see how Abiy links positive thinking to progress for the people and the nation. Emphasising the country's existing resources, he would admonish people for not being aware of the richness found in the country – its cultural values, natural resources and the like. Complaining that Ethiopia had unjustly been labelled a poor country, the task ahead was 'to uncover the country's greatness that has been covered by dust'.<sup>27</sup> Poverty and lack of development were, along these lines, a state of mind. In a speech delivered in 2020, he said that 'too many of you reiterate the word "poverty" repeatedly in your speeches . . . we don't want poverty and we abhor it. [But] we shouldn't write and talk about poverty; rather, we eradicate it by paying our attention to thoughts and deeds of prosperity' (Gardner 2024: 206). The same ideas were expressed by Lencho Bati, at the time a senior advisor to the prime minister, who said that 'when you talk about poverty again and again and again it becomes your friend. That is why we try to avoid the word poverty and that is why we adopted the word prosperity. We are dreaming big'.<sup>28</sup> In a more recent statement, the prime minister said that 'eating three times a day cannot be our ultimate goal. Our baseline is to achieve the three Hs: happiness, harmony and human excellence'.<sup>29</sup> The spoken words are treated as speech-acts that have the potential to bring change, where the – often repeated – utterance of words with a positive flavour would affect the mind and eventually alter behaviour. Negative words would obviously have the opposite effect, and that was the reason why people were careful to avoid certain words in the prime minister's presence (Gardner 2024: 208).

One important aspect of Abiy's attention to positive thinking is the importance of personal appearance and the cleanliness and beauty of his immediate surrounding – and the potential for prosperity imagined to be built into this. Abiy is careful about his looks, he is always neatly shaven and polished. He appears in stylish suits, but also more casually in sporty outfits,



yet always fashionable, and sometimes in attire that reflects the clothing of different ethnic groups. During the war with Tigray, he often appeared in military fatigues that oozed masculinity. According to him, a clean and nicely dressed man would receive more respect as well as convey success.<sup>30</sup>

Similar attention is paid to his immediate surroundings. Already during his time at INSA, he was preoccupied with refurbishing the agency's offices in a slick and modern manner (Gardner 2024: 65). Immediately after taking power, he embarked on a project of renovating the prime minister's office with sleek white furniture and state of the art technology. When David Pilling and Lionel Barber from the *Financial Times* interviewed him, he talked extensively about his decorations, explaining that 'I want to make this office futuristic. Many Ethiopians see yesterday. I see tomorrow' (Gardner 2024: 204).<sup>31</sup> According to the two journalists and other people close to him, he is convinced that creating a clean and beautiful work- and living-space serves as a model for others to emulate, claiming that 'if someone comes to my office and sees its beauty, that will radiate throughout the community' (Pilling and Barber 2019). The central idea is that transforming one's immediate surroundings will reverberate further and further, that people will duplicate it and that it thus will bring prosperity to the whole country. In a video where he spoke at length about the office renovations, he said he wanted to show those around him 'that I am walking the talk' and claimed that soon after other government officials started to renovate 'their dirty offices once and for all'.<sup>32</sup>

Abiy has also made similar aesthetic innovations across Addis Ababa, which he clearly sees as an extension of his initial office-renovation project. Green spaces and lavish parks have been constructed, including the Friendship Park and another one in the Entoto Hills. The 'Chaka Project' is so far the pinnacle. Covering an area of 500 hectares, the project is currently under construction and will include a new palace for the prime minister as well as parks, three artificial lakes, waterfalls and luxury hotels. The price tag is estimated to be \$15 billion.<sup>33</sup> In 2024 the so-called Corridor Development project was implemented, which turning major roads into boulevards with broad sidewalks, bike lanes and green spaces – adorned with lavish new light posts and palm trees decorated with light strings. Owners of tall buildings have moreover been forced to paint them in grey and white and decorate them with glitzy LED light strings. Whole neighbourhoods are being demolished, extensively to give space for new modern high-rises. Corridor Development projects are also being implemented in nearly every town across the country, with the aim of enhancing the beauty of these towns.

The idea that a person's surroundings, their beauty and cleanliness, will have an impact on their wellbeing, productivity and success is intrinsic to positive thinking and stems, moreover, from areas like environmental psychology and positive psychology.<sup>34</sup> A little known study by Abraham Maslow and Norsett L. Mintz (1956) is important here, and has contributed to what has become known as neuroaesthetics or neuroarchitecture (Coburn et al. 2017; Chatterjee and Vartanian 2016). The main arguments in these field are that environment matters in enhancing people's mental health. Emphasising the value of clean and beautiful surroundings, Abiy insists that 'a mind that doesn't see a good

thing will not create a good thing' (Gardner 2024: 206). There is also a particular Abiy-twist to the impacts of aesthetics. Speaking about his office renovations, he claimed that when foreign donors came and saw the office, 'we got huge amount of donations, where, for example the World Bank gave us \$1.7 billion'.<sup>35</sup>

Abiy is adamant that his projects will improve living conditions and quality of life. While he talks about the practical impacts of developing infrastructure, there is no doubt that aesthetics is the main thing. Carefully crafted promotional videos of the projects are constantly being made, displaying the lavish boulevards – often at night – with their shiny lights, water fountains where neon lights paint sprays of water in different colours and high-rises framed by strings of LED light. One friend dryly said: 'Ethiopia has gone from being 13 months of sunshine to 13 months of Christmas'.<sup>36</sup>

## Conclusion

Abiy is a product of intertwined socio-economic and religious developments. A changing political economy led to the expansion of a middle- and upper-class, which also produced changing attitudes among the country's Pentecostals who increasingly underscored the connections between spiritual transformation and societal growth. Prosperity gospel ideas gradually infused Pentecostalism which in the Ethiopian context provided justification for newfound wealth and entrepreneurship. Abiy found himself at home among this upward mobile group of people, identifying with the rich and the famous – who he also sees as crucial for his vision of development.

While drawing upon prosperity gospel and positive thinking, he does so in his own idiosyncratic manner. His ideas and actions are often ad-hoc and disjointed, and he seems to draw inspiration from often eclectic trains of thoughts and appropriate them in a way that leaves room for ambiguity. A question that emerges from this is how this elective affinity produces an 'Abiy Ahmed spirit of capitalism'. As I have shown, there is an elective affinity between the prosperity gospel and neoliberal capitalism as a form of capitalism, which, among others, is characterised by unrestrained market forces. While Abiy is said to favour a neoliberal economic model, the state remains at the centre of economic activity. The remarkable and intrusive form of infrastructural restructuring over the last year entails a massive social reengineering that is formulated and implemented by the state. Excess and extravagance are surely crucial to this aesthetics of prosperity where beauty seems to be the main thing, but it is not neoliberal in any form. As critical voices effectively and violently are silenced, its implementation cannot be categorised as liberal.

Abiy is more or less the new emperor in Ethiopia, with power becoming increasingly personalised in himself. He has shown a remarkable ability to maintain and strengthen his power, shifting alliances and playing people against each other. As noted by one of his colleagues: 'Abiy doesn't give a penny unless it's for some kind of political gain' (Gardner 2024: 74). This makes it relevant to ask whether his policies are determined by a distinct set of ideas. While there is little doubt that he sees himself as divinely chosen, there is something about power politics that allows for flexibility. References to

prophecies and revelations are obviously powerful bases for power, but they can also conveniently be negotiated and supplanted with something else.

## Notes

1. 'Pente' is the Ethiopian colloquial used for a Protestant or Pentecostal Christian.
2. Interview, 22 June 2024.
3. Interview, 22 June 2024.
4. Posted on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Zehabesha/photos/a.257207591018121/1065797373492468/?type=3> (accessed 20 June 2024); 'Layman Plans for 50,000 Churches in Ethiopia, *Ethiopianorama*, 4 December 22016. <https://ethiopianorama.com/?p=32853> (accessed 20 June 2024).
5. The leader of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), the late Reverend Gudina Tumsa is a departure from this, arguing for an active engagement in politics (Gebissa 2014).
6. The term is based upon Matthew 28: 16-20, where Jesus commands his disciples to 'go and make disciples of all nations'.
7. Interview, 22 June 2024.
8. Interview, 22 June 2024.
9. Interview, 23 November 2024.
10. 'A Leading Figure in the New Apostolic Reformation,' NPR, 3 October 2011. <https://www.npr.org/2011/10/03/140946482/apostolic-leader-weighs-religions-role-in-politics> (accessed 15 November 2023).
11. Interview, 22 June 2024.
12. 'Spheres Conference,' *Youth Minsitry of Zetseat Apostolic Reformation*, n.d. <https://ays.international/spheres-conference/> (accessed 23 June 2024).
13. 'Ethiopia: Dr. Abiy's Speech at Reconciliation Conference of the Orthodox Church,' *YouTube*, July 26, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MRgyENI8HqU> (accessed February 10, 2022).
14. The Mahabere Qidusan movement (the Association of Saints) is an Orthodox reform movement that emerged in the late 1980s with the aim of saving the youth from Marxist influences and the expansion of Protestant Christianity by reviving EOC's doctrines and traditions.
15. Posted on PM Abiy's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/112704996810839/posts/520239812724020/> (accessed 20 May 2021).
16. 'Abiy and Nebiy Birtukan Leaked Audio,' *YouTube*, 11 August 2021. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YKyy\\_HWu2zE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YKyy_HWu2zE) (accessed 22 June 2024)
17. Interview, 22 June 2024.
18. 'Ethiopia: Full Speech of Prime Minister Dr. Abiy - ENN,' *YouTube*, 3 April 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ajjlYTbjm4U> (accessed 28 June 2024); 'Mom Told me I'll be Ethiopia's 7<sup>th</sup> King: Pastor Abiy,' *YouTube*, 17 May 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhDoLdIYfyg> (accessed 28 June 2024).
19. 'Prophecy about Dr. Abiy and Ethiopia,' *YouTube*, 14 April 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wgj2zqpj924> (accessed 22 June 2024)
20. *The 1955 Revised Constitution of Ethiopia*. Available at: <https://chilot.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/1955-revised-constitution-of-ethiopia1.pdf> (accessed January 13, 2024).
21. Interview, 15 November 2023.
22. The idea of 'working together' can also be traced back to the EPRDF, particularly in relation to gender equality (Østebø Tolo 2015).
23. 'Ethiopia Embraces the Power of Positive Thinking,' *The Economist*, 16 January 2020. <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2020/01/16/ethiopia-embraces-the-power-of-positive-thinking?fbclid=IwAR1t5gtzHizSm0fPlxANTA6g-ZLmlHmg-jd4Iq3NYFjtGKqSkLNw4u60A5g> (accessed 14 November 2023).
24. Positive Thinkers of Addis Ababa. *Telegram*. <https://t.me/positivethinkersaddisababa>
25. Mehret Debebe's *YouTube* channel has over 60,000 followers: <https://www.youtube.com/@MindseTubeDrMehret>

26. 'From Hype to Reality: Why Ethiopia's Motivational Speakers Need a Reality Check.' *Addis Insight*, 24 September 2024. <https://addisinsight.net/2024/09/from-hype-to-reality-why-ethiopia-motivational-speakers-need-a-reality-check/> (accessed 17 December 2024).
27. 'PM Abiy Explaining Palace Project.' *YouTube*, 20 September 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K6KrJDfHTDk> (accessed 17 June 2024).
28. 'A Changing Ethiopia: Understanding Medemer.' *United States Institute of Peace*, 13 February 2020. <https://www.usip.org/events/changing-ethiopia-understanding-medemer> (accessed 16 June 2024).
29. 'Eating three times a day cannot be our ultimate goal - PM Abiy Ahmed.' *Addis Standard on X*, 29 October, 2024 (accessed 12 December, 2024).
30. 'PM Abiy Explaining Palace Project.' *YouTube*, 20 September 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K6KrJDfHTDk> (accessed 17 June 2024).
31. David Pilling and Lionel Barber: 'Ethiopia's Abiy: Africa's new talisman.' *Financial Times*, 20 February, 2019. <https://www.ft.com/content/abe678b6-346f-11e9-bb0c-42459962a812> (accessed 5 February 2024).
32. 'PM Abiy Explaining Palace Project.' *YouTube*, 20 September 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K6KrJDfHTDk> (accessed 17 June 2024).
33. 'Addis Ababa 'Beautifying Sheger' River Development Project.' *African Development Bank Group*, 17 November 2022. <https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/addis-ababa-beautifying-sheger-river-development-project-56625> (accessed 12 November 2023); Geoffrey York: 'A New Palace for Ethiopia's Prime Minister Brings Evictions and Dissent in a Country Beset by Hunger and War.' *The Globe and the Mail*, 8 December 2023. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-new-palace-for-ethiopian-pm-brings-evictions-and-dissent/> (accessed 15 January 2024).
34. 'Improve Productivity and Success with Five "Positivity" Habits.' *Wharton Aresty of Executive Education*, University of Pennsylvania, March 2014. <https://executiveeducation.wharton.upenn.edu/thought-leadership/wharton-at-work/2014/03/positivity-habits/#:~:text=Infuse%20positivity%20into%20your%20surroundings,&text=The%20positive%20feelings%20they%20inspire,us%20more%20productive%20and%20successful.> (accessed 16, June 2024); '8 Ways Your Physical Environment can Impact Productivity and Innovation' 1 *IdeaScale*, 8 December 2021. <https://ideascalenation.medium.com/8-ways-your-physical-environment-can-impact-productivity-and-innovation-7608e2321ab1> (accessed 16 June 2024).
35. 'PM Abiy Explaining Palace Project.' *YouTube*, 20 September 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K6KrJDfHTDk> (accessed 17 June 2024).
36. The Ethiopian calendar has 13 months and a much-used slogan for its tourism sector has been 'Ethiopia is the country of 13 months of sunshine.'

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