



NORWEGIAN  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

# **The Ethiopian Evangelical Community in Oslo**

An empirical analysis of five Protestant congregations in Oslo

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Norwegian School of Theology, [Autumn, 2012]

AVH5030, Master Thesis (50 ECTS)

Master in Religion, Society and Global Issues

## **Acknowledgments**

The thesis is written at the Norwegian School of Theology in Oslo under the supervision of Inger Furseth. Scores of people deserve acknowledgment for their contributions to the final product. Only I take credit for any mistakes, be they factual or logical.

My foremost thanks are for Inger Furseth, my advisor, for her outstanding supervision, time and effort devoted to guide me and give me all the constructive feedbacks. Her extensive knowledge in the field of migration and the dynamics of religion linked to it has been a very important resource to me. Her years of experience in the area of empirical research has improved my ability to collect valuable data in a much more effective way than I could ever have expected.

My heartfelt gratitude goes to the leaders and members of the Ethiopian Protestant community in Oslo who have wonderfully been welcoming to me and extra-ordinarily supportive of this work. I am deeply indebted to the 11 individuals who gave their time to answer my interview questions. Their contribution to this project is invaluable.

I also want to use this opportunity to show my gratitude to many friends who suggested important sources which improved the quality of this thesis involved in various informal discussions.

Last but not least, I thank my children, Peace, Joy and Hope for their encouragement, patience and understanding of a mom who has been absent many weekends during the period of this project. Their consistent love and comfort gave me the strength that pulled me through the whole process.

Oslo, December, 2012

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## Introduction

Recent immigration studies have argued that religious communities have an important role in the way immigrants adapt to the life of the host community. This thesis is about five Amharic speaking Ethiopian immigrant Protestant congregations in Oslo and their role in the participants' incorporation into the life in the larger Norwegian society. The names of the congregations are Yewongel Berhan Church, Ethiopian Adventist Fellowship, Ethiopian Evangelical Church, Selihom Church and Gospel United International Church. Towards the end of my study, I have been informed that the Gospel United International Church does not exist anymore. Apparently, the participants have joined some of the other congregations included in this study but I do not have adequate empirical evidences to present the complete development of this incident. Although during my stay with the congregation I did not observe a hint of this, the development does not come as a total surprise. As it will be discussed in later pages, there basically exists no fundamental difference between these congregations and opportunities of merging or unite appear to be imminent. For this reason and also because I already approach the communities as a single unit, I do not recognize that the new development affects my findings and the presentation in this work in any way.

Ethiopian congregations in Oslo have not yet consolidated their form of existence. In that way, this research only shows the early phase of the life of the communities. At the same time, this probably is the stage when the community's role starts to form and the connection between individuals and institutions begin to shape. Thus, the questions of this research rotate around what role the communities play in the participants' effort to get acquainted with the life of the new setting. I attempt to see which supports the communities provide to the participants and analyze the forms of support from four angles. First, I ask which practical support the congregations, collectively or individually, provide for individuals in different needs. Second, I explore what collective activities take place within the communities. Third, I address the question if the congregations provide links to civil activities of the larger Norwegian society. Finally, I scrutinize how the communities engage questions of political participation into their religious life.

Here are the four main research questions covered in this thesis: 1) Do Ethiopian congregations in Oslo provide practical support to their members as they cope with their new setting? 2) Do Ethiopian congregations in Oslo organize community activities beside their focus on religious education? If yes, which ones?" 3) Does participating in the Ethiopian

evangelical congregations in Oslo lead to further civic engagement? Do the congregations organize activities that build bridges to other civil society bodies beyond their own religious groups? 4) Does participation in the Ethiopian congregations has an impact on the way members approach questions of political engagement? Do the leaders encourage or discourage political engagement?

The objective of this thesis is to see if Ethiopian Evangelical communities in Oslo are a positive or a negative force in the process of integration. Integration has been a debatable topic in many immigration countries. Within the last decades, various forms of tensions have occurred all over Europe due to policies and practices by which immigrants and offspring of immigrants have been incorporated to the structures of host communities. In the Norwegian politics as well, this topic has often been argued for or against in a number of forums. There have been reoccurring signals from the side of immigrant background people to point out the question of integration is far from resolved.

Correspondingly, it is visible that the hosting Norwegian society has not yet figured out a desirable reference to how the newer members of its communities flocking from all corners of the globe may be incorporated. The government has shown an obvious apprehension concerning the negative effects of ethnic enclaves (Guro Ødegård 2010). This concern has called attention to immigrant voluntary associations to see which premises they employ to form their existence. Immigrant associations can play a role in furthering or hindering incorporation of their members into the different spheres of the host community. When they on one hand can facilitate an easier transition for new immigrants, they on the other hand can block integration by building tight bond among the members, to use Robert Putnam's expression, they provide a bonding social capital that excludes the majority group (Putnam 2000: 22-23). So, to see if the Ethiopian Evangelical community in Oslo facilitates linkages to the larger society or it blocks further integration is the main task of this research. The thesis explores how the community forms the terms by which their members create connections to the life in their new land.

I employ the theory of social capital as a tool in the analysis of the networks and the resources individuals may access in the congregations of this study. Social capital may be generated through a variety of formal and informal interactions between people (Smidt 2003: 154). The assessment presented in this thesis is based on the patterns observed among the members and the responses from individual interviews.

The presentation of the thesis proceeds as follows. In chapter one I discuss the research literature. Chapter two presents the research questions. In Chapter four, I will introduce the historic background of the congregations. Then, the four subsequent chapters, analyze the data. The two first of these focus on investigating possible bonding social capital while the two later will look into the possibility of the existence of bridging social capital. Chapter nine addresses the question of the future direction of the congregations. Finally, in chapter ten I give a summary of the thesis.

One of the challenges of this thesis is to try to avoid some imprecise terminologies. One such term which is commonly used in my sources is “second-generation immigrant”. I do not believe that this term appropriately grasps the concept it stands for. Thus, when I distinctly refer to the group born in Norway to two Ethiopian/Eritrean born parents, I have used the expression that is preferred in the more recent reports of the Statistics Norway, which is “Norwegian born”. The term immigrant/s, in this study stands distinctly for groups who are born outside of Norway and immigrated directly. It never indicates individuals born in Norway to immigrant background parents. To refer to the majority group as opposed to the immigrants, I frequently employ the expressions “non-immigrant population” or “the larger Norwegian community” as I find which one better describes my intention in the context.

It seems like *nechoch*, meaning the whites, is a more common word used by Ethiopian immigrants in daily communication to refer to the non-immigrant background Norwegians. However, I would like to add that the use of the term does not seem to imply a racist connotation which is much more prevalent in some other contexts. My impression is that since Ethiopia does not have a history of colonization, the sense of color antagonism is not reflected in the expression. Most informants, both immigrants and Norwegian born alike, refer to the Ethiopian population as “abesha”. So, when I quote them directly, I use this term and without attempting to defend the meaning of it, I would like to inform that in the way the word is used by the informants it simply refers to Ethiopians.

## **Literature Review**

This chapter focuses on the concept of social capital and its importance in analysis of immigrant incorporation into the life of the larger host community. In doing this, the chapter is divided in two main sections. In the first part I look at how the theory of social capital has been understood and approached by various scholars. Then, I present some empirical studies which employ social capital theory to analyze the role of immigrant organizations in the process of integration.

### **1.1 Social capital**

Robert D. Putnam and et al. recognize that the first known use of social capital in the sense it is used in the social sciences today is by Lyda J. Hanifan, the state supervisor of rural schools in West Virginia in 1916 (Putnam 2000: 19; Woolcock and Narayan 2000: 5). Hanifan used the term to show the importance of community involvement for successful schools (Hanifan 1916: 130-131). After Hanifan, the concept of social capital disappeared for some decades, but was reinvented five more times in the twentieth century (see Putnam 2000: 19; Woolcock and Narayan 2000: 5). According to both Putnam and Woolcock although none of these writers cited earlier works, they all used the term to describe ways in which lives are made more productive by social ties.

The prominence of the term social capital in various fields in current research was brought about by the seminal works of Pierre Bourdieu (1986) James Coleman (1990) and Robert Putnam (Putnam 2000: 1993). In what follows I will present some of the important discussions around the theory of social capital.

#### **1.1.1 Theories of social capital**

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu defines social capital as "... the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition." (Bourdieu 1986: 248). Bourdieu's definition emphasizes two elements: resources and networks. According to him,

members in a social network are entitled to benefit from “collectivity-owned capital”. Bourdieu emphasizes that each member’s frame of social capital is limited by the boundaries of the network and the economic and cultural capital that is owned by the participants (Bourdieu 1986: 150, 249). So, for him social capital has both individual and collective aspects. Each individual brings something additional to a group, while he/she is entitled to the benefits from the possessions of the group.

American sociologist James S. Coleman in his book *Foundation of social Theory* draws upon Economist Glenn Loury’s (1977) definition of social capital, which is social relationships are established as a result of individuals’ attempt to make best use of their resources (Coleman 1990: 300). Coleman looks at such social ties as resources that individuals make use of in order to gain social mobility, and that he calls social capital.

Coleman defines social capital by its function and says that social capital produces certain results that are not possible in its absence (Coleman 1990: 302). He conceives social capital as a resource that has value in use and describes it by comparing it to other more tangibly productive forms of capital, such as physical and human (Coleman 1990: 315-316). However, unlike physical capital and human capital social capital is not freely interchangeable because social capital is not owned by individuals. It rather dwells in the structure of relations between persons (Coleman 1990:302). Although physical capital and human capital are complementary to social capital, one of the fundamental differences between them lays on that those who invest in physical capital and human capital are able to collect the benefit themselves. But not all forms of social capital primarily benefit those who contribute the most for its existence. For example, the kinds of social structures which make social norms and the sanctions to enforce them possible, do not only benefit the persons whose efforts are necessary to bring them into existence, but all those who are part of that particular structure.

For Coleman, obligations, expectations, norms and sanctions are some of the important elements which constitute social capital. For example, if people do something to others and trust that the favor returns directly or indirectly sometime in the future, that creates expectation in the giver and obligation in the receiver (Coleman 1990: 306). Norms can constitute a powerful form of social capital. For example, Norms that restrain crime in a city make it possible for women to walk freely outside at night (Coleman 1990: 310). Norms have

to do with putting an effort to fulfill what is expected of a member in a group and sanctions follow if the norms are not followed.

Another important aspect of social capital that Coleman brings up is the potential for information exchange that inheres in social relations (Coleman 1990: 310). As Coleman states, access to information is costly and time consuming. Yet, persons who can get the necessary information from a friend who pays attention to a given matter or simply through an everyday interaction can save time and resources.

Both Bourdieu and Coleman see social capital as inherent in networks of relationships that connect individuals. However, Bourdieu emphasizes resources that are determined by the size of the network, whereas Coleman underlines relational phenomenon such as norms and trust (Furseth 2008: 151). Moreover, Bourdieu's concept of social capital consists of resources that are owned by individuals. This makes social capital to be a transportable matter that an individual can take it with him/her from one connection to another. But for Coleman, social capital is not a property or characteristic of an individual, and as such it is not transportable. It is something that only exists between and among certain individuals within a particular context (Smidt 2003: 8).

Social capital, for American political scientist Robert D. Putnam is a well-connectedness of individuals or/and groups. His concept of social capital stresses the idea of social networks. In *Bowling Alone* (2000), he discusses how the American social fiber is disintegrating as people are building less and less social connections. Putnam argues that social capital has both an individual and collective aspect (Putnam 2000: 20). He states that individuals form connections that benefit their own interests. However, the costs and the benefits of social connectedness affect not only the individual but also the wider community. The degree of an individual's benefit depends on how well the group he/she belongs to is connected to a wider community. He says, "... a well-connected individual in a poorly connected society is not as productive as a well-connected individual in a well-connected society. And even a poorly connected individual may derive some of the spillover benefits from living in a well-connected community." (Putnam 2000: 20).

Putnam draws upon Coleman by stressing honesty, trust and norms of reciprocity as crucial components of social capital. He defines social capital as "... features of social organization, such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions" (Putnam 1993: 167). Networks of community engagement

establish mutual obligations and norms of reciprocity. Furthermore, Putnam argues that honesty, community involvement and social trust are mutually reinforcing (Putnam 2000: 137). People who are more active in community life are less likely to condone any form of cheating, and similarly, people who believe that others are honest are themselves less likely to cheat.

### **1.1.2 Forms of social capital**

Although social capital can be understood as inhering in social ties, not all forms of social capital have identical function. Putnam distinguishes between bonding and bridging social capital (Putnam 2000: 22). Bonding social capital is inward looking and tends to reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups. This type of social capital is beneficial to build specific reciprocity and group solidarity. “Dense networks in ethnic enclaves, for example, provide crucial social and psychological support for less fortunate members of the community, while furnishing start-up financing, markets, and reliable labor for local entrepreneurs.” (Putnam 2000: 22).

Other networks are outward looking and include people of diverse background. These types of networks produce what is called bridging social capital. Bridging social capital denotes social ties that a group creates beyond its own single community (Putnam 2000: 22). Therefore, bridging social capital provides wider opportunities and better chances for information diffusion. Nevertheless, groups cannot be categorized as either bonding or bridging alone. Many groups can bond along some social dimensions and bridge along others (Putnam 2000: 23).

Some scholars have recognized the negative sides of social capital. The negative consequence of social interaction is referred to as negative social capital. Putnam states that strong bonding social capital can create antagonism toward those who are outside the group (Putnam 2000: 22-23). An example he gives of strong bonding social capital that produced destructive results, is Timothy McVeigh’s network which enabled him to bomb the Federal Building in Oklahoma.

Other downsides of social capital in some highly integrated communities include ghettos, gangs, drug cartels and etc. (Woolcock and Narayan 2000: 4). Furthermore, social capital that bonds people along racial, gender and class lines can create social exclusion and

makes the social and political power of voluntary associations to widen class differences (Putnam 2000: 358). Norms and networks that are discriminatory can create social segregation. Norms that discourage deviant actions can reduce innovativeness, and norms that encourage certain actions highly can direct energy away from other engagements (Putnam 2000: 311).

Cuban American sociologist Alejandro Portes gives a list of negative consequences of social capital (Portes 1998: 15-18). First, strong ties in a group can exclude outsiders. Second, some groups demand excess investment of time and money of their members. This leads the less diligent persons to becoming dependent on the effective ones and makes opportunities for success to dissipate in the process. Third, tight social connections between group members might intensify social control and demand conformity. In such cases, some young individual minded members may be suppressed or forced to leave. Fourth, sometimes group solidarity is cemented by a common experience and opposition to the majority group. This can result in “downward leveling norms that operate to keep members of a downtrodden group in place” (Portes 1998: 17). In such cases also individuals have limited freedom in the choices they can make and ambitious members can be suppressed or forced to leave. This is to argue that although social capital in many groups can contribute to further civic engagement, some forms of social capital can isolate members from networks of larger communities.

### **1.1.3. Critique of social capital**

Even though the use of the term social capital has currently become popular in studies of civic associations and political mobilization, it is not left without its critiques. One of the main critics social capital faces is that it is a vague term and that it is treated in different ways (Furseth 2008: 153). In spite that Michael W. Foley and Dean R. Hoge use the term, they also acknowledge the lack of consensus around its precise meaning (Foley and Hoge 2007: 30).

Inger Furseth holds that the theory of social capital can be useful in research of immigrant religious communities (Furseth 2008: 160-161). She asserts, “in spite of the critic (around social capital), few scholars dispute the idea that involvement in civic associations serves to generate interpersonal trust, cooperation, and norms of reciprocity and create expanded social networks” (Furseth 2008: 155). Furthermore, the use of the term has become common both in academia and public use after Putnam’s *Bowling alone*. Therefore, it is clear

that the term has been found to be a useful theoretical approach to communicate important aspects of social and civic interactions in spite that there is lack of consensus in its precise meaning and what its exact components may be.

I find the theory of social capital to be a useful approach to frame my analysis of the Ethiopian Evangelical congregations in Oslo. I employ the term to characterize the networks and resources available among the faith communities that play a role in incorporation into the larger Norwegian society. The social capital I will highlight in my thesis is that which the participants of the congregations in this study can benefit from by the virtue of being part of one of the congregations in the study.

The aspect of understanding social capital as networks and resources is generally acknowledged by most writers and it is an understanding that combines both Bourdieu and Coleman. My argument in this work is that both angles of looking at social capital, as an individual or structural resource, are important to value the contributions of immigrant communities in facilitating for the adaptation of fellow immigrants. The individually owned resources as it is emphasized in Bourdieu can be argued to be one form of human capital (Smidt 2003:9). However, what is emphasized in this thesis is the aspect of sharing the resources owned both individually and in collaboration. The participants of the communities, individually or collectively, benefit from the resources possessed by individuals. The social ties at the same time can be beneficial in forming both bonding and bridging social capitals. They can allow the communities both duplicate norms of reciprocities in their ethnic terms and also provide opportunities for further links to others outside communities.

## **1.2 Empirical studies**

In the recent years, there has been a growing interest in the area of immigrant studies. In what follows, I will present a summary of some of the empirical studies done among immigrant communities to see their role in the process of integration. The two first studies presented here are done in the US. Then, follow two studies conducted in Oslo. Lastly, I present four master theses that look into immigrant communities in Norway.

### **1.2.1 Adaptation of immigrant worship communities: An empirical study in Huston, Texas**

Sociologists Helen Rose Ebaugh and Janet Saltzman Chafetz in their book *Religion and the New Immigrants: Continuities and Adaptations in Immigrant Congregations* (2000) have published the first broad comparative study on the role of religion in the lives of immigrant communities. The findings of Ebaugh and Chafetz are based on data collected in various forms including a field research in thirteen immigrant religious institutions (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000: 12-13). The members of the communities are represented from various corners of the world, whereas the religious institutions included are Buddhist temples, Protestant churches, Catholic churches, Greek orthodox churches, Mosques, Hindu temples and a Zoroastrian congregation. Some of the communities in the study are ethnically homogeneous, whereas others are multi-ethnic in varying degrees. The theory of Social capital is not the frame work of Ebaugh and Chafetz's analysis. However, they have done a monumental work in providing a background for research in the area of the contribution of immigrant religious institutions for the adaptation of immigrants.

According to Ebaugh and Chafetz religion is an aspect that has been overlooked in immigrant studies, yet is a crucial component in forming the lives of immigrants in their new home (Ebaugh and Chafetz 4-5). Obviously, the primary function of most immigrant religious institutions is to serve as places of worship and religious education (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000: 49). However, most religious institutions serve in addition as what Ebaugh and Chafetz call community centers (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000: 55). Ebaugh and Chafetz define community center to be as a physical site at which the following occur: provision of classes in native culture and language, financial planning, job searching, health services, emergency, food, housing, recreational facilities, assistance with immigration papers, and the existence of social activities and communal celebration of secular holidays.

Ebaugh and Chafetz argue that most immigrants are likely to face a variety of common needs that can be met within their religious institutions (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000: 58). New arrived immigrants are attracted to immigrant religious institutions because they seek to develop social networks with others who share their background. Information and emotional support are needs all new immigrants have regardless of their level of human capital. These needs, along with other material ones, are met within the congregations (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000:74).

Immigrant parents take advantage of the setting where their children already gather for religious purpose to teach them the native languages and culture. Furthermore, they try to protect their children from the influence of some negative moral values of the American society by providing recreational facilities.

Most congregations create smaller sub-structures to meet members' needs and strengthen their commitments in the faith (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000: 49, 60). It appears that in Ebaugh and Chafetz study strong bonding possibly even bridging social capital is accumulated in small cell groups. Cell groups provide intimacy and help to bring homogenous groups together, for example, people of similar background in language, ethnicity or even professional interests. By doing so, they provide opportunities for high quality and specialized services.

After having observed the features mentioned above, Ebaugh and Chafetz conclude, "Immigrant religious institutions thus serve a central role in the adaptation of immigrants to their new home" (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000: 79).

### **1.2.2 Social capital and immigrant worship communities: An empirical study in Washington D.C.**

Political scientist Michael W. Foley and sociologist Dean R. Hoge have done an empirical study in the Washington D.C. area to see what role immigrant worship communities play in immigrant incorporation (Foley and Hoge 2007). The research is done over a period of three years and includes a survey of 200 local worship communities - Catholic and Protestant churches, Buddhist and Hindu temples, mosques and Sikh congregations (Foley and Hoge 2007: 4-5). In addition, they have drawn on ethnographies of 20 of the same communities, as well as similar studies of immigrant groups elsewhere across the country. Foley and Hoge use the theory of social capital effectively to show the contribution of immigrant religious communities for better integration. Due to that fact and because they scrutinize the degree of civil incorporation and political integration in addition to the economic and educational sectors, Foley and Hoge are of special interest in this research.

Foley and Hoge try to answer the research question if the immigrants' effort to maintain their native culture and language threatens American national unity (Foley and Hoge 2007: 3). Although Foley and Hoge find enormous diversity both in the degree and types of

contributions the different religious communities offer, they present some angles from which the communities can assist immigrants (Foley and Hoge 2007: 4). First, they play an important role by meeting the spiritual needs of the immigrants who face the challenges and anxieties of life in a foreign context. Second, they play central role to many immigrants by providing settings by which they can maintain their culture. Third, as communities in most cases created by immigrants, they reflect the multiple ways that the newcomers struggle in their new setting. Fourth, as organizations embedded in American civil society, they provide special avenues for the incorporation of the newcomers into the fabric of American life.

According to Foley and Hoge, employment wise immigrants are well incorporated, however, the communities' participation in the affairs of the larger society is generally low (2007: 7-8). Thus, the main question Foley and Hoge raise is not whether immigrants will be incorporated into American society or not, but it is the forms of incorporation. They mainly focus on the role of the worship communities for civic incorporation.

Foley and Hoge state that even among the naturalized citizens, rate of voting is low. Immigrants are less likely to be members of formal associations, perform community service, or involve politically (2007: 9). The one organization in civil society to which immigrants tend to belong with greater frequency than the larger population is the local worship communities; and the question then is what these organizations do to assist incorporation of immigrants into American society.

Throughout the twentieth century, the term of immigrant incorporation was dominated by the notion of assimilation. Assimilation implies that immigrants abandon their original identity in order to adjust and in allegiance to the host society. Due to this negative connotation associated to the term, Foley and Hoge suggest the use of the term "incorporation" which they suggest is a more neutral term (Foley and Hoge 2007: 25). Foley and Hoge insist that "incorporation" implies that immigrants have acquired skills and working knowledge that would facilitate their participation in the larger community without necessarily having to abandon their distinctive customs or beliefs. Nor does it require that they assume indiscriminately the norms and behaviors of the host society. Incorporation means playing a part in a larger society and polity, without necessarily forsaking the original identity.

Foley and Hoge distinguish between "social incorporation" and "civic incorporation" (Foley and Hoge 2007: 27). Social incorporation is defined as the degree to which immigrants have contacts with those outside their immediate families and ethnic or religious circles, the

sorts of opportunities they have for economic advancement, and their ability to make their way in the school system and with relevant agencies and institutions of American life. Civic incorporation, on the other hand, concerns the degree to which immigrants and the organizations to which they belong to are active in neighborhood and community efforts, their interest in civic affairs and their participation in the political process. In their research, Foley and Hoge are primarily committed to investigating the level of civic incorporation among immigrant religious communities.

Foley and Hoge agree with Bourdieu when they emphasize the fact that it is not just the degree to which people belong to social networks that guarantees the strength of the social capital available for them, but also the sorts of resources to which the networks give access to (Foley and Hoge 2007: 105). More diverse communities with higher educational and income levels are more likely to provide a richer variety of resources and outside linkages. Even among poorer immigrants, the relatively privileged immigration status contrasts sharply with those who have arrived without official sanction. The level of interaction among members is crucial when it comes to access to the resources. Even in a community of relatively high income, better education and legal immigration status, where the interaction among members is low due to religious tradition or organizational culture the resources do not necessarily benefit the members (2007: 108).

Foley and Hoge present the varied roles immigrant worship communities have assumed in the larger community and their implications for the social and civic incorporation of immigrants. The degree at which worship communities take part in civic life varies widely (Foley and Hoge 2007:116). Few local worship communities have political action as a priority. However, all worship communities to varying degree are involved in non-political civic activities in form of social services (Foley and Hoge 2007:121-123). This fact is true in Ebaugh and Chafetz findings as well (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000: 71, 77,).

Foley and Hoge outline four arenas through which worship communities contribute to the development of civic skills among their members (2007:153-160). 1) Some worship communities provide opportunities for lay involvement in worship services, community life, and governance, thereby training members in skills potentially useful in civic life. 2) The sub-groups in many worship communities provide opportunities for lay people to assume leadership roles and acquire civic skills. Both leadership and critical skills could be sharpened in such settings. 3) Most immigrant congregations, regardless of religious tradition or ethnic group, feature a governing committee of some sort. Engagement in the governing bodies gives

opportunity to practice handling responsibilities, participate in framing decisions and managing delicate negotiations. 4) Some worship communities provide classes and discussion groups which are directly oriented in civic engagement.

The ways people orient themselves to civic life, however, depends not just on their personal philosophies or theological leanings, not just on the sorts of civic skills they have acquired and the opportunities they encounter for exercising them, but on how they see themselves in relation to the society they live in. Foley and Hoge's finding suggests that worship communities reinforce ethnicity by promoting sense of self and belonging among members while simultaneously permitting and sometimes promoting a certain 'selective assimilation' (Foley and Hoge 2007: 183). Instead of choosing either American or ethnic identities, immigrants may construct adhesive identities that integrate both" (2007: 183). In this way immigrant worship communities provide a setting where many recent immigrants who are affected by the experience of racial stereotyping and discrimination may find identification. Both "reactive identity" of this sort and pride in one's own ethnic heritage find outlets in immigrant worship communities.

Foley and Hoge's survey reveals that most immigrants pay attention to national affairs. Surprisingly, the worship communities who report high level of interest in their own origin are also the ones who are interested in national and local affairs in America (2007: 188). In this regard, Foley and Hoge suggest that a heightened ethnic identity appears to be associated with higher levels of incorporation into American society and not the reverse (2007: 189). Strong ethnic identity is compatible with high level of civic engagement (2007: 190). Religious and cultural identities help immigrants orient their relation to the larger society.

### **1.2.3 The Role of Voluntary Associations – Empirical Study in Veitvet, Oslo**

One of the recent researches done in Norway among immigrant voluntary associations is Guro Ødegård's *Foreningsliv i et flerkulturelt lokalsamfunn* (Voluntary associations in a multicultural local community) (2010). In her report, Ødegård examines the role of local minority voluntary associations in the Veitvet area and the efforts of government authorities to facilitate for better integration through providing resources to immigrant associations. Ødegård applies the theory of social capital to analyze the role of the associations and

introduces the aspect of linking social capital to refer to the inputs from the side of the government.

Ødegård states that her research was triggered by an increasing concern by the political authorities about low level of immigrant participation in Norwegian voluntary organizations (Ødegård 2010: 4). According to her, the underrepresentation of immigrants in the Norwegian civil society does not only indicate low level of social integration, but also weak political participation.

According to Ødegård, both in politics and research, integration is grasped as meaning equality between the minority and the majority (Ødegård 2010: 11-12). She goes on saying that when integration is approached as equality, it can be measured. Ødegård suggests three different spheres by which integration can take place, namely, economic, political and social. Economic integration is often evaluated by comparing the employment rate among immigrants and majority group. Political integration can be assessed by the extent of participation in election. Ødegård argues that focusing on participation in election alone, however, is a narrow way of assessing political integration. In Norway, associations have a key role in forming democratic infrastructure and are important channels of impacting peoples' political stand both in local and national level (Ødegård 2010: 8).

Ødegård applies both Putnam's understating of social capital and American political scientist Michael Woolcock's concept of "linking social capital" in her assessment of the level of integration in Veitvet. Putnam stresses the importance of voluntary associations in producing social capital (Ødegård 2010: 13). However, Ødegård highlights Putnam's shortcomings of not paying adequate attention to the political, economic and democratic factors of a given context. In that respect, she draws on Woolcock's concept of linking social capital to fill the gap between the bonding and bridging forms of social capitals.

The linking social capital gives individuals and networks access to resources of public institutions. In contrast to Putnam's emphasis on voluntary organizations as producers of social capital, this approach points to the need for engagement in public affairs as a way of ensuring people's access to resources that can help them play an active role in civil society. Participation in associations, in this way, becomes a result of social capital rather than the source of it as in Putnam. This will form the background for understanding the relation between the local authorities and the multicultural Veitvet as Ødegård summarizes it.

Woolcock defines social capital as “norms and networks that enable people to act collectively” (Woolcock and Narayan 2000: 2; Woolcock 1998: 153). He then emphasizes the interdependency of civil society and governmental authorities in shaping the forms of social capital in a given society (Woolcock 1998: 175-176). The internal dynamics of a community does not occur in isolation, rather in a context of particular history and regulatory framework that can strengthen or undermine the capacity of independent groups in the civil society. Independent groups, in turn, can play an important role in shaping government policies and performance. Thus, Woolcock argues that the level of interdependency between independent groups and government authorities can determine the resources available to a given group. A good state-society relation therefore paves the way for a better application of resources of both parties. According to him, a community’s stock of social capital is a good basis for launching new initiatives, but it must be complemented over time by the construction of new forms of social capital, i.e., linkages to non-community members.

Here is why Woolcock’s linking social capital is beneficial for Ødegård’s study: one implied reason very well be that the welfare state like Norway can be broadly affected by immigration because trust between citizens and the government is crucial for the welfare system to function. Ødegård argues that if social capital is understood based on Putnam’s society oriented approach, the possibility of creating networks depends totally on individuals and the ability of small groups (Ødegård 2010: 38). But if we take Woolcock’s institution oriented approach, we also stress institutional trust that takes government’s role in establishing necessary collective welfare arrangements into consideration. Secondly, according to Ødegård, linking social capital is important because it takes the potential of contextual framework in furthering or hindering the possibility of networking between actors of different spheres in to consideration (Ødegård 2010: 39).

Ødegård reports that the representation of ethnic minorities in the voluntary activities in the Veitvet area is by far lower than the non-immigrant Norwegians (Ødegård 2010: 17). This can, on one hand, be explained from the immigrants’ background side, such as, ignorance of the social codes, language barrier, religious factors, level of education, employment rate, income level and length of stay. But, on the other hand, it may be caused by lack of effort from the side of host community to facilitate opportunities for the newcomers. In this regard, Ødegård draws on the Norwegian sociologist Jon Rogstad, who compares the number of Danish Pakistanis who voted in the local election in 2001 with Norwegian Pakistanis who participated in local election two years later (Ødegård 2010: 25). In Denmark

67 percent of the Pakistani immigrants voted, whereas in Norway only 40 percent did so. The Pakistani immigrants to these two countries come from the same region and same condition. Rogstad, concludes that it must then be the role played by the host communities that may have caused the difference, for example, in opening opportunities for job market (Ødegård 2010: 25).

The government of Norway has recognized the need for improving immigrants' involvement in voluntary associations for better integration. Ødegård gives a brief account of a project carried out by government authorities to mobilize interest based organizations and clubs that accommodate members of ethnic minorities in Veitvet (Ødegård 2010: 44). Veitvet is a residential area in Oslo which is represented by multicultural community. Over the last two decades the demographics of Veitvet has changed significantly, as large groups of ethnic minorities settling in and non-immigrant Norwegians moving out (Ødegård 2010: 54).

The immigrant organizations in Veitvet are oriented towards their own background rather than the traditionally known Norwegian style interest based engagements (Ødegård 2010: 49). The activities organized by the immigrants reflect the particular needs they have. Ødegård recognizes four arenas by which ethnic associations can be important in the lives of immigrants. (Ødegård 2010:56). First, she holds that immigrant associations are strong in providing fellowship, sense of belonging and support to their members (Ødegård 2010: 57). Second, they are a meeting place for the bi-cultural, who grow up in Norway but have a close thigh to their relatives in the home countries of their parents. The ethnic groups are arenas where the two culture people find the mix off their roots and the structural frame of Norway. Third, immigrant associations serve as arenas for cultural learning. The ethnically oriented immigrant associations contribute to the Norwegian born by introducing the history, culture and language of the parents.

Fourthly, the ethnic groups serve political purposes. Although the ethnic minorities use their voting right at a very low rate compared to the non-immigrant population, it does not mean that their political concern is low (Ødegård 2010: 61). Some of the immigrants are occupied with political concerns that are not publicized widely. Such concerns come to the surface when issues that represent large number of immigrants appear in political forums, such as the hijab and the so called Muhammad caricature controversies (Ødegård 2010: 62). The Norwegian Tamils have protested in public the silence of the Norwegian government towards the political crisis in Sir Lanka. So, in such circumstances it is important to the ethnic

groups to meet in clubs and face the situation together. The strength of the ethnic groups has a political importance in the way it gives the group an opportunity to influence the position of the government on homeland issues and immigration/integration policies. It is clear that immigrant organizations have an important role in the lives of immigrants that the traditional Norwegian organizations are not capable of fulfilling.

Ødegård argues that beyond their purpose of serving homeland oriented concerns, ethnic organizations serve also as spring board to institutions of the larger society (Ødegård 2010: 94-96). Immigrant organizations offer their members a forum where they can practice their skills and build confidence for participation in a wider context. For example, some women, who otherwise would not have participated in public setting, have come forth to represent their own culture in cultural festivals and then created further contacts. So, bonding social capital within associations has been followed by contact and participation in the networks and associations of the majority people.

Ødegård sees dilemmas connected to linking social capital (Ødegård 2010: 103). The first one is indulging the government's political agenda in the lives of associations. This kind of interference can cause ambiguity and tension both for the majority and minority groups. Government interference is in collision with the principles of voluntary associations which are supposed to be self governing. Secondly, the government's zeal for integration might cover up the sensitive problems the ethnic minorities face in their daily life. Ødegård meets the governmental financial incentives also with critique. She questions what the government's primary zeal to achieve integration would do to the values of the associations. The dilemma is intensified when the ethnic organizations are pressured to conform to certain expectations in order to qualify for the governmental funding (Ødegård 2010: 104). Therefore, although Ødegård is not opposed to governmental support, she warns the local authorities to be clear about the principles that dictate the role they can have in the lives of the associations. Autonomy and internal democracy is what characterizes independent associations.

#### **1.2.4 Christian immigrant congregations in Oslo**

Recently KIFO Stiftelsen Kirkeforskning has published a report on a study done among five Christian immigrant congregations in Oslo. The research was done by Ronald M. Synnes, who evaluates if the congregations isolate the participants or make contributions towards

further integration to the larger community (Synnes 2012:33). The congregations included in the study are the Spanish speaking group in the Salem Church, International Charismatic Church in Oslo, the Filipino Christian Church in Oslo, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church in Oslo and St Olav congregation. Synnes has done participant observation in all five congregations and conducted 22 interviews with individuals in the congregation composed of both leaders and regular members of the congregations (Synnes 2012:7, 34). The field work is done over a period of four month from August to November 2011 (Synnes 2012: 35, 36).

Among the congregations Synnes has looked into, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church and the Spanish speaking congregation are covered rather broadly in the other segments of this work. The Ethiopian Evangelical Church is one of the congregations included in this research and a study done by Kari Austigard in 2008 among the Spanish speaking congregation in Salem Church is included in the later part of this chapter. For this reason, I do not go deep in presenting these two groups in this section but highlight the important features Synnes points out in connection to his aim to evaluate the role of the congregations in furthering or hindering integration.

#### *The Spanish speaking congregation in Oslo*

The Spanish speaking group is organized under Salem church which is a Norwegian speaking Pentecostal congregation. The Spanish speaking group has an employed pastor whose wages are covered by the Salem Church (Synnes 2012: 39). The Spanish speaking group has independent leadership and its own separate activities. Synnes reports that the Spanish speaking group can be considered as an a section under Salem church since the leadership in the Salem church administers the group partly through the pastor who is a member of the leadership of the main congregation and gets paid by them (Synnes 2012: 40).

The presentation of Synnes gives an impression that the host Salem Church and the Spanish speaking group have a stronger collaboration than Austigard gives (Synnes 2012:46). This very well can be a development over the four years difference between the two studies. Participation in the Spanish speaking group is considerable larger than the host non-immigrant Salem church (Synnes 2012:55. The Spanish service is normally held on Sunday afternoons while the Norwegian service is done before noon. However, once every month the two congregations have a service together with translation into Spanish or Norwegian. Each

congregation is responsible to organize the services every other meeting. Youth meetings are held on Sunday evenings in Norwegian but translated into Spanish (Synnes 2012:56).

In collaboration with the host congregation the Spanish speaking congregation offers Norwegian language teaching for new arrived. The Spanish speaking group informally provides information about job opportunities and registration processes for their European members who do not need to apply for legal permit (Synnes 2012:69). They also with caution provide information to asylum seekers regarding how they can get in contact with relevant institutes, for example to seek for asylum (Synnes 2012:70).

### *Oslo International Charismatic Church (OICC)*

Oslo International Charismatic Church is a pan-African Charismatic congregation established in 2004 (Synnes 2012: 37). The congregation is attended by 40-60 participants during the main services. The pastor of the OICC is originally from Ghana, where as the remaining leaders of the congregation and the participants are represented from different African nations (Synnes 2012: 41, 57, 62). The language used in the services is English (Synnes 2012: 57).

The OICC has established other two branch congregation in Norway, in Drammen and Fredrikstad (Synnes 2012: 41). The pastor of the OICC is the top authority of all the three congregations and he appoints all the leaders. The different activities in the three congregations are arranged in such a way that the leaders could be able to be present in all of them (Synnes 2012:57). For example, the main service in Fredrikstad is held on Saturdays where as the services in Oslo and Drammen are done on Sunday mornings and afternoons respectively. The midweek meetings also follow the same pattern.

Many of the participants in OICC are people without legal papers (Synnes 2012: 56). Synnes reports that many participants are also involved in prostitution and drug dealing. Hence, the leadership of the congregation is focused in providing support characterized by the nature and needs of the participants (Synnes 2012: 71-73). Much of the support is directed towards asylum seekers. The network the pastor has built seems to play an important role in terms of finding jobs and housing for the participants. The congregation also organizes seminars regarding sexually transmitted disease, provide temporary housing for those who do not have the ability to live independently and give financial support. The pastor contacts lawyers concerning legal issues for asylum seekers and in many occasions the congregation covers the expenses related.

Oslo International Charismatic Church collaborates with the Norwegian Baptist Community (Det norske baptistsamfunnet). The cooperation reflects the practical needs the OICC has and is not because of theological unity, according to Synnes (Synnes 2012: 40-41). Synnes comments that the immigrant congregation benefits from facilities, networks and longer experience the established Norwegian Baptist Community has accumulated. The participants of the OICC are registered members of the Norwegian Baptist community and governmental donations on their account go to the Baptist community. The OICC's sole income source is the participants' voluntary donation. The pastor of the congregation works fulltime with no pay apparently due financial shortcomings in the congregation.

#### *The Filipino Christian Church in OSLO (FCC)*

The Filipino Christian Church in Oslo is started as a branch of the Fellowship of Christian Church Communities in Copenhagen (FCCC) in 2005 (Synnes 2012: 37). The pastor of the Filipino Christian Church in Oslo (FCC) is employed by the FCCC (Synnes 2012: 42). FCC has about 100 registered members. The congregation uses a meeting hall in a building that belongs to the Filadelfia church, which is a Pentecostal congregation in Oslo. There is a form of collaboration between these two congregations. The FCC is an independent congregation with its own leadership, administration and activities. However, the participants of FCC are registered members of the Filadelfia congregation. Thus, Filadelfia is the receiver of the governmental donations on account of the members of the FCC. In return, the FCC uses the facilities of Filadelfia free of charge (Synnes 2012: 47).

The language used in FCC is English (Synnes 2012: 58). Besides the main service which is held on Sunday afternoons the FCC are organizes small house groups. The majority of the participants of FCC are women (Synnes 2012: 57-58). Many of them come to Norway as au pairs and students. However, many have already acquired higher education before entry. FCC provides information regarding further possibilities in Norway (Synnes 2012: 73). Every now and then FCC provides seminars on topics like how to proceed with Norwegian language courses, how to get authorization of academic papers, job and further education possibilities. Furthermore, the informal network in the congregation also plays an important role in finding jobs and housing.

The congregation collaborates with other Filipino organization found in Norway when it comes to celebration of religious and national holidays (Synnes 2012: 58)

### *The Ethiopian Evangelical Church in Oslo*

The Ethiopian Evangelical Church in Oslo is established in 2008 (Synnes 2012: 43). The congregation is not registered as a religious organization and due to that fact it does not receive any governmental donations. The voluntary gift from participants is the only income source of the congregation. Outreach to asylum seekers is one of the important activities run by the EEC (Synnes 2012: 59). The congregation provides material help to Ethiopian asylum seekers and assists them with their asylum cases (Synnes 2012: 75). The network within the congregation is important in providing temporary housing and finding jobs.

### *St Olav congregation in Oslo*

St. Olav congregation in Oslo is a Roman Catholic Church with a membership of 11,000 (Synnes 2012: 44). The congregation is established in 1886, which is much older than the other four congregations in Synnes' study (Synnes 2012:38). However, the congregation is increasingly a recipient of several immigrant groups from various countries. Due to that fact, the participants are organized under various language groups. Some of the groups function semi-independently with their own separate worship services, activities and pastors who speak the mother tongue. However, the leaders say that they try to arrange common meetings for all groups in different occasions, for example, Christmas, Easter and they also arrange a culture day which involves all the different groups (Synnes 2012: 60).

St Olav church does not directly involve in social services and assisting new immigrants (Synnes 2012: 75). However, Caritas, a Roman Catholic based NGO has established an information desk for immigrants in downtown Oslo area. There, recent immigrants get information concerning residence permit, employment regulations, taxes, welfare assistances, housing regulations and so forth. St. Olav congregation, however, offers Norwegian language courses to people who do not have legal permit and thus do not have access to the public system to attend language courses offered officially (Synnes 2012: 76).

The work of the congregation is financed both with voluntary donation from members and also governmental donation, which apparently is a considerable amount compared to the small congregation represented in Synnes' study (Synnes 2012: 44).

### *Summary*

Out of the five congregations in this study, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church is totally independent with no structural or practical link to any religious body (Synnes 2012: 51). The Spanish speaking congregation is organized under Salem church. St. Olav Church is hierarchically connected to bodies of the Roman Catholic Church. The Oslo International Christian Church has a connection of practical form with Norwegian Baptist Community. The Filipino Christian Church in Oslo is organized under the Fellowship of Christian Church Communities in Copenhagen, whereas it in practical matters collaborates with the Filadelfia congregation.

The congregations in Synnes' study provide various forms of support both in organized and informal ways. He says that the congregations serve psychological purposes to the participants by reproducing a family like atmosphere for those who are troubled by loneliness and homesickness (Synnes 2012: 65). The help provided varies depending on the different needs the participants have. St Olav church and Salem church provided Norwegian language courses free of charge. The FCC provides seminars concerning opportunities in the host country. The participants in the two African congregations, ICCO and EEC, seem to be in a less advantaged situation than the other three groups in terms of finances, educational background, legal permit and so forth (Synnes 2012: 77). Thus, the congregations' interest to provide social services seems to be accordingly more intense.

Synnes' concludes that the congregations in his studies produce a strong social capital which in a large degree isolates participants from the larger Norwegian community (Synnes 2012: 80). Many of the participants are so absorbed with the activities within the congregations. The gluing factor among the participants is characterized by ethnicity, culture and language and it in many ways hinders the participants from making links to population outside of the religious group (Synnes 2012: 86). However, Synnes also holds that in the way the congregations give a sense of belonging and comfort to the participants, they further integration (Synnes 2012: 80). Furthermore, most of those who have legal permits are out in the job market which again helps them to create contact to people outside of their religious groups (Synnes 2012: 86). St. Olav church and the Spanish speaking congregation, however, are in a distinct situation because of the organization which includes non-immigrant worship groups.

### 1.3 Relevant Master thesis

In the following, I will look into four relevant master theses written in the area of immigrant faith communities in Norway. The first two discuss the role of two different Christian faith communities in Oslo whereas the two last ones investigate how Ethiopian immigrants cope with life in Norway.

#### *A Spanish speaking congregation in Oslo*

Kari Austigard (2008), by using the theory of social capital assesses the contribution of the Spanish speaking group in Oslo for the members' engagement in civil society (Austigard, 2008: 2). The Spanish speaking group is formally organized under the Norwegian speaking Salem Congregation. Although, ideologically both congregations belong to Pentecostal stream of Christianity (Austigard 2008:1), the relationship between the two is simply for office matters and a direct collaboration in internal matters is none existent (Austigard 2008: 99).

The members of Spanish-speaking group come from several nationalities, such as, Chile, Peru, Colombia, Mexico, Dominican Republic and Angola (Austigard 2008: 29, 75). Like most immigrant religious communities, the participants of the Spanish speaking congregation meet not only for the purpose of religious activities, but also because they want to socialize together, use their native language, practice their culture and eat Latin American food. In short, the fellowship gives them a sense of identity and belonging (Austigard 2008: 85-86). Although the congregation does not have organized support system for new arrived immigrants (Austigard 2008: 96), the participants of the congregation are forthcoming in helping them with their immigration papers and providing the needed information (Austigard 2008: 94).

The level of integration in the labor market among the group seems to be dissatisfactory. There are many highly educated people, who mainly have settled for manual labor in low paying occupations (Austigard 2008: 76-77, 91). There are two main reasons for this, according to Austigard: 1) it is expensive and takes long time to have academic papers authorized; 2) the Norwegian employers are skeptical to give jobs to foreigners.

One of the challenges the Spanish speaking group faces is the dilemma of Norwegian born members (Austigard 2008: 75-76). There are few participants who are in their early teens and they have difficulties to follow the service in Spanish. The congregation does offer separate activities for the young participants, thus, these group normally hang around the

foyer or the staircase while the meetings are going. Austigard reports that the members of the congregation are unsure about what kind of congregational affiliation their children will choose in the future. They, however, know that Spanish is not their children's future, thus, do not seem to be particularly enthusiastic to pass on their culture to the next generation (Austigard 2008: 119).

Although no political topics are collectively talked about, many of the participants are conscious about their voting rights (Austigard 2008: 101-102). Apart from that, the political concern of the group appears to be extremely low. Many consider that their contribution to the society is evangelization. The road to a good society is through conversion into Christian faith and lifestyle. This goes along with the proposition of Foley and Hoge that evangelicals who emphasize personal salvation and mission provide less bridge building social capital than some mainstream churches (Foley and Hoge 2007: 52).

#### *Scandinavian Chinese Christian Church in Oslo*

By using the theory of social capital as a tool of analysis, Eveline Hansen (2007) examines the role of Scandinavian Chinese Christian Church (SCCC) in the lives of the participants. SCCC is an independent congregation (Hansen 2007: 72) with members represented from all age groups (Hansen 2007: 64). The membership includes Chinese from main land China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macao and Malaysia and many of the members have jobs in the restaurant branch. Some of them have professional education and are employed in well paying jobs, particularly in computer industry.

The Norwegian skill of the Chinese immigrants appears to be low and the congregation uses both Mandarin and Cantonese side by side during the services, while use of Norwegian language is preferred by the Norwegian born (Hansen 2007: 50). The SCCC looks at itself as first and foremost to be a place for spiritual feeding, thus, the congregation's commitment to provide an organized form of practical assistance is minimal. However, practical and psychological support is provided as needs arise (Hansen 2007: 57-58). For example, new arrived are provided with information and assistance with their papers. Hansen suggests that the welfare state of Norway and the good economic status of the members make the need for practical support less relevant for the Chinese group (Hansen 2007: 59).

The congregation runs social activities that give opportunities of creating social ties. The members of the SCCC are divided in small groups mainly based on some kinds of communality, such as, language groups, seniors, new converts, new baptized, and so forth

(Hansen 2007: 56-57). People in smaller groups build tighter bond and some of these groups meet for other activities like, soccer games, movies, trip to a cabin and so forth (Hansen 2007: 55-56).

Women participants of the congregation take various responsibilities in different positions in equality with their men counter parts apart from the pastoral one (Hansen 2007: 45, 83). What is interesting in the SCCC is that men do most of the kitchen work, while women are busy taking care of the social relations and spiritual feeding of the children (Hansen 2007: 66). Hansen does not believe that the gender equality in SCCC came because of the Norwegian culture influence. It rather seems to have reflected the Chinese background.

SCCC is a member of the fellowship of Scandinavian Chinese Christians (Hansen 2007: 60), which is a fellowship of Chinese in the Nordic countries. The members of the congregations in the network gather together annually to worship together, discuss issues and do other social activities. The fellowship gives the opportunity for the congregations to exchange resources, ideologies and practice (Hansen 2007: 89). It is also one of the arenas where future partners meet (Hansen 2007: 65).

There is a considerable gap between the Chinese immigrants and their Norwegian born children in the SCCC (Hansen 2007: 48-50). The Norwegian born choose to use Norwegian and not the Chinese languages. Furthermore, they are less interested in their Chinese roots (Hansen 2007: 68). So, Hansen questions if the SCCC continues in the future and if yes in what form (Hansen 2007: 71).

The leaders of the SCCC are clear that they will not make any effort to be politically involved. They underscore that their calling is to spread the faith of Christianity (Hansen 2007:73).

After assessing the above mentioned components, Hansen's conclusion is that the SCCC is rich in both bonding and bridging social capital (Hansen 2007: 85-86). For Hansen, occasional meetings with Norwegian lecturers or even the governmental funding can qualify the congregation to have owned rich bridge building social capital. However, based on Hansen's findings one can only say that the Chinese Christian congregation is an isolated Chinese ethnic community with low level of motivation to create contact with the host community. When it comes to helping the new arriving immigrants to adapt in to the Norwegian life, it does a job of providing information and resources. Yet, there is few efforts done to facilitate the members' integration in various spheres of the host country's life.

### *Immigrants and integration policy*

Patrick Grigorian Tamrat in his master thesis, *Ethiopian Immigrant Women within the Framework of the Norwegian Integration Policy: their daily experiences, thoughts and opinions of the Norwegian society*, explores the effects the Norwegian integration policy has in the daily life of Ethiopian immigrant women in Oslo. Out of the four master theses presented here, Tamrat's is the most pessimistic one in terms of integration success in Norway. It is also the one with informants with most diverse background in age, education, religion and length of stay, but not gender since he focuses only on women (Tamrat 2010: 38-40). Although religion is not the main issue in Tamrat's study, he has interviewed eighteen women who are represented from six different religious backgrounds which he calls Coptic Orthodox, Islam, Buddhism, Pentecostal, Catholic and born again Christian.

Tamrat argues that the integration policy of the host nation is an important factor in shaping the lives of immigrants (Tamrat 2010: 1). Each immigrant fits into the structural, social, cultural and psychological framework of the society based on the policy that is laid out by the system of the host society. In line with Guro Ødegård, Tamrat sees integration as equality between immigrants and members of host community. Here is how Tamrat summarizes the definition of the current integration policy in Norway:

...is based on non-discrimination, equal individual human rights and opportunities for everyone regardless of their ethnicity, gender, culture, educational and social backgrounds....(Tamrat 2010: 1).

He further elaborates on the understanding of the concept of integration as one that allows immigrants to be part of the host community while maintaining some of their social and cultural features as long as they do not infringe on the Norwegian law (Tamrat 2010: 4). Tamrat's study investigates if this policy is applied in practical terms and how it impacts the lives of immigrant women from Ethiopia. For Tamrat, it is important that immigrants are treated equally and have equal opportunities with the non-immigrant Norwegians in all aspects of life. Based on F. Hekmann's (2004) sub-categories, Tamrat summarizes the integration level of his informants in four different spheres: structural, cultural social and psychological.

What Tamrat calls structural integration is that immigrants have the same right and access to labor market, housing, education, etc. as the members of the host community (Tamrat 2010: 8). Tamrat believes that the women in his study are only partially integrated in this respect. Many Ethiopians strive to get good education and find professional jobs. However, Tamrat expresses his disappointment for having realized that the facilities provided for immigrant integration basically do not promise opportunities. Hence, many settle for low paying manual labor. This, according to him, is due to poor method and low quality of Norwegian language instruction for immigrants (Tamrat 2010: 42). According to Tamrat, integration in Norway is failing and needs to be rescued due to two reasons. First, facilities like language instruction and job oriented trainings provided by the government prepare immigrants primarily to a manual labor sector (Tamrat 2010: 102). Secondly, though some fair policies are in place, they are not capable of transforming the deep seated resentment of the Norwegian community towards immigrants (Tamrat 2010: 27, 69).

He further argues that getting employment does not end the challenges immigrants face in the job market. Differential treatment and favoritism based on ethnicity, color and etc are prevalent in the work places as well (Tamrat 2010: 53-56). Promotions and higher posts are reserved for the non-immigrant Norwegians regardless of qualification. Besides, he suggests that when policies are applied, they need to take into account the fact that immigrants do not have the same starting points as non-immigrant population on issues like language, social network and also the fact that many of the immigrants come from a traumatic state as asylum seekers and refugees. So, Tamrat recommends that the policy makers must come up with practical strategies that make up for the disadvantages the immigrants experience (Tamrat 2010: 29).

Tamrat defines cultural integration as immigrants' level of adjusting their attitudes, values and behavior in daily practice (Tamrat 2010: 8-9). This includes preferences of media, entertainment, food, leisure, child rearing, language, religion, etc. When it comes to cultural integration, immigrants in Tamrat's study appear to have been impacted by the Norwegian one, particularly, when it concerns gender role and child rearing (Tamrat 2010: 79-82). Since most women are active in labor market, male Ethiopians also have to learn to share equally the traditional household role of women. Regarding child rearing, all of Tamrat's informants prefer the Norwegian way, where children's opinions are taken into consideration and sticks are not employed as a way of disciplining. Yet, the immigrants have their misgivings towards

Norwegian culture for its lack of family bond and limited respectfulness towards elderly. In these aspects the immigrants prefer their children to be inspired by the Ethiopian culture.

Social integration deals with the immigrants' level of social interaction with members of the host community, participation in voluntary associations, intermarriage and etc (Tamrat 2010: 9). Tamrat's evaluation of the immigrants' level of social integration is very pessimistic. Throughout his work he keeps on coming back to a conclusion that most non-immigrant Norwegians are non-sociable and attempt of social interaction with them is a disheartening experience (Tamrat: 2010: 69).

The immigrants in Tamrat's research have expressed the problem of valuable networking in Norway, which they regard is inherent within members of host community (Tamrat 2010: 52). Much of the network the Ethiopians possess, belongs to the victim immigrants and that affects their opportunities. The informants have an impression that Norwegians are not interested in helping immigrants acquire better paying jobs, neither are they willing to associate with non-white immigrants (Tamrat 2010: 69). Nevertheless, those who have better education and professional jobs have better social interaction with the non-immigrants than those who do not (Tamrat 2010: 75).

Identificational, which is also referred to as psychological integration, has to do with immigrants' feeling of belonging and level of loyalty to the host nation (Tamrat 2010: 9). Although the immigrants in Tamrat's study are still attached to their home nation, there is no sense of denial that Norway is also home particularly among those with better education (Tamrat 2010: 92-94). The majority of the informants follows Norwegian news, uses voting rights and are conscience of their ability to influence the politics. There is a general concern among them to teach their native language and the history of Ethiopia to their children (Tamrat 2010: 82). They do this due to concern for the identity building of their children and helping them grow up accepting who they are among the Norwegian community.

### *Integration in Rogaland*

Inger Øglænd Bredhal has done a comparative study between Muslims and Christians from Ethiopia and Eritrea in the Rogaland area. In her master thesis, *Religiøs Tilhørighet og Samfunnsmessig Integrasjon: Hvilken betydning har religiøs tilhørighet for samfunnsmessig integrasjon i Rogaland for personer fra Etiopia og Eritrea?*, Bredhal discusses how religious

identity can affect immigrants' way of associating to members of the host community. Her findings are based on empirical study done both in Norway among the immigrants and in their countries of origin, Ethiopia and Eritrea (Bredahl 2008: 10).

For both Muslims and Christians from Ethiopia and Eritrea in Rogaland, their gatherings, first and foremost, are for a purpose of worship and prayer (Bredahl 2008: 37, 66; 73-74). In addition, most Christian immigrants Bredahl spoke to consider their congregations to be their primary arena for socializing and networking. The communities are also important for the purpose of teaching native languages, values and culture to the children (Bredahl 2008: 40). The communities, however, are not focused in providing practical help for their members.

In contrast to Tamrat, Bredhal reports that her informants acknowledge that the Norwegian government provides all the help they need for better integration. To show the Ethiopians and Eritreans attitude towards life in Norway, Bredahl makes a good deal of comparison between studies done among Somali immigrant men in Stavanger by Eilif M. Gard and Somali woman in a suburb in Oslo by Una Mara Beier (Bredahl 2008: 87-89). Then, Bredhal suggests a wide contrast between these two groups. Many of the Somalis have low education level, thus, have difficulties finding jobs and acquiring opportunities of further education. Conversely, everyone in her research had already gotten at least a high school background by the time they entered Norway, hence, found it easier to get further education and jobs. Besides, most Somalis believe that they are not wanted in Norway. As a result, their children face hard time in schools. Conversely, all men and women informants in Bredhal's study are active in the labor market and Bredhal claims that her informants emphasize the significance of their own effort in becoming independent and attain better life (Bredhal 2008: 91). For them, to be dependent on welfare means lack of freedom (*ufrihet*) (Bredhal 2008: 103). To be self-reliant, on the other hand, is connected to self-image and dignity.

Bredhal has encountered that in general, Muslim immigrants think that Norwegians are prejudiced and, thus, they have not built much connection to them. But most Christians express that Norwegians are somehow cold in the beginning, but as one gets to know them, they are friendly and helpful (Bredhal 2008 97-98).

The governmental financial support to religious organizations based on membership registry has a great influence on the way congregations are organized (Bredhal 2008: 50-51). According to Bredahl, the Orthodox churches and Mosques both in Ethiopia and Eritrea do

not have a tradition of keeping membership registry. However, in Norway, these two groups are forced to register their members due to the governmental financial support in accordance with membership size. This practice does not only feel unnatural among the members but also gives a challenge to the leaders who struggle to persuade their members about the actuality of the practice. This perhaps can be taken as one example of Ødegård's fear to the governmental financial power twisting some of the practices of organizations (Ødegård 2010: 104).

The religious communities Bredahl studied are politically neutral (Bredahl 2008: 68). Her informants did not believe that politics belong in religious gatherings. They say that politics brings along tensions.

None of Bredahl's informants believe that their offspring would carry on the congregations in the same way and language as they do it now (Bredahl 2008: 78-79). Some thought that the congregations would simply die out when the immigrant generation fades out. Some Christians thought the language of the congregation in the future will be Norwegian and it will naturally become part of the Norwegian church. Interestingly, the more charismatic groups believe that they have something more to offer to the Norwegian believers and are optimistic about attracting Norwegian members who will be converted to a charismatic Christianity.

For Bredahl integration focuses more on job and economic independence plus making Norwegian friends. She looks at those who are happy with their lives as ones integrated better. What is not very clear from her assessment is that if the immigrants know their rights and obligations in the society and strive for a right distribution of it. Her shortcoming starts in the way she sees integration. Her emphasis is on how immigrants connect socially to members of the host community without having to be forced to abandon their cultural and religious identity (Bredahl 2008: 2-3, 5). She has ignored what kind of occupational or educational background her informants have. She does mention the government's emphasis on participation in election as an important part of integration, but chooses to ignore the question of political engagement all together (Bredahl 2008: 113). Another limitation of her research is that she has contacted individuals, both men and women, who are able to explain themselves in understandable Norwegian (Bredahl 2008: 13). This may show that her informants were a pull of more successful people integration wise, who may have lived long enough to find their way around in the community.

## 1.4 Summary

The review presented in this chapter covers a range of literature in the area of immigrant religious communities. In the first part I present the origin and discussions around the theory of social capital. This theory is my tool of analysis when I ask if Ethiopian Evangelical community furthers or hinders incorporation into the larger Norwegian society. In the second part I give a summary of some empirical studies done both in the US, and Norway.

Some studies show that religion plays a central role in forming the terms by which immigrant adaptation takes place (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000: 79). Although the degree varies widely, the majority of the writers presented in this chapter agree that religious communities contribute a great deal for the integration of their members. The contextual difference between the studies done in the US and the ones in Norway is vivid. The two studies done in the US reflect a higher level of engagement both civically and politically as opposed to the ones in Norway. This might depend on multiple factors that are not included in this study. However, it is important to highlight that the frames of the literatures are also different. Among the ones done in Norway, Ødegård's is done among voluntary associations and religion is not a component in her assessment. Austigard and Hansen focus on single Christian congregations. Tamrat's data comes from individuals and he does not approach it from the aspect of community. Bredhal includes individuals from two different countries and both from Christian and Muslim background. Her analysis, however, is based on how the religious belonging orients the individuals' preferences rather than how the communities impact the individuals.

My research is distinct from the empirical studies presented here in three ways. One, it assesses the role of the religious communities themselves rather than, for example, the role of religious belonging in Bredhal. Secondly, it is focused on only Protestant congregations and only Ethiopian congregations. Thirdly, beyond the economic and educational advancement of the immigrants, it analyzes the contribution of the congregations for the members' civic incorporation. Synnes' report, which is a research published towards the end of my project, in more or less similar way as this study looks into five Christian congregations in Oslo and analyzes the forms of social capital generated within them. However, his study is based on congregations of different ethnic backgrounds and he also includes a Roman Catholic congregation.

## **Research Questions and Data**

This thesis is about what the role of Ethiopian Protestant communities in Oslo is in the integration process of the members into the life of the larger Norwegian Society. The study asks if social ties and resources the members access through participating in the congregations may affect how they connect to different aspects of the host communities' life. I have collected the data through field research conducted among the community. I have applied a qualitative approach by observing various activities in five Ethiopian Evangelical congregations in Oslo and conducted interviews with eleven participants of these congregations, both leaders and regular members. In this chapter I will give a description of the research questions and the methods I applied to accomplish this project.

### **2.1 Research field**

There are a number of Ethiopian Christian congregations in Oslo. Out of these, the present study focuses only on five of them. The rationale of this selection is based on the religious ideology and the language used in the services. Ethiopia is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country with estimated number of 80 different languages. The Ethiopian immigration to Oslo is also correspondingly represented. In addition to that, Christianity in Ethiopia is colored by a number of different denominations. In this research, I will look into the Protestant congregations that use Amharic, which is the official language of Ethiopia. There are other Ethiopian faith groups in Oslo who either do not use Amharic or are ideologically from a non-Protestant segment of Christianity. I believe, covering all would have added to our knowledge of the role of these communities have regarding integration. Nevertheless, regrettably, the space and time limit of this thesis restricts me from the exiting work of comparison between the different Christian segments.

## **2.2 Why this theme?**

My interest in the area of immigration study was triggered by the series of discussions in the Norwegian political arena in the last years. Some of the articles I came across in the media give a very positive impression of the government's effort to facilitate for better integration of immigrants. This created curiosity in me to see how the immigrants themselves look at their life within the framework of Norwegian context.

Furthermore, where and when the question of immigration is talked about, there is a larger focus on Muslim background immigrants. Christian minorities, however, are a rather unexplored area (Austigard 2008: 1). Lack of focus on Christian immigrant communities is one of the reasons I chose this topic. First of all, it is asserted that little scholarly attention has been given to the role of religion in social capital formation (Smidt 2003: 2) and immigration studies (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000: 4; Bredahl, 2008:1). Then, again the Norwegian immigration discussion is more focused on Muslims and their religious ideologies and codes while other religious minorities are mostly ignored (Synnes 2012: 9).

The other area I hope this work is a contribution to pertains to the geographic background of the people I base my study on. In many circumstances where Africa is in concern, it is addressed to as a single people group/nation. What most know about one location in Africa is generalized to be true for all Africa (Bredahl 2008: 83, 87). Africa is the world's second largest, second most populous and most multilingual continent with fifty four sovereign states. In light of this, I believe this work is seen as a contribution of first of, a literature on African immigrants and second, a highlight on Africa's diversity and Ethiopian immigrants represent only one of the fifty four nations in Africa.

## **2.3 Research questions**

The overall question of this thesis is, "What is the role of the Ethiopian Christian community in Oslo in the process of the participants' incorporation into the larger Norwegian society?" I discuss four basic aspects from which the congregations in this study may be sources of social capital in terms of facilitating adaptation of their members to the different spheres of life in Norway. The first two aspects focus on the bonding social capital, whereas the last two scrutinize the nature of bridge building social capital that the congregations can give access to (the different forms of social capital have been explained broadly in chapter one). 1) Some form of practical support can be crucially important for new immigrants in the first phase of

settlement. Information and support provided through the networks among immigrant communities are important in finding housing and jobs. So, this study investigate if the Ethiopian Evangelical congregations provide practical support whether emotional, material or social and examine if this brings further links to the labor market. 2) Gaining sense of security and belonging can be fundamental in the process of adaptation in a new context. Ethnic religious communities can be settings where new immigrants find themselves at home and gain courage, skills and orientation to face the outside circumstance. Often, engagement in the various activities organized in the ethnic religious communities can meet the social needs participants have in terms familiar from home. This study examines which community activities the Ethiopian congregations arrange and how the participants benefit from them. 3) Immigrant religious communities can facilitate direct linkages to the host community through collaboration with civic activities organized by and with outside organs. This study explores if participating in the Ethiopian evangelical congregations in Oslo leads to further civic engagement. 4) Religious communities can impact the participants' views in politics in a way it can affect the participants' level of engagement in the political affairs of the larger society. This study looks into if participation in the Ethiopian congregations impacts the level of the members' participation in politics. I ask whether the leaders of the congregations encourage or discourage political engagement. In what follows I will elaborate the four research questions of this study in detail.

### *Practical support to members*

The first research question of this thesis is “Do Ethiopian congregations in Oslo provide practical support to their members as they cope with their new setting?” Immigrants face various challenges in the new country they move to. These challenges can be material, social or psychological (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000: 74). The newly arrived immigrants may not have a lot of material resources of their own, most do not speak the language of the host country and have very limited ability to create connections and find their way around. Thus, access to necessary information may be a crucial need, mainly at the first phase of settlement. By practical support I mean help that is not primarily arranged for collective benefit but for individuals as the needs appear. This includes economic support, visitation, finding housing, jobs and school, information concerning social security benefits and so forth. For new comers, this type of support includes help with their paper works, translation and taking them around.

It is argued that participation in voluntary associations fosters interactions between people, increases the level of information and trust between members (Smidt 2003: 6). So, this creates a social network through which members can provide physical care, social and psychological support to each other (Smidt 2003: 2; Foley and Hoge 2007: 5; Hansen 2007: 57-58; Bredahl 2008: 73). Communities can provide such supports either by organizing formal programs or by simply offering a social space where fellow participants can meet one another and form networks for mutual support and assistance (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000: 74, Foley and Hoge 2007: 121). For example, in the Chinese church in Oslo, students who come for a limited stay are formally welcomed from the pulpit and given power point presentations concerning important locations, reasonable shopping, how to get around Oslo and so forth (Hansen 2007: 58). Whereas, in the Spanish speaking congregation in Oslo there is no formal program to offer practical help, however, the members are forthcoming to help out new immigrants and others who need assistance of practical manner (Austigard 2008: 96). My question then is, “Do Ethiopian congregations have formal programs to organize support to participants or do they do it informally?”

Since Norway is a welfare state and there is larger possibility of the state providing some of the basic needs, the congregations may or may not be focused on giving material support to their members as it is emphasized in some of the studies done in the US (Foley and Hoge 2007, Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000). Nevertheless, to start afresh in a new setting might still be economically demanding. So, to see if the congregations provide material support, I ask, “Do Ethiopian congregations in Oslo provide material assistance to their participants? If yes, what kinds and in what form? Do they provide assistance with practical issues like finding jobs, schooling and housing?”

Emotional challenges and frustration seem to be common problems which newly arrived immigrants face. As one uproots from their original setting, which at times can involve loss of prestige and self esteem, and misunderstood by members of hosting societies, immigrants can go through humiliating experiences. Grete Brochman, in *Hva er invandring*, writes about how the experience of immigrating can be degrading and cowardice in contrast to emigrating which most of the time can be regarded as brave and daring (Brochman 2006: 10). According to Brochmann, emigrants have a much higher status than immigrants throughout history. To travel out is brave, adventurous, and innovative, whereas to come in is unsafe, incompetent, dependent and demanding. Emigration symbolizes new impetus, whereas immigration symbolizes disappointment. Thus, the process of integration is already iced by symbolical frustrations even before the practical challenges begin to be dealt with.

Immigrant communities in many ways can be in a better position to help people who go through such frustrations since many of them have gone through the same experience (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000: 58, 159). My question then is: “Do Ethiopian Christian congregations in Oslo give emotional support to their participants? If yes, what are the ways they can help the members to deal with their frustrations and disappointment?”

Forming a more intimate connection can be one of the difficult things new immigrants face. So, ethnic congregations can have a better capacity to provide networks that can touch codes of home of origin. Many times, immigrants know that one of the places open for everyone is religious gatherings and seek out for them (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000: 265). Thus, I ask: “Are there social networks available among the Ethiopian congregations that are capable of facilitating the transfer of practical support for individuals who need them? If yes, how do the networks function?”

Labor market engagement is one of the significant aspects by which immigrants can be incorporated into the host community’s life. Information provided and network available is important in finding employment opportunities. This study will ask, “Do Ethiopian Evangelical congregations in Oslo provide information and support that furthers labor market engagement for the participants?”

It is common in the Ethiopian congregations in Oslo to see people who visit from asylum camps being greeted and welcomed from pulpits. The Oromo Evangelical congregation in Oslo sees assisting asylum seekers with their application process and giving them information about how legal issues function in Norway as one of its tasks (Bredahl 2008: 73). Groups in Ebaugh and Chafetz study also support their members with similar forms of practical needs (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000: 5). In this research, I ask “Do the Ethiopian congregations assist participants with immigration issues and paper work?”

### *Community life*

Although the primary purpose of religious communities is worship and religious education, many of them organize other secular activities in addition. Corwin Smidt argues that membership in voluntary associations increases the capacity for collective action, cooperation, and trust within the group (Smidt 2003: 6). He goes on saying, “Group activity helps to broaden the scope of an individual’s interest, making public matters more relevant”. Often the ethnic religious institutions revitalize ethnic identities by enabling the group to use

native languages, celebrate religious and ethnic holydays, socialize in their own terms and eat ethnic food together.

Ebaugh and Chafetz highlight two different purposes of most immigrant religious communities they had studied in Huston (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000: 49). In addition to being a place of religious activities, congregations are also social settings within which people of similar background and interest come together (Smidt 2003: 25; see also Austigard 2008: 85-86). Ebaugh and Chafetz call these types of extra-religious services “community centers”. They define the community center model as secular, mundane services provided primarily or exclusively to members of the religious institution itself (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2002:55). That is, religious communities serve as a physical site at which, the following occur: communal celebration of secular holidays, classes in native language, recreational facilities, and social activities. Most immigrants in Bredahl’s study have said that although their congregations first and foremost are for religious purpose, they at the same time are primary arenas for socializing (Bredahl 2008: 37). Therefore, my second research question is, “Do Ethiopian congregations in Oslo organize community activities beside their focus on religious education? If yes, which ones?”

Leaders of congregations provide opportunities of closer ties between participants through organizing cell groups. Immigrant studies suggest that congregations that are organized by small groups give opportunities for the participants to get closer intimacy and assist each other with particular needs (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000: 49, 61, 185; Foley and Hoge 2007: 46). The advantage of smaller groups is also that members get satisfaction through participating in some level of leadership and discussion, which is not always possible in large congregations. “Do Ethiopian evangelical congregations organize cell groups or are they a single large community? What are the advantages or disadvantages of the way the congregations are organized?”

Furthermore, congregations arrange leisure time activities along line the different interests participants have. The members of Chinese Scandinavian Church in Oslo are divided in various small groups mainly based on some kind of communality (Hansen 2007: 56-57). These groups, time to time, meet for other social activities like birthdays, soccer games, movies, trip to cabins and so on. The congregation also offers Chinese language class to children (Hansen 2007: 54-55). The participants in this class are both children of the members and also others who are outside of the community. The class is purely language education

with no Christian elements for the sake of including the non-members. So, immigrant congregations organize smaller groups that have a potential to address the deeper needs of individuals who participate in them. So, in this study I ask “Are there organized leisure activities in the Ethiopian congregations in Oslo?”

### *Civic Engagement*

The third question of this thesis is, “Does participating in the Ethiopian evangelical congregations in Oslo lead to further civic engagement? Do the congregations organize activities that build bridges to other civil society bodies beyond their own religious groups?”

Robert Putnam discusses broadly how religious participation is intertwined in a number of ways to other civic activities (Putnam 2000: 64-79). Religious communities make important contribution by preparing members to further involvement to civil society which in turn leads to political participation. Regular church goers and people who say that religion is very important to them are much more likely than other people to visit friends, attend club meetings, volunteer in other public activities and give charitable contributions (see also Smidt 2003: 2, 34; Ebaugh and Chafetz 2002: 71). In Ebaugh and Chafetz’s study, the Christian communities are involved in these kinds of activities in a larger degree than the rest of the religious communities in their study.

Religious communities provide opportunities of civic engagement to their members by themselves being part of other networks, such as religious groups and civil organizations. The Chinese church in Oslo is part of the network of the fellowship of Scandinavian Chinese Christians (Hansen 2007: 60). The fellowship consists of all Chinese congregations that are found in Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland. This research will ask, “Are Ethiopian Congregations in Oslo part of any other larger network? If they are, how do the participants profit from such connections?”

It is argued that participation in religious communities nurtures civic skills by training members in social interaction, fostering leadership skills, letter writing, participation in discussion and providing resources essential for effective public action (Foley and Hoge 2007: 20, 35-36, 150-157; Smidt 2003: 6, 51, 87). Evangelical congregations are said to excel in developing civic skill because they offer wider opportunities for lay participation (Foley and Hoge 2007: 51). Vertically organized communities or those who are focused on worship

and prayer provide few such opportunities. “Which opportunities participation in the Ethiopian congregations in Oslo offers for developing civic skills? How open are the settings for lay participation in leadership positions?”

Although all communities advance some form of civic participation, the extent and the forms of the contribution the different groups make vary enormously. For example, communities whom Foley and Hoge refer to as “house of worship” model and evangelicals are less involved in social activities (Foley and Hoge 2007: 20). In the house of worship model, the primary focus is on worship and prayer and individuals come and go with little or no interaction with others (Foley and Hoge 2007: 46; Ebaugh and Chafetz 2002: 73, 156, 159). Although Evangelicals are rich in opportunities of nurturing civic skills, most of the time this skills are not transferred to settings outside of the church due to the fact that they withdraw from other secular activities they perceive detract attention away from the religious (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2002: 72; Bredahl 2008: 74; Hansen 2007:73; Austigard 2008: 102). Putnam expresses the same concern when he comments that the new denominations are directed inward rather than outward limiting their stock of social capital (Putnam 2000:79). The congregations in this study can be categorized under what is called “Evangelicals”. My question then is, “Do the Ethiopian congregations encourage or discourage engagement in secular activities? How does their religious ideology impact their interest in public affairs?”

Much more frequently, religious communities assume roles in the larger society through charitable activities (Foley and Hoge 2007: 116, see also Ebaugh and Chafetz 2002: 77). Some more established communities with less need within their own groups do this by giving donations to other charitable organizations, whereas many of them go out to help substance abusers, the needy and so forth. Because they are involved in carrying out social services, religious communities increase opportunities for individuals to come in contact with, and join in working with others outside of their own religious groups (Smidt 2003: 26). This thesis will ask, “Do Ethiopian congregations in Oslo involve in social services? If yes, does their engagement build linkages to outside groups?” Given the fact that Norway is a rich welfare nation, while Ethiopia being one of the poorest, it can easily be deduced that Ethiopian communities may be enticed to send their economic remittance to their home of origin. My empirical study will ask “If the communities do charitable contributions, do they prioritize the need among themselves, outside community in Oslo or country of origin?”

### *Political participation*

The final research question of this study asks “Does participation in the Ethiopian congregations has an impact on the way members approach the question of political engagement? Do the leaders encourage or discourage political engagement?”

It is argued that civic associations foster political engagement through creating greater public awareness, broadened interests, and enhanced skills (Smidt 2003: 6; Foley and Hoge 2007: 5). However, it is also been reported that leadership model, religious doctrines and organizational culture of faith communities dictate the extent to which participants choose to relate to those outside their religious community, and the priorities they give to political life and agendas (Foley and Hoge 2007: 12 ; Smidt 2003: 2; Ebaugh and Chafetz 200: 73). For example, a leader who is politically informed and active can play a role in shaping the profile of a community.

Research suggests that when it comes to religious tradition, most main line Christian segments are more active in political matters than the evangelicals who emphasize personal salvation (Smidt 2003: 36; Foley and Hoge 2007: 19; Austigard 2008). The organizational culture of a religious community is also one of the important factors that determine the level of interaction between participants. Communities that are organized to provide wider interaction among participants give better chance for educating each other on various subjects where as communities, such as, Catholic parishes, Hindu temples and Mosques, where members come and go just for prayer and meditation purposes, provide limited opportunities for interaction (Foley and Hoge 2007: 46, 51; Bredahl 2008: 74). Putnam argues that in southern Italy, it is the vertical organizational culture of the Catholic Church that minimized opportunities for participation in voluntary associations, thereby sabotaging the growth of democracy (Putnam 1993: 107).

This research will investigate how the aspect of political involvement is accommodated by the Ethiopian congregations. Politics among Ethiopian Christians is an interesting subject to look into due to various reasons. First, it is only about two decades ago communism collapsed in Ethiopia. During the communist period, political involvement was looked upon as anti-Christianity and devotion to religion was condemned as anti-revolution. That created uncompromising gap between devotion to Christianity and political involvement due to the fact that one was required to renounce one’s religious conviction in order to become a member of the communist party. It is interesting to see what kind of attitudinal

changes may have occurred over the last twenty years. Second, the congregations in this study can be categorized as which Foley and Hoge call Evangelical and are generally assumed to regard politics as worldly engagement and abstain from it (Foley and Hoge 2007: 51). This study explores if this trait is prevalent or not in the Ethiopian congregations as well. Thirdly, integration and legal papers are political subjects in Norway which would directly touch the Ethiopian community. Does this fact pressurize Ethiopian immigrants to learn the policies and want to know about their rights, thereby, making them part of Norwegian politics? Do the members have access to some political information through participating in the religious communities? These aspects are addressed by my fourth research question.

Tamrat suggests that Ethiopian immigrant women in his study are interested in Norwegian politics and want to impact immigration politics. They are also interested in the rights of the working class (Tamrat 2010: 92-95). Contrary to that Bredahl, who did a research among both Ethiopian and Eritrean Christian and Muslim immigrants in Rogaland reports that her informants were happy about the neutral stance of their faith communities in political matters (Bredahl 2008: 68). Bredahl's informants believe that religious gatherings are just for spiritual nurturing and politics remains outside of church walls.

The contradiction between these two findings is interest provoking that I would like to inquire how my informants perceive political participation. Do they believe that they can combine religion and politics as some faith communities in Foley and Hoge's study do or do they avoid it because they believe it is a worldly affair (Foley and Hoge 2007: 51-52)? If yes, which issues matter the most?

## **2.4 Method**

The method used in this research is a qualitative approach, a combination of both participant observation and interview. I have done observation of the different activities among the congregation over a period of two years and have conducted a semi-structured interview with 11 active participants of the different congregations.

### *Data collection*

The primary material of this project is assembled through observation and one-to-one interviews. I have done participant observation among the communities for a period of two

years, from the fall 2010 to the fall 2012. I have participated in various activities of all of the congregations, such as main worship services, prayer meetings, social gatherings, holiday celebrations, weddings, and mourning of losses.

Interviews gave me the opportunity to get information about the informants' own fundamental convictions and how they experience their life in the community. I have performed semi-structured interview, by which I have used my interview guide to steer the process and kept myself focused on issues I wanted to investigate, while allowing informants to bring forth what they think is important in relation to the topics at stake. Besides, the semi-structured interview gave me opportunity to raise follow up questions that may be advantageous in completing thoughts I may not had seen in advance. It also helped me clarify some of the questions when the informants did not grasp the whole thought well enough and vice versa. Nevertheless, I was aware that I needed to keep the balance between what my informants were willing to give and what I am out to look for. So, I kept the responsibility of steering the whole interview process myself.

Five women and six men eleven informants in total have participated in the interviews. In addition, I have had informal discussions with many more people in multiple occasions. Since the communities included in this study are small and everyone knows everyone, the issue of confidentiality takes extra attention. Thus, I refrain from giving the details of the distribution of the informants according to the different segment of the communities they represent. However, I have to make it clear that I have done all my best to have a proper representation of the different categories of people involved in the congregations. The considerations I took in to account during recruiting informants is number of informants involved from each congregation, gender, age, length of stay, legal status, position in the congregation, educational background, segments of labor market engagement, immigrants and Norwegian born. The age range of informants' is 19-55.

All of the informants are regular attendants of the activities in the congregations, i.e. they are in the churches almost in all of the main services and other specific engagements that concern each of them. In consideration to protecting the identities of individuals, I have not used any names or pseudonyms. But I have used expressions that may indicate approximately which group the informant may represent, for example, gender, approximate age, profession, etc.

In recruiting informants, I have employed both personal acquaintances and snow ball method. I directly contacted some of the leaders who in turn connected me to individuals who can represent the specific category I intend to recruit. Myself, being an immigrant from Ethiopia, I have not faced much challenge in my presence among the people. Although I am not an active participant in any of the congregations, I have visited all of them on multiple occasions before and am quite familiar with the environment. In that sense I consider myself as partial insider and partial outsider and my assumption is also that the informants looked at me this way. I consider myself as insider because I am an immigrant from Ethiopia, speak Amharic and am part of the culture. I am an outsider because I am not a member nor am I a regular participant of any of the congregations. Besides, my circumstances are quite different from those who come as asylum seekers, or who do not have previous connection. I came to Norway because of marriage. So, I must also acknowledge that I do not quite identify with some of the immigrants.

The insider-outsider dynamics may have its own advantages and disadvantages. As an outsider, on one hand, I might lack some of the up to date information which my informants might assume I have. But, on the other hand, I also assume my partial outsider position has gained me some respect and made it that I be taken somehow seriously. As an insider, I have broad background information of the context and was able to do all the interviews in Amharic. But there are weaknesses that come along with the insider's position, such as, own bias and taking for granted issues that may have been interesting from outsider's point of view. I have been aware of this dynamics during my time of data collection and did all my best to reduce the limitation that arise as a result of my position in connection to the communities. Although such weaknesses are not easy to avoid completely, I as a researcher have done my best to remain objective and scientific in order to be able to collect as valid and reliable data as possible.

I audio recorded eight of the interviews. Practical situations made it impossible to apply the same method to three of the interviews. Thus, one informant responded by e-mail, one is done face to face by taking notes and the other one is done by telephone. I have transcribed the audios and deepened the notes the very evening I have performed the interviews in all cases. The interviews lasted from one hour to one and half with the shorter ones being with the Norwegian born and the longer ones with leaders. All translation of interviews to English is my own.

All informants were incredibly forth coming to respond to my question. I have allowed the informants to choose meeting places where they think is suitable to do the interviews. Some of the interviews are done in the informants' offices, whereas one interview is done at the informant's residence. The rest of the interviews which were audio taped are done in the discussion rooms in the library of the Norwegian School of Theology. I have not observed any feeling of discomfort caused by the locations of the meetings. The home pages of the communities are also part of the primary sources of this research.

### *Ethical concerns*

The intent of this study is known to all the communities included in the study. In order to create trust and transparency, I have told the leaders of the congregations about my intents and told all my informants that the project is known by the leaders of the congregations. In the congregations I was given the opportunity, I have explained my topic and the objective of my project to the whole gathering. I believe that has increased the informants' sense of liberty to participate.

My first contact with informants is made face to face or via telephone. Almost everyone I have inquired was willing to respond. However, due to the ethical obligations I have, I attempted to forward a written informed consent form in addition. Nevertheless, it is only three individuals who were interested to sign the sheet. The rest gave me comments like that they did not worry about the issue of confidentiality or what they were going to say. Hence, I have orally explained the rights and obligations of both an informant and a researcher in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Norwegian Social Science Data Service (NSD). I have done my best to keep confidentiality. I have covered all names and sensitive information during transcription and have destroyed all recordings and notes at the end of the project. In addition, I have presented my project to NSD and obtained a permit to do my qualitative study according to the research tradition in Norway.

### *Method of Analysis*

As it is discussed in chapter one, social capital is the theory through which I will see, organize and analyze the data obtained. The roles of the congregations would be assessed either as bonding, bridging or negative social capital.

The data collected is categorized along line with my four main research questions which try to investigate the social capital present in the communities in four aspects: practical support for individuals, collective activities within the communities, linkages to civic activities and political engagement. This preference is, though not identical to, influenced largely by Foley and Hoge's (2007) analysis of their findings among the immigrant communities in Washington D.C. In addition, in the two first points where the emphasis is on how the communities function internally, the book *Chainatown: A portrait of a closed society* by Gwen Kinkead (1992) has contributed to my curiosity to see closely how certain segments of people can function as semi-detached within and from the larger communities. This does not mean to draw any likeness between the people in Kinkead's Chainatown and the immigrant Ethiopians in Oslo. But, it is to say that to closely scrutinize internal networks of certain ethnic groups that are more or less disconnected from the host community's organs, brings a lot of knowledge about how they tackle their ethnically tainted life within a foreign framework.

## Presentation of the Congregations

This chapter will present a short history and the demographics of Ethiopian immigrants in Norway as a whole first and then proceeds with a portrait of the start and development of Ethiopian Evangelical community in Oslo.

### 3.1 Ethiopian immigrants in Norway

Ethiopian immigration to Norway is a recent phenomenon. Data from Statistics Norway suggests that the major flow started in the early 90s (Statistics Norway 2007: 205). Besides, Ethiopians in Norway are not a very large group. Perhaps due to this fact, there are few data available on their situation in Norway.

#### *Demographics*

Very few Ethiopians came to Norway before 1985 (Statistics Norway 2007: 205). Statistics Norway mentions two waves of Ethiopian immigration to Norway. The first wave took place between 1991 and 1993 when the 20 years war between Ethiopia and Eritrea came to an end and Eritrea declared its independence. Many of the refugees who arrived in 1993 are Ethiopian citizens who fled from the territory which now is called Eritrea. In 1998 the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea was triggered again causing the second wave of refugees. In 2006, 3200 immigrants from Ethiopia lived in Norway out of which 515 were Norwegian born (Statistics Norway 2007: 204).

Ethiopian immigrants in Norway are a young group of people (Statistics Norway 2007: 204). In the beginning of 2006, one third of the population was under 40 and 0.3 percent was over 60, which actually is only 21 individuals. 76 percent of the Norwegian born at that time were under 10 years of age and 98 percent were under 20.

Currently, about 5805 people of immigrant background from Ethiopia live in Norway (Statistics Norway 2011). Out of these, about 1081 are Norwegian born to two Ethiopian born parents. The number of men and women is relatively the same. Men immigrants are 2444,

whereas the women are 2280. The number of Norwegian born men to two Ethiopian born parents is 567, and women are 514.

In 2006, more than 40 percent of Ethiopian immigrants lived in Oslo (Statistics Norway 2007: 206). The remaining 60 percent were spread across the country with a visible preference of big cities like Bergen, Trondheim and Stavanger.

### *Education and job*

The Ethiopian community consists of a relatively well educated and employed group of people, particularly compared to other recent immigrant groups (Statistics Norway 2007: 207-208). 31 percent of immigrants from Ethiopia in the age group 30-44 have a university level education and 29 percent are in the higher secondary level. The percentage in the age group 19-24 is 35 percent in upper secondary and 12 percent have a higher education. The population for under high school level among immigrants from Ethiopia is at the same level as the total population of Norway. There are a large number of adults among immigrants from Ethiopia who are in primary school.

Nevertheless, the gap between men and women who have higher education is wide. Although Statistics Norway does not have information about the educational background of 42 percent of Ethiopian immigrants in the age group 30-44, among those whose level of education is recorded, 42 percent of the men and 15 percent of the women have higher education.

At the end of 2005, 54 percent of immigrants from Ethiopia in the age group 16-74 had been employed (Statistics Norway 2007: 208). Unlike some other non-western background immigrants, employment rate among men and women immigrants from Ethiopia is almost identical, 55 and 52 percent respectively (Statistics Norway 2007: 34, 208). Employment rate increases with length of stay (Statistics Norway 2007: 209). 61 percent of immigrants from Ethiopia who lived for more than six years were employed.

### **3.2 Ethiopian Evangelical community in Oslo**

Four of the five congregations in this study are independent with no organizational link to any other religious body and they contain the characteristics of contemporary charismatic churches. Theologically, the congregations are composed of believers from diverse background: Lutheran, Pentecostal, Baptist, Mennonites, and so forth. Nevertheless, the Ethiopian Adventist fellowship is somehow different, organized under Bethel Adventist church, which is a Norwegian speaking church. In this segment, I will present the historical background and the characteristics of the congregations.

#### *Ethiopian Fellowship*

The first gathering of Ethiopian Christians in Oslo started in 1985 and was called Ethiopian fellowship. Although this fellowship does not exist any longer, it is the origin of all Christian congregations which subsequently came forth in Oslo including the ones in this study. The very first initiative to gather Ethiopian Christians in Oslo was taken by a missionary couple in the Norwegian Lutheran Mission (Norsk Luthersk Misjonssamband), who has worked in Ethiopia and speak Amharic. The couple invited an Ethiopian woman and a couple whom they met in the assembly hall of Norwegian Lutheran Mission (Misjonssalen) and suggested to start an Amharic Fellowship. That was agreed upon and the fellowship started. The missionary couple lived at Fjellhaug International University College in Sinsenveien 15 and the meetings were held at their home.

Shortly after the start, two more individuals were added and the missionary couple suggested that they make Ethiopian food and invite all Ethiopians the participants knew. About 30 individuals accepted the invitation and the fellowship expanded. After that, the fellowship meeting place was moved to the assembly hall in Misjonssalen in Tullins gata 4, in downtown Oslo.

The fellowship consisted of individuals from all denominations, Protestants, Ethiopian Orthodox and Roman Catholic. Since the fellowship started before Eritrea and Ethiopia split, participants of the fellowship were represented from both Ethiopia and Eritrea. However, not long after the beginning of the fellowship Ethiopia and Eritrea were divided and the participants from the two nations also formed separate fellowships.

### *Yewongel Berhan Church, Oslo*

In 1994, when the Eritrean Protestant participants started a separate fellowship, Ethiopians and Eritreans who chose to use Amharic formed a common fellowship, which is called “Yewongel Berhan Church” meaning light of the gospel. The congregation is located at Møllergata 40 in downtown Oslo, where it rents a worship hall from Den Frie Evangeliske Forsamling. Yewongel Berhan is a bi-national and multi-denominational congregation.

A gathering of people who belong to different denominations is not unthinkable in an Ethiopian context because of a long tradition of strong unity between churches of Protestant background. Worship together among Lutherans, Baptists, Pentecostals, Mennonites, and many other evangelical churches is a common practice in Ethiopia. Although the churches in Ethiopia have strict membership registration and follow up, attending worship services across denominational lines is understood by most as a practice of mature Christians. Besides, one of the tasks of the Evangelical Churches Fellowship of Ethiopia is to promote unity between member churches. It also needs to be noted that apart from some of the doctrinal definitions among the different denominations, the nature of the churches and the worship style is rather similar. Given this background, it is not at all surprising that the immigrant believers joined together to create a common fellowship.

In the fall of 2011 the Yewongel Berhan Church had 120 members and no employed worker or any full time minister. All activities are carried out by volunteers. The elders, who are elected by majority vote for a term of two years, are in charge of all functions in the congregation.

The main service in the congregation is held on Sunday afternoons and is followed by coffee fellowship. A separate children’s Sunday school is offered in Norwegian while the main service is going on. Other activities consist of prayer group, Bible study, women ministry, compassion ministry, mission outreach and choir.

There are two different prayer meetings held every week. Dedicated individuals gather every Thursday to pray on different issues, whereas on Fridays, there is a prayer meeting open for all who wish to participate. Individuals with specific needs are encouraged to come forward and laid hands on. The leaders of the congregation organize small home Bible study groups. The groups choose a day and time that is suitable for the participants. The congregation has two choirs and one worship team. These groups sing in the worship services

alternately. The worship team and one of the choirs meet on Saturday afternoons and the other choir meets on Wednesday late afternoons for rehearsal. The women group meets every two month for Bible study and they gather every six month for worship, socializing and have a meal together. The women ministry is also in charge of arranging food in all sorts of social get-togethers and organizing visitations for individuals who have specific needs. Mission outreach in the congregation is done in two ways. Every now and then, the outreach committee organizes groups to go to the asylum camps and speak to the asylum seekers. The group also does street evangelization. The outreach committee consists of three individuals.

The congregation supports financially an orphanage in Ethiopia. Individuals contribute pledged amount every month to send to the orphanage. Most of the funding of the congregation comes from members' voluntary donations. The governmental support covers less than 10 percent of the congregation's income.

#### *The Ethiopian Adventist Fellowship (YeEthiopiawuyan YeAdventist Hibret)*

The Adventist fellowship started in 2000 with a membership of 16 persons. The meetings take place in a building that belongs to Bethel Adventist church in Akergata 74, in downtown Oslo. The participants of the Adventist fellowship are already members of Bethel Adventist church, which is a Norwegian speaking congregation. They say that they needed a separate Amharic speaking fellowship for two reasons: to satisfy their socio-cultural needs and to provide a bridge to new-comers. .

Members of the Adventist fellowship have not decided if they want to be a separate congregation or they want to continue under the Bethel Adventist Church. The main church encourages them to be independent if they so desire. The regulations of the Adventist church also are such if a gathering has a membership of 25 or more, it can be promoted to a level of an independent congregation. However, the Amharic speaking fellowship postpones the idea of independence due to certain reasons. Firstly, they say that one of the tasks of the Amharic speaking fellowship is to function as a point of transition in the process of integration. They find integration to be easily attainable if they mingle with Norwegian communities. Since it is hard for newcomers to join the Norwegian group at once, the fellowship serves a purpose of bridging between newly arriving immigrants and the main Norwegian congregation. One of the leaders of the Amharic speaking fellowship says, "we do not know exactly what will happen in the future but based on our experience and the results we obtained so far, this is the

path (continue as a separate group while fully involving in the main church simultaneously) we assume is best functioning for our community.”

Nevertheless, the Amharic speaking fellowship is independent in many ways. For example, they elect their own board every two years. To keep a functional flow between the fellowship and the main congregation, a representative of the Amharic speaking fellowship, which is one of the board members, sits on the board of the main Norwegian speaking congregation. This type of cooperation is extended to financial management as well. The tithes and the governmental grant on account of Amharic speaking members go to the main congregation. For expenses that concern the Amharic speaking fellowship alone, the participants make a separate monthly contribution. They have the option of making use of the budget allocated for small groups by the main church should they so desire, but they say that they did not have to ask for it. They, however, use all the facilities of the main church free of charge.

The Amharic speaking fellowship is dependent on the main church when it comes to formal contacts with governmental bodies. This is due to the fact that they are not themselves a formally registered organization. For example, if they need to invite a guest speaker from abroad, they need the main church to facilitate the paper work and so forth.

At the time of this study, a little over a decade after its formation, the fellowship claims a membership of 80 persons. Since the participants of the fellowship are formal members of the Bethel Adventist church, the fellowship does not do a formal registration of members. The Ethiopian Adventist fellowship holds its main service on Saturday afternoons. Children devotion is done separately while the main service is going on. At the end of the service, the participants gather for coffee and socializing. A choir rehearsal and a Bible study are also done on Saturday afternoons before the main service starts. The social committee, which is elected by the participants, is in charge of organizing the social activities, such as, coffee fellowship, visitations, cultural events and holyday celebrations.

### *The Selihom Church*

The Selihom church was established in 2004 and is located in Hausmannsgate 22, in downtown Oslo. The congregation rents a worship hall from Oslo 1 Baptist Church. In the fall of 2011, the congregation had 23 members. Selihom was rather large, with about 50 members,

for some years after its beginning. However, at the time of this study the size has shrunk possibly due to some leadership tensions.

The main service in the congregation is held on Sunday afternoons. Children Sunday school is offered at the same time as the main service. Prayer meeting is held on Wednesday late afternoons. The congregation has a part-time pastor who does a professional job for a living. The elders, who are elected by majority vote, are the leaders of the congregation. The main funding of the congregation comes from voluntary gift from the members and expenses include rental and expenses related to visiting speakers.

### *The Ethiopian Evangelical Church*

The Ethiopian Evangelical Church (EEC) was established in 2008 and is located in Staffeldts gate 4, in downtown Oslo. The congregation rents an assembly hall from Høgskolen I Staffeldtsgate, which belongs to Normisjon, which is an independent mission association within the Church of Norway. The EEC has 94 members and is led by a committee of five individuals including the pastor. The pastor and the four members of the churches leadership are the ones who started the church. Thus, the constitution of the church recognizes them as founders and no election happens in the congregation. As it was explained to me the founders of the congregation have learned from experience that replacing gifted and experienced leaders with new ones every second year does not produce better results.

The main service in the EEC is held on Sunday afternoons. A Sunday school for children is done in Norwegian at the same time as the main service is going on. The main service of the congregation is aired out live through what is called pal talk ministry. The pal talk ministry on the internet makes possible voice and text transmission live to all who are logged on at the time. It also allows interaction to all interested as the facilitator controls the setting. After main services, the participants gather for coffee and socializing. The participants gather for prayer on Friday afternoons. Mission outreach is one of the focuses the EEC has. The main target of the mission work is asylum camps. The pastor and other volunteers go to speak to new immigrants in asylum camps.

The EEC has a fulltime pastor but no paid worker. By fall 2011, the congregation could not afford to pay their pastor's wages and he serves them full time with no pay. At the

time of this study the only source of EEC's income was the voluntary donation from the participants.

### *Gospel United International Church*

Towards the end of this project, I am informed that the Gospel United International Church does not exist anymore. I have not been able to follow the details of this process and I basically do not believe it causes any difference for the outcome of my work.

At the time of this study, Gospel United International Church (GUIC) is the youngest of the Amharic speaking evangelical congregations in Oslo. The congregation is established in June 2010 and rents a worship hall from a Methodist church which is located in Thorvald Meyers gate 56, in downtown Oslo. The GUIC, started as a Bible study group of 6 people before it was formally announced to be an independent congregation. In the beginning of 2012, the congregation had 42 members.

The main worship service in the congregation is held on Sunday afternoons. The Children Sunday school is offered alongside the Sunday worship. After the service, participants gather for fellowship and coffee. They also meet for prayer on Friday afternoons. Every last Saturday of a month, the participants go out for handing out tracts and street evangelization.

The congregation's source of income is participants' voluntary gift. Main expenses include rental and hosting guest speakers.

### *Similarities and differences*

The five Ethiopian Protestant congregations in Oslo contain rather similar features in the language used, worship style, cultural and social engagements. Nevertheless, there are also some differences that need to be highlighted. The Adventist Fellowship is visibly distinct in many ways. It is the only one with denominational affiliation and is organized under a Norwegian speaking church. Thus, the Adventist fellowship has the benefits of using the church facilities free of charge and ministered to by the pastors of the main congregation on occasions that require a professional pastor.

The remaining four congregations are independent congregations with characteristics of contemporary neo-Pentecostal Christianity. All of them rent a worship hall and none of them have any employed worker. All their activities are covered by volunteers. Three of the congregations apart from Yewongel Berhan have ordained pastors yet the pastors are also volunteers. The congregations finance their work mainly by voluntary gifts from the members. And some of them receive a small amount of governmental grant. Much of their finances are spent on rental of worship halls. Other expenses include social fellowship, short term trainings, expenses related to guest speakers and charity.

The age of most participants in the five congregations ranges from 20-50, with the majority being in their 30s. The members of the youngest congregation, Gospel United International Church, are also younger themselves, with most of them in the lower end of the thirties.

The leadership formats of the congregations vary. Yewongel Berhan, Selihom and the Adventist Fellowship elect their leaders by majority vote for each term. In the Ethiopian Evangelical Church, election is not practiced. A committee of five individuals, who are recognized as founders of the congregation remain leaders as long as they are able and willing to stay in the position. In the Gospel United International Church, individuals who are recognized as visionaries have the prerogative of appointing others into various positions. Unlike in the Ethiopian Evangelical Church, here it is acknowledged that positions can be replaced, for example, when the type of skill an individual has becomes less relevant to the need the congregation can have in a specific period of time.

The level of women participation in various positions is more or less the same in all the congregations. The traditional distribution of gender role is still dominant. For example, women are primarily responsible for preparing food for the social events while men are always at majority in the top leadership. Nevertheless, none of these roles are exclusive. Men also get actively involved in shopping, cleaning up, taking care of children while, for example, women may be doing the cooking and setting up tables. In the same way, though there has been masculine majority, there have always been one or two women elected to the boards. There have been times when women were elected to a position of a chair person too. As far as pulpit ministry, women engage in equal degree as their men counter parts in all of the congregations, they preach, lead main services, lead in prayers and are dominant in choirs.

Expansion is the vision of all of the groups and the method applied to attract more participants is more or less the same. New visitors are welcomed in all of the services and are suggested to join the congregation. Moreover, all members are encouraged to witness and invite people to the church in all acquaintances. Almost all congregations make efforts of street evangelization. The main target of a formally organized mission of the congregations focuses on the asylum camps.

### *Summary*

About 5805 people with immigrant background from Ethiopia lived in Norway in 2011. Out of these, about 1081 are Norwegian born to two Ethiopian born parents. Ethiopian immigrant community in Oslo is a relatively well educated and employed group of people.

The first fellowship of Christian immigrants from Ethiopia has started in 1985 through the initiative of a Norwegian couple who have been missionaries to Ethiopia. Gradually, the membership increased and the participants started to establish various congregations based on denominational and language backgrounds. The present study focuses on five evangelical congregations. All of the congregations are small with 15-120 registered members. However, the number of the beneficiaries of the social capital available in the congregations can definitely be bigger than the numbers mentioned above because there are many more who visit the congregations in irregular bases. During special occasions and conferences, attendance in some of them can very well rise above 200.

## Practical Support

This chapter will explore about practical support provided by the congregations. Do Ethiopian Evangelical congregations in Oslo provide practical support to their members? If yes what kind? Do they have formal programs to organize support or do they do it informally? Are there social networks that can facilitate the transfer of practical support? If yes, how do the networks function?" Do they provide information and support that furthers labor market engagement? Do they assist participants with immigration issues and paper work?

The need for support can vary based on length of stay and types of legal permits immigrants have. Thus, in order to give a detailed elaboration on the types and ways of support provided, I divide the group in three segments: asylum seekers, other new comers and existing participants.

### 4.1 Assisting asylum seekers

Since immigrants come through various channels, the needs they have also vary accordingly. The routes Ethiopian immigrants use to come to Norway differ from those who come in a marriage relation to ones who come by the UN sanction of refugees, from those who fly directly to Norway to those who take long routes which are full of challenges and life threatening situations. It is not only the circumstances of how immigrants enter Norway that varies, but also the way they are received by the immigration authorities. Some are granted a legal refugee status before arrival, and enjoy the government's sponsorship and support that comes along with it. Whereas others get theirs after they have entered the country. There are some who lived for nearly two decades but have not yet acquired legal status. Thus, individual circumstances have a lot of implications in what kind of support the communities need to provide for individuals.

The most privileged group of immigrants in terms of integration possibilities are those who are included in the immigration authorities what is called "introduction program". To this group of immigrants, Norwegian authorities cover the living expenses while they go to free Norwegian language course, higher education and short term job oriented trainings. As one informant indicated, some of the important advantages this group may have are opportunities

of bettering Norwegian language skills, greater knowledge about the functions of the public system, better follow up and links to appropriate offices and so on.

The Ethiopian congregations seem to primarily be concerned about those who wind up in asylum camps. Asylum camps are a clear mission focus of all the five congregations. The passion of most participants is to make the challenges to the newcomers as manageable as possible. The informants in this study did not make far distinction between spiritual, physical or emotional needs of persons who just entered Norway to stay. A woman in her thirties says the following regarding the purpose of the after service coffee fellowship:

After the service, we sit together and chat with each other. There can be a condition where we have a new visitor. And you need to sit down and talk to that new person. How is his life? Does the person have a permit or not? To discuss such personal issues, you must sit next to the person.

One of the leaders in the Yewongel Berhan congregation says that they specifically target the asylum seekers because they consider them to be surrounded by confusion and questions about their future. Here is his opinion:

When immigrants arrive, they face a lot of problem; there is confusion, cultural shock, and also when their expectations are not met, depression. Again people who come here anticipate Norway to be a heaven, a paradise. Separated from their family, thrown out in some bush somewhere out there, where there is no one to talk to, they find it extremely tough. Since most of our members have gone through the same experiences themselves, they have the ability to comfort and encourage.

There are two temporary camps situated in Oslo, where the newly arrived asylum seekers are placed in while the authorities are making initial assessments in their cases. Then, they are transferred to regional camps where they stay for longer periods. Due to the proximity, the temporary camps are easily accessed by the congregations. Some of the informants in this research have been reached out to while they were still staying in these

camps. They kept in touch and kept coming back to visit the churches in Oslo even after they were moved to camps further away. The congregations help them search jobs, housing, provide information and material help when they are ready to leave the camps.

A woman in her early thirties, who is married and speaks no Norwegian, says that it was her friends in the church who found her the first job and helped her find a flat. She came to the church the first time together with fellow asylum seekers who lived in the same transitional camp. Then, she made further contact to others in the church. She says, “I received the Lord Jesus after I came to Norway.” After she was moved to her long term camp far away from Oslo, she had already made some friends in the church who helped her come back to Oslo and establish her life. The woman is so grateful for joining the church where she met her now husband. She says that it was the congregation that arranged everything for her wedding, covered the expenses and supported her when she later gave birth to her child. She imagines that she would have suffered a lot if not for the support from the people in the church. She knew no one when she arrived in Norway. She says:

In the church we look at each other as brothers and sisters in Christian life....And when the church people help you, they are serious about it. Church has an obligation to help those who are in trouble. And it fulfills its call in a good way.... I cannot imagine what would have happened to me if not for the church. ... There is love in the church, it is just good.

People in the church gave the woman accommodation when she could not afford to cover the expenses herself and they helped her find a job. But now, she in turn is helping others. She says that some people she knew and did not choose to join the church were still struggling.

This is a story of many in the Ethiopian community. A man in his mid thirties and has lived in Norway for about 5 years also remembers how ministers from one of the congregations came to the asylum camp he was staying in and taught him about evangelical Christianity and suggested to contact them when he came to Oslo. Sometime later, he moved to Oslo and by the help of some friends, found a flat and a job.

Even if the asylum seekers do not get a chance to come back to Oslo or settle in other parts of the country, the members of the church community still try to get them connected to

other Amharic speaking groups other places in the country. In this process of networking, the pastor of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church says that he has an advantage through his pal talk ministry. Due to the fact that many Amharic speaking people participate in this internet talk, the pastor has contact with communities other places in the world.

The congregations also send delegates to other camps further away from Oslo, primarily, to comfort and give Christian teaching to the asylum seekers. However, this proves to be the primary stage to all the practical support that is to follow in the subsequent years. For example, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church invites the asylum seekers for a Sunday service or sometimes for long weekend services and covers their transportation and accommodation during their stay with the congregation. They also invite them during major holidays. Such arrangements are done by the congregation leaders but it is also common that individuals host visitors in the same manner. The congregation's desire to provide this type of assistance is posted on the front page of its website and guests are encouraged to leave their note on the webpage and then be contacted.

Gospel United International Church, like the others, targets asylum seekers as a primary field of mission outreach. The congregation has a three level plan for carrying out evangelism: one-on-one witnessing, national level and international level. The one-on-one evangelism focuses on street evangelism and using all sorts of acquaintances. The national level evangelism targets the asylum camps in Norway. Finally, the international level evangelism focuses on churches in Ethiopia.

The Adventist fellowship seems to be the least aggressive one in attempting to go out to the asylum camps. However, the leaders believe that the newcomers spot the fellowship quickly either through friends in the camps or other connections. A member of the congregation, who is a woman in her mid forties, says that the very presence of the fellowship is crucially important to the newly arriving immigrants. Here is what she says:

The fact that we have our own fellowship is a great privilege to the new comers. First of all, they would not be lonely. We are their own people, in religion or in blood relation or just somehow they are related to us, so they would not be lonely. When they first arrive, when their feet land on Norway, they have a place where they are acknowledged. The fact that we are gathered here makes it very easy to share information and so on.

In a similar manner, a member in the Selihom congregation says that their gathering is an intermediary spot for newcomers. He says, “Our congregation reproduces what is familiar to the immigrants, while embracing the reality of the Norwegian circumstances. Thus, we believe that we provide the new immigrants a smoother transition to the life in the Norwegian community.”

A leader in the Ethiopian Evangelical Church argues that information provided by their community is extremely important for newly arrived. First, since many of their members have gone through similar circumstances, they understand the need of the newly arrived and provide them with more relevant information. Second, the fact that they have the potential to reach out to the newly arrived in their language, it eases the problem that arises as a result of language and other communication barriers.

A leader in the Adventist fellowship agrees with this argument when he says that since ways of communicating information in different cultures vary, immigrants are in a better situation to reach out to the newly arrived in the cultural codes which are familiar to them. For example, most of the time, among Ethiopians information is passed on orally and in a way it can address the particular need of the individual. Where as in Norway various information is provided in a written form out of which individuals would have to select one that is relevant for them, and that in a language they do not understand. He goes on arguing that generally, in the Norwegian setting, one gets assistance if one brings forth their needs. However, Ethiopians suggest what a person may need and the individual chooses to accept the offer or not. This would increase the chances of getting the help needed if the person is in a situation where he/she has not identified the options.

It needs to be mentioned that the congregations’ passion to reach out to the asylum seekers is contested by certain groups, particularly by the Orthodox believers. Orthodox Christianity is often connected to Ethiopian nationality. So, many Orthodox believers look conversion into Protestantism as abandoning national belongingness. A follower of Ethiopian Orthodox church in Oslo commented, “He who does not preserve his faith does not care for his country”. However, to the disappointment of many orthodox believers, it commonly happens that both in Ethiopia and in Oslo many converts to Protestantism come from Orthodox faith. So, the Protestants’ visits to the asylum camps are not desired by immigrants from Orthodox background. An Orthodox man in his mid thirties expressed his frustration about this activity with the following words:

The Pentes (a derogatory term to address Protestants) kept on coming to the temporary camp I was staying in. They deceive people. They say that they would give them money, find them jobs and a place to stay. Yes, they do those things if one is willing to convert, but if someone does not want to convert to their religion they drop them off down the road. How can you do that? If you are an Ethiopian there should not be difference whether you are orthodox or Pente or even a Muslim. ... Besides, if you are speaking in the name of God, you cannot take advantage of someone's vulnerable state to force into conversion.

The individual's comment makes it clear that although those who benefit from the support provided are grateful, there are others who are suspicious of it to be an attempt to pressurize people to conversion.

#### **4.2 Assisting other newcomers**

Immigrants who enter the country with legal sanctions have an easier start out than asylum seekers. In this category we can put those who come through family reunification permit, students, and UN sanctioned refugees. These groups are received by family members or bodies in the Norwegian system. Due to the arrangements set for these groups, many of the needs that are mentioned above are not very pressing. However, the congregations provide help to new comers who do not need to go to the asylum camps too. A woman in her mid forties and came to Norway because of marriage describes the support she received in this way:

The congregation (The Ethiopian Adventist Fellowship) has supported me to learn the language. In this congregation (the Norwegian Adventist congregation) they used to train people in cookery. ...Through that program the church has helped me to learn the language.

The support the woman received is not directly from the immigrant congregation. But it came through the link the Ethiopian fellowship has to the Norwegian Adventist Church.

Currently, the youth group in the Norwegian speaking Bethel Adventist Church teaches Norwegian language to young new immigrants.

Students and refugees as well look for the Amharic speaking congregations and vice versa. The information network that combines a home of origin social codes and language is beneficial for these groups of immigrants too. A man in his late twenties who was attending a “job searching” course sponsored by the government says,

I go there because I ought to but I know that I will not get any job through applications. It is through other friends. I did it last time, I know that again that is my only chance.

His comments suggest that although the government provides some resources, the immigrants believe that their own informal network is more efficient in finding the appropriate niches for jobs. Here is how a leader in the EEC describes it:

They can use our networks to look for jobs. And looking for housing, looking for friends. Even to that extent if they are still young and are not settled, we help them with establishing marriages. We are very available to help them in any aspect of life. So, the existence of the church in this regard is extremely appreciated.... They get a lot of advice from different people who have better knowledge about things. There are different professionals among us. For example, there are some who work in UDI (Norwegian Directorate of Immigration), there are medical people, doctors, there are some who work in hospitals, there are translators. So this individuals among us support newcomers by giving them advice. For example, if someone needs help with their immigration cases, the pastor connects them to one who works in UDI. For example, there are places they can get free medical help but they do not know where that is. We assign individuals who give them guidance to such places. So, in different aspects of life we give them support: psychological, emotional, social and also practical information. Also in our spiritual ministry we specifically pray over their issues. ...In this regard (in terms of helping immigrant integrate) very important is the network we offer. Some have lived here for 20 years. Others have just arrived and can exploit an experience of 20 years because of the network. The information they get is very valuable. They get information about job, school, short term courses and employers who train and hire them. If they simply sit at home, they do not have access to such information.

So, it is apparent that newcomers can have access to the various resources owned by individuals of different profession because of the tight network. The diversity in the group enriches the social capital that exists in the community.

### **4.3 Existing participants**

The congregations provide support to their existing members more or less in the same manner as they do it to new immigrants although the needs somehow vary. Some of the patterns of mutual assistance will be discussed in the next chapter. In this segment, however, I will highlight the forms of support targeted on specific needs for individuals. Generally, the intensity of the needs immigrants have decline with time. However, for many, the congregations still remain to be the primary safety net on issues such as family and marriage problems, needs of counseling, emotional support and so on. One of the leaders of Yewongel Berhan says the following:

As far as giving physical support, information, offering a network through which they can connect with each other, even the Sunday coffee fellowship, we do a lot of work and have cut a large number of suicides.

A leader in the Ethiopian Evangelical Church contends that people who go to church are well taken care of. According to him the leaders of Ethiopian Community in Oslo, which is a religiously, politically and ethnically neutral secular association for all Ethiopians in Oslo, are not worried about those who go to church. They think that church goers are luckier in terms of getting individual attention and appropriate support.

The network within the groups is important for the survival of many. For example, there are some who speak neither Norwegian nor English. Nevertheless, due to the tight network, they get information that can help them to lead a normal life. Individuals are more than willing to check out information on behalf of others and take people to places. For example, a woman in her mid fifties and does not have Norwegian language command says that it is her friends in the church who translate all official letters and help her do her tax reports. It is also a common thing that better knowledgeable individuals support others who want to process a family reunification application for family members who are left at home or buy or rent a flat.

On one social occasion where people from the church were gathered, there were three young men present who just arrived in family reunification permit. All of a sudden in the middle of other talks, two other young men who apparently came few years earlier asked the newly arrived what kind of educational background they had and how they had planned to proceed with their further education. The newly arrived did not seem to have a clue what they were going to do next. However, the discussion continued and the group kept on exploring which way would be more efficient for the newly arrived to pursue school. It is apparent the connection would last and the newly arrived will get the support they need to have their school papers authorized and find ways to further their education.

This kind of assistance is both voluntary and also regarded as a duty. If an Ethiopian faces a challenge, he/she does not hesitate to inquire a fellow Ethiopian for help. For example, in one incident when I was standing at the Oslo Central station, an Ethiopian looking person simply came over to other two Ethiopians I knew and asked them to show him the location of the police station where one can turn an asylum application in. The person apparently just arrived in Oslo and has never known these people before, except for their Ethiopian look. The people instantly changed their plans without even talking between themselves turned around to assist this person. Their first concern then was not to show the guy the location he was looking for but to check if he knew the regulations that apply to asylum applications. Although I did not get a chance to follow on the end outcome of the discussion, it was apparent the individuals were willing to help the newcomer with further challenges awaiting him.

Visitation from leaders and members in times of need is one of the valued customs among Ethiopians. Both leaders and regular members of the congregations visit if one of them gets sick or lose a loved one and give them the needed support when they face troubles. If someone is in some kind of trouble such as sickness, it is often announced from the pulpit so that members could pray over the issue, call the individual or visit. When individuals have gone through some tough situations, they also stand in front of the congregations and give testimonies, i.e. to thank God for the help and also thank the congregation for the prayers and support they have received during difficult times. It is an offence among Ethiopians not to show some such consideration when someone is facing problems. I have not only been part of visits to individuals where a group of people go to the residence of members, bring food and drinks, spend time together, pray and help clean up, but also received such benefits myself.

According to the Adventist fellowship leaders, one of the associate pastors of the Norwegian Adventist congregation has responsibility to reach out to their non-Norwegian background members. So, he is involved with the Amharic speaking members in many situations. For example, he offers them practical support like driving them around, visiting hospitalized members, families who have lost loved ones and asylum seekers in the camps. I have attended a number of weddings of Amharic speaking participants in the Adventist fellowship where the pastor in the Norwegian Adventist church conducted the ceremony and also became part of organizing the reception. His wife is also active in such occasions, for example, in receiving guests and entertaining. The couple does not speak Amharic but they use English and most of the time it is translated into Amharic, particularly the sermons.

As it is mentioned earlier, the opportunity to work or go to school is determined by the type of legal status individuals acquire. So, for some of them, passage of time does not always entail total independence economically or otherwise. One good example of this sort is the incident in 2011 when many Ethiopian immigrants were denied the possibility to work (this issue is broadly discussed in chapter 7). At that time all of the congregations provided financial support to the individuals who were directly affected by the incident.

My informants define their obligation to provide all kinds of support to each other from a biblical task point of view. The leaders of Gospel United International define their mission as making sure that their members grow mentally, physically, spiritually and socially. This is defended by the Biblical scripture that says “Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men.” (Luke 2: 53) The interpretation of this scripture according to one of the leaders is that “wisdom” is mental development, “stature” is physical, “in favor with God” means spiritual, and “in favor with men” is social. Thus, the mandate of the leaders is to see to that their members grow in all these dimensions.

### *Summary*

Communities in this study provide various forms of practical assistance to the participants. The types of needs immigrants have vary by individual circumstances, legal status and length of stay. However, all participants receive some form of support from the leaders of the congregations as well as fellow participants. The congregations provide information,

emotional and material support, and social space where the participants can connect to each other.

The congregations reach out to asylum camps to assist Ethiopian immigrants without legal papers. The primary purpose of the mission is to communicate Christian message and comfort fellow Ethiopians. However, to those who respond positively, this seems to be the primary step to the subsequent practical support to follow. The congregations provide transportation and accommodation to the asylum seekers who visit them. They also help them search for jobs, housing, and also provide other necessary information when they are ready to leave the camps. Nevertheless, some Ethiopians who are not part of the Evangelical community do not appreciate the asylum outreach by the congregations. They criticize it as taking advantage the individuals' vulnerable state.

The asylum camp outreach is not aimed on assisting with legal cases. However, outside of the outreach context, it seems that individuals help fellow immigrants with asylum cases.

When it comes to other recent immigrants and existing members, the networking capacity of the congregations is vital. The congregations consist of individuals of various professions and connections. This has enriched the social capital of the communities due to the fact that individuals of various educational and professional backgrounds have access to information of various forms. The leaders of the congregations provide marriage counseling and advice for different emotional questions participants face. The existing members seem to value visitation from leaders and members in times of need, such as sickness, birth of a child, loss. The support is provided both in organized way and also through the informal networks.

Finally, all five congregations in this study are very intentional in the way they organize support to individuals who need specific help in their daily challenges. The types of support provided stretches from spiritual to material and psychological. The support can be provided collectively, in small groups or individually. The network and the information provided in the aspect they give access to the practical support is internal and benefits mainly the participants involved in the community. Thus, they can be categorized as strong bonding social capital. However, in the way they are instrumental in linking people to labor market, housing market, schools and governmental institutions they do not isolate the participants, so function as partially bridge building social capital.

## 5

### Community Life

Ethiopian Christian congregations in Oslo primarily focus on their role as religious centers. The leaders I talked to and the websites of the congregations emphasize the visions of the churches to spiritually nurture the participants and mission outreach. However, as it is reported by immigration studies, religious communities often have social and cultural functions beside the religious activities. As discussed in the previous chapter, both leaders and regular members of the congregations provide support of different sorts to individuals who are in various needs. This chapter explores which social and cultural needs of the participants the congregations serve. Do Ethiopian congregations in Oslo organize community activities beside their focus on religious education? If yes, which ones?" Do they organize cell groups or are they a single large community? What are the advantages or disadvantages of the way the congregations are organized?

#### 5.1 Socializing

Almost all informants involved in this study suggest that although their communities primarily serve their spiritual feeding, they are also their primary arenas for socializing. Most of them have their friendship circle in the congregations. They say that they come to church, in addition to attending the religious services, to meet others and spend time together. All of the congregations have coffee fellowship after the main service, which is appreciated by all informants. Leaders also say that it is one of the ways they create closeness between members. The coffee fellowship is considered to give opportunity to meet more people at the same time. One of the leaders in the Ethiopian Evangelical Church has this to say:

Especially, the coffee fellowship after the service is time to talk to such people (new and lonely). What are their names? Where do they come from? Loneliness is a series challenge. Just coming here and meeting people from the same background, talking in their own language is therapeutic for people who struggle with problems of anxiety.

A middle aged woman informant appreciates her congregation's ability to embrace visiting relatives:

When our families come to visit us, they will not face language problem. They spend time with us. They also get invited to the homes of other friends.

Beside the Sunday services (Saturday in the case of the Adventist fellowship), the congregations organize small groups like choir, women group, prayer groups and bible studies. The small groups provide opportunities of intimate friendship among the group members. Yewongel Berhan congregation has bible study groups that are organized by geographic proximity. The groups are suggested to have 5-8 members and according to the church's website one of the advantages of limiting the size of the groups is to create a possibility for the participants to know each other closely and give support. One of the women groups I have attended meets every month and it rotates home to home. In these meetings, the mothers bring their children along and the children play together while the mothers pray. In the prayers, they share personal concerns and encourage each other. At the end of the meeting the participants spend even longer time chatting and dining together.

Some of the congregations arrange social activities that do not necessarily involve religious elements and welcome others who are outside of the faith community. Occasional arrangements include picnics and outdoor barbeque where they do non-religious activities like games. The picnics are mentioned by a leader of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church and he says that such social gatherings are popular and attended by many. To such social occasions they invite others who tend to be lonely but are not interested in going to church.

The Adventist fellowship has a separate committee to organize social activities. One of the leaders says,

... What we consider a very important ministry is the social section. We have coffee following after the worship service. In that time people have the opportunity to sit and chat whomever they desire to do so with. Other issues also can be addressed. There can be national issue, there can be cultural issues ... The social committee coordinates the work of the section. The social committee is responsible for, for example ... celebration of annual holidays.... It is the members who do the practical job but the committee coordinates it.

According to the informant, the social ministry replaces what is called *idir* in Ethiopia. *Idir* in Ethiopia is a religiously neutral neighborhood support system which is responsible to cover costs and practical arrangements in connection to funerals and mourning period of a lost relative of the members.

Not all the congregations have a separate committee for these kinds of social concerns. However, one way or another, the needs are covered in a more or less similar way. Female members are instrumental in the social gatherings by preparing food, visiting families and hosting guests. The website of Yewongel Berhan Church describes that one of the tasks of the women ministry is visiting member and making food for certain occasions.

## **5.2 Cultural elements**

One of the important functions of the congregations is providing a setting where participants can continue to practice some of the customs of home country. A married man in his mid thirties, who says that he actually prefers to socialize with Norwegians, describes his need for an Amharic speaking congregation as follows:

Although you do not find everything you have had in your home country, at least you find some of it in the church. You talk in your own language. You make humor in your own language. Since we are used to collective life, those kinds of things you can find in the church. And again, to express your deep feelings in your own language and other languages is two different things.

A woman, who is in her mid 40s, supports this comment:

Although our primary reason of gathering is spiritual, in the same setting we include our social engagements and our cultural values. We have not abandoned our tradition. We have kept it.

As in many other cultures, there are some mandatory practices among Ethiopians, such as holiday celebration, celebration of a birth of a child, weddings and funerals. These

occasions are impossible to practice unless in groups. Ethiopian congregations in Oslo provide a suitable context for the continuity of the customs.

The congregations observe both Norwegian and Ethiopian national holidays in various ways. Ethiopia has a different calendar than the one followed in Norway. So, some of the congregations celebrate Christian holidays and New Year twice a year. Many times the congregations arrange a four days long conference, particularly, in connection to Christmas and Easter, eat Ethiopian food together and get dressed with Ethiopian traditional outfits.

In Ethiopian culture, when a new baby is born, almost all known are expected to visit the family and bring some presents to the newborn. Often there is a type of ceremony where women friends gather together and eat porridge at the families'. This home land practice is reproduced in some form among the Ethiopian communities in Oslo as well. Not only individuals visit the families with newborn baby, but also leaders of the congregations provide presents for the family with a new born baby. One of the leaders of Yewongel Berhan Church says that the leaders assign individuals who bring their greetings and the gifts of the congregation to the family with a newborn baby. In the Selihom congregation, the pastor, representatives of elders and the women group visit a family with a new born baby. I have been part of such visits in multiple occasions with groups from the two congregations mentioned above.

Ethiopians arrange large weddings, with about 500 or more people in attendance. Such big weddings mean large expenses and a lot of physical work. In Ethiopia some of the burden of weddings is shared by family members. However, in Norway, this responsibility is taken over by the church folks. The congregations cover most expenses through contribution and bringing food. They also do the entire practical job from cooking to decorating and cleaning. I have informants who have benefited from such arrangements and are very grateful about it. In one wedding where I was present, some people have said that they always want to be present in weddings whether they know the couple or not because they want to help create the atmosphere where family support is lacking. During weddings, the separation between the congregations is less visible. People from all the different congregations involve in various capacities.

Among Ethiopians, doing what the culture mandates is not an optional thing at all when it comes to loss of loved ones. In the majority of the cases, all known are expected to visit the individuals who have experienced the loss. If the death happens in Oslo they either

do the funeral in Oslo or in many of the cases they send the body home after they have done a memorial service. But, if the death occurs other place outside of Norway, individuals who are directly affected by the incident would stay home and receive visitors. In such incidents, the faith communities' involvement is vital in arranging all that is needed. Eating together is an important part of the whole comforting process and the congregations are in charge of organizing it. One of the responsibilities of women ministry in the Yewongel Berhan Church as the website states it, "When loss is experienced by one of the congregation's members, preparing food, receiving guests and comforting." Generally, the time of collective grieving can last from three days to a week.

Since during this period of grieving together many people visit the individuals affected, sometimes the homes of some individuals can be too small to accommodate all guests. The communities seem to have ways to resolve this challenge. A leader in the Adventist Fellowship responds as follows:

If the space cannot accommodate us ... we discuss with the individual and we solve the problem. For example, not long ago there was a friend who traveled to Ethiopia together with her sister and passed away there. The burial took place in Ethiopia and her sister returned alone. The sister's residence was not suitable to gather the whole community. So, we arranged the occasion here in the church. Or else if the individual is single, we do it in the residence of one of the members. Not long ago one of our members lost his father. That occasion, we arranged in the house of one of our members.

He goes on saying,

If, for example, someone loses a loved one, and he is informed about it, that weekend we spend the Saturday with that person.... the worship service and everything. All the expenses are covered by our contributions. When we hear about it, we spread the news and we go to that person's home. And everyone comes on the appointed time. We spend the time together, we comfort the individuals affected, we worship together, we eat together. Other people who are not members of our fellowship but know the individual also come, we host those guests too.

What is interesting in this story is that the network to spread the information is so tight that they have the level of certainty that they know everyone gets to hear about the incident and come to the individuals' home or selected location on that weekend instead of going to church.

In some of the larger social occasions, particularly death in Oslo, the sense of community stretches beyond religious lines. All Ethiopian immigrants engage in unity. Commonly, there is a tendency of sending a dead body of a grown up immigrant back to Ethiopia particularly if they do not have a large family in Norway. In this case, all including the Ethiopian Community (a secular organization), student bodies and all religious groups cooperate to collect the finances needed to send the body. An individual who in one incident had this kind of assignment said that the amount collected was much more than needed that it was sent to the family of the deceased back home.

### **5.3 Challenges**

Although a number of activities that bond the participants together take place in the congregations, there are also a number of challenges the congregations face in their ability to function as a community. Some of these challenges are outside pressures whereas others are internal.

A newly wedded informant brought up one of his frustrations concerning the status of Ethiopian congregations in terms of their capacity to fulfill religious duties needed. According to him, the recognition these congregations are granted by the Norwegian authorities is a limited one. Due to this fact, some of the religious duties the congregations perform are not legitimized by the Norwegian law. For example, if the congregations perform a wedding ceremony, the marriage is not a valid one in the eyes of the Norwegian legal system. The reason for this, according to the informant, is that the congregations do not fulfill the requirements to carry out some of such duties. One such criterion is pastors' academic qualification. The required qualification for pastors in Norway is different from in Ethiopia. Three of the congregations in this study have ordained pastors, however, none of them fulfill the requirements in accordance with Norwegian regulations. Thus, the informant says that couples who marry in the Ethiopian congregations have to do their vows again in the Norwegian system in order to be able to acquire legally acknowledge papers.

However, there are also some who get married in an Ethiopian congregation and leave the question of legality alone. For some couples who cannot submit all the papers required by the Norwegian authorities, the existence of Ethiopian congregations have become a blessing in disguise. A young man in his late twenties says,

Well, for many it is good that our churches exist. It would not have been all the people who get married who could do it in accordance to the Norwegian laws because they do not have all the papers required by the authorities.

Ethiopian Christians expect fellow Christians to marry in the church before they start to live together. In the Ethiopian congregations immigration papers are not hindrance to pronounce a couple married. The congregations have their own criteria to assess if a couple can be allowed to enter a holy matrimony or not. Thus, couples marry under the blessing of one of the Christian congregations gives a greater level of legitimacy within the community.

The biggest challenge at least for four congregations, apart from the Adventist fellowship, is a place of worship. Four congregations rent a worship hall. This raises multiple challenges to the participants. The first one is financial particularly for the smaller and newer congregations. Secondly, the leaders of some of the congregations say that they get treated unfairly by the landowners. For example, sometimes it is difficult to serve Ethiopian food because the landowners are displeased with the unfamiliar smell of the food. Thirdly, since the rooms are rented for a use of a limited time a week, the congregations do not have the flexibility to plan their activities as it suits them. A leader of Yewongel Berhan Church has stated that the congregation's biggest challenge is not having to own a worship hall of their own.

This appears to be a common problem among immigrant congregations in Oslo. A leader of the Eritrean Evangelical Lutheran Church in Oslo says that his congregation has wandered around several non-suitable locations until they finally found a rental room at a Norwegian church situated in Haugerud. According to him, Norwegians are skeptical towards immigrants and do not want to accommodate them. He says, "The biggest challenge immigrant Christian congregations have is lack of a place to gather. This everybody knows. The bishop knows this (referring to the then bishop, Ole Christian Kvarme)."

Ethiopian Christian congregations in Oslo have gone through periods of tensions and break ups. The bi-national and multi-denominational natures of the congregations are the two dynamics which are mentioned by some informants and can affect the congregations' capacity to function as communities. Although these subjects are hardly a matter of pulpit talk, they reoccur in some informal group discussions. And there are some informants, particularly those who have lived in Norway longer, who strongly voice their concern as these two matters to be the biggest issues in the Ethiopian congregations.

The question of bi-nationality primarily exists in the Yewongel Berhan Church which is officially announced church for both Ethiopian and Eritrean immigrants. The tension lies in the fact that the Ethiopian Fellowship was originally started before Eritrea and Ethiopia split. After the Eritrean independence, Eritrean immigrants started their own separate congregations and Yewongel Berhan has chosen to embrace both Ethiopian and Eritrean background immigrants who want to use Amharic, hence, taking a more neutral name which means "The light of the gospel." Nevertheless, some Ethiopians who want to highlight their country of origin in connection to their faith community expressed their dissatisfaction with Yewongel Berhan's neutral stand. It is apparent that this is one of the reasons why some leadership tensions arose and the Ethiopian Evangelical Church was established.

Another potential tension in the multi-denominational congregations, i.e. all apart from the Adventist fellowship, may very well lie in their inability to satisfy the doctrinal preferences of participants who come from various denominational segments. How strong the unity of the member churches of the Evangelical Fellowship in Ethiopia may be, Oslo lacks the benefit Christians in Ethiopia have, namely, a home congregation for each believer based on denominational preferences. The size of Ethiopian immigrants in Oslo is not large enough to duplicate the diverse denominational communities each participant represents. Thus, while the congregations in Oslo are denominationally inclusive, leadership at different times seems to be dominated by certain confessions, according to some of the informants. One informant who is dissatisfied with the situation and has known the congregations long comments,

The stand of the leadership sways depending on circumstances. When they possess wider ground, they say out loud which denomination the congregation belongs to and disregard the rest, but other times they keep their interests under cover and appear to be inclusive.

This study does not claim to have made an attempt to research the reasons for the conflicts within the communities. However, I have asked one of the leaders in one of the congregations concerning the cause of instability within and between the different Amharic speaking faith communities. His comment brings us to a third possible challenge, possibly most immigrant organizations face:

I see this as a problem related to immigration. Immigration involves a lot of loss in terms of social status. Many of the immigrants had had some kind of status before they left their home. The new land does not offer you an opportunity which compensates for all the status loss you experience. I think many want to make up for it by assuming leadership positions in the congregations. So, that causes conflicts and the result is splitting up.

He says the following about his own biggest challenge in diaspora:

My biggest challenge in Norway is loss of social status. When I was in Ethiopia, my power was my tongue. I would speak and persuade people. I would teach. I would rely on myself to go to any office and have my case taken care of. But now, even when kids talk to me, I am dependent on someone translating it for me. That is the hardest thing for me.

Financial shortcomings are the main challenge Ethiopian Evangelical congregations face. Some do not afford to pay wages to their pastors. Some of them struggle to raise the amount for rental. Moreover, from internal conflicts surface within the congregations time to time, it can be said that some of the roots of instability are the bi-national and multi-denominational nature of the congregations coupled with the contest between individuals who use leadership positions to compensate for possible status loss experienced as a result of immigration. These problems are mostly directly connected to diaspora setting.

#### **5.4 Variations**

The condition of Ethiopian Christian immigrants in the five congregations is rather similar and the communities function collectively in various aspects of life. However, there are some different variables that impact the congregations slightly differently.

It appears that the inclusion of the word “Ethiopian” in the name of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church brings along some privileges that the other congregations perhaps do not have the same access to. For example, according to informants from the EEC, they can involve in national matters which directly affect Ethiopia without having to worry offending non- Ethiopian members. This tone is also echoed from the pulpit when every now and then a speaker thanks God for now Ethiopians gather together after a long time of struggle and pray for issues that directly concern Ethiopia without reservation. They say that they can also direct their humanitarian engagement towards Ethiopia without having to worry accusations of bias.

The concern on Ethiopian matters is reflected on the website of the EEC. For example, Yewongel Berhan church on its website has posted a vision that is totally religiously focused, whereas the EEC mentions issues like creating cooperation with other churches in Norway and ending the suffering in Ethiopia. A leader in EEC says that although they are not against other nationalities, as Ethiopians they “primarily burn for Ethiopia.” He argues,

As Ethiopians, we love to engage in things that concern Ethiopia directly. The fact that we called our congregation Ethiopian Evangelical Church has helped us to have a direct access to Ethiopian Community (a non-religious, non-ethnic, and non-political organization) and things that directly have to do with Ethiopian people.... At the moment ... we have better recognition and respect by the Ethiopian community. For example, last time when the asylum seekers were denied any help, we were directly involved. We were given a license to enter the Oslo Cathedral (to visit the strikers). And also, to advice, to encourage, and we together with the Ethiopian community entered the parliament to present their requests concerning their rights.

In another occasion, in 2009, a forum was arranged by Ethiopian Community to address an issue, “the recourses Ethiopians in diaspora are losing”. This forum was arranged in connection to some unusual tragedies that occurred among the diaspora Ethiopians in different parts of the world. This was explained to me as incidents like murdering a spouse and suicide had occurred repeatedly among Ethiopian immigrants in the Netherlands, England, America and also Norway. To address this problem and discuss how Ethiopian immigrants can “sustain their social assets”, the Ethiopian community in Oslo invited the pastor of the EEC and a psychologist from the Netherlands to give lectures on the topic.

The Adventist fellowship has organizational and theological differences compared to the other congregations in this study. It is the only one with a distinguished denominational confession that links it to the international Seventh Day Adventist bodies. That seems to give the Adventist fellowship some privileges. My impression during the time spent with the congregations is that the Adventist fellowship is more stable and better established one. It can be assumed that in the same way as the term “Ethiopian” strengthens the internal unity in the Ethiopian Evangelical Church, the single denominational representation may have been a unifying glue in the Adventist fellowship. One of the Adventist fellowship members who was part of the Amharic speaking congregations before the Adventist fellowship was established separately says, “You may go along as far as the common issues are concerned, but matters that set you apart, you can never touch them. They can be important for you. In that case, you would have to find your own separate fellowship.”

Although it is difficult to establish this fact strongly, it seems that length of time has given the Yewongel Berhan congregation a privilege to grow larger and stronger. The regular Sunday attendance in Yewongel Berhan is much larger compared to the other four congregations. Financially also Yewongel Berhan seems to be doing much better. The leaders say that they are in a good position to cover all the expenses that concern the congregation. Another extra advantage Yewongel Berhan has is recognition by the Nordic Ethiopian Evangelical Christians Fellowship and the fellowship of Ethiopian Evangelical churches in Europe. Since Yewongel Berhan is the oldest of the existing Amharic speaking congregations in Oslo, it has already been represented by these transnational organizations. Leaders both from the Yewongel Berhan and the other newer congregations have mentioned that the newer ones are regarded as splinter groups and have not gotten the opportunity to cooperate with the transnational networks in the same scale as the Yewongel Berhan does.

### *Summary*

The findings of this research show that Ethiopian Evangelical congregations organize community activities of various forms. The activities have mainly social and cultural character. However, most of the time, they are mingled with religious components. Almost all the time where Ethiopian Evangelicals are gathered whether for cultural or social reasons, there are heavy religious elements like teaching, songs and prayer involved. Thus, neutral

leisure group activities or clubs are very scarce. Very seldom some of the congregations arrange picnics where the religious is less focused on.

All of the congregations are organized in small groups like choir, women group, prayer groups and bible study groups. The small groups seem to give participants a more intimate connection. The website of the Yewongel Berhan church states that the small Bible study groups are intended just to do that.

One of the highly valued social gatherings is the coffee fellowship after the main services. This is a practice adapted in diaspora and churches in Ethiopia do not meet for fellowship after the main service. Each congregation celebrates national and religious holidays together by arranging conferences and eating the national food together. The communities also duplicate the home land culture by the way they celebrate a birth of a child, arrange weddings and organize mourning ceremonies for lost loved ones.

The congregations also face some challenges. The main challenge of the congregations seems to be financial, particularly for the newer and smaller ones. The Adventist fellowship is not affected by financial shortages because of the advantage to be under a Norwegian Adventist church. The organizational nature of the congregations seems to impact their daily activity differently. Informants from the Ethiopian Evangelical Church say that they have the freedom and the recognition to involve in Ethiopian issue. It is likely that single national and single denomination congregations have easier time in addressing some sensitive common interests and sharpen the focuses of the participants. However, Yewongel Berhan, which is the oldest of the congregations, enjoys larger participation and wider resources in spite that it is both bi-national and multid denominational perhaps because of length of time. The congregations have also experienced conflicts in various occasions. Some informants have mentioned that the attempt among the leaders to compensate for the status loss experienced in the land of immigration is one of the factors that create strife between leaders.

It probably is not wrong to assume that the social and cultural activities generate the strongest bonding social capital that exists among the communities. The activities include a number of socio-cultural interests of the participants in codes that touch home land practices. My impression is that since the activities are so heavily loaded with Evangelical understanding, they can exclude outsiders including non-Evangelical Ethiopians.

## Civil Engagement

The two previous chapters have shown that the bonding social capital embedded among the Ethiopian evangelical community in Oslo helps immigrants cope with the life in the new land. This chapter will explore if the social capital includes linkages that can further social and civic incorporation into the larger Norwegian society. Does participating in the Ethiopian evangelical congregations in Oslo lead to further civic engagement? Do the congregations organize activities that build bridges to other civil society bodies beyond their own religious groups? Are the Congregations parts of other larger networks? If they are, how do the participants profit from such connections? Which opportunities participation in the congregations offers for developing civic skills? Do congregations involve in social services? If yes, does their engagement build linkages to outside groups? If the communities do charitable contributions, do they prioritize the need among themselves, outside community in Oslo

The findings are presented in the following sequence. 1) The kind of individual interaction informants say that the community members make to non-immigrant population. 2) The links the community has to other Ethiopian organizations. 3) Connections to organizations of the host community. 4) Opportunities to develop civic skills 5) Involvement in social services.

### 6.1 Individual contacts

Informants understood easily most of my questions that apply to engagement in the Amharic speaking congregations and answered them with interest. Nevertheless, questions concerning social contacts with non-immigrants are answered with a longer thinking and less assertiveness. Most informants have said that they do not engage in Norwegian voluntary organizations or leisure activities. Neither do many have non-immigrant close friends. Some parents with small children have visited each other on occasions, but even that trend seems to be primarily for the sake of children and it is seldom extended beyond that.

I have asked informants if they have had a chance to make non-Ethiopian background friends at the work places. Almost all replied in such a manner as they have had good work

environment and fine contact with co-workers but the relationship created at the work place does not seem to go beyond that. A woman informant who is involved in a manual labor describes the job atmosphere as follows:

I have met people in my work place. Many came from other parts of the world. Our friendship is just at work and does not go beyond. We have good relationship but we are not so close. We keep a good social life at work that does not follow us after the work time. I have good time at work.... Many of them are foreign and few Norwegians in my first work. It feels good because they are from various backgrounds. But in my second job most of them are Norwegians.... I have good contact with them.

However, this individual has made close friendship with a Chinese woman at her work place mainly because they both come from a charismatic Christianity background.

But one thing I cannot forget, there was a Chinese lady in my first work place. And she was a believer in the Lord. Since I have language shortcomings, she helped me with many details at work.... out of all those many, she is the one who helped me a lot. She is a Protestant Christian. She corrected me if I made mistakes, showed me how I should do the job ... She is much more compassionate as well. She even visited me at home and brought me a present when I gave birth to my child. Also in the breaks, we sat together and did some Bible verse sharing.

This is a suggestion of one informant and if this pattern of closer contact between people of the same religion is common cannot be said for sure.

A middle aged woman informant, who has a high position job in the health and social services, is not particularly persuaded if immigrants need to pursue making friends at work places. She says that as long as the work atmosphere goes all right, the rest is up to individuals. It seems that this informant is not particularly interested in making non-immigrant friends at her work. She comments,

There are some who sit together with the Norwegians at tea breaks; listening to the kind of talks Norwegians enjoy: cabins and so on. You know Norwegians adore their cabins.

Nevertheless, her experience at the work place is positive:

In my case, I have been working for over a decade.... I have never experienced any skepticism about my competency. There is no one at all who rejected my service on the account that I am black. Nobody has ever given me any negative comment. Even in the work setting my bosses and everyone respects me. I am not so fluent in the language. There are obvious weaknesses. Nevertheless, they do not disrespect you just based on that. ... You know, the bottom line is we do not speak the language or write as well as the Norwegians. Yet, the shortcomings are not so bad that they hinder us from carrying out our jobs well enough. We are improving by day. ... I have been given the same kind of responsibility and place as my Norwegian equals. I have not experienced any discrimination. It may be because that I am a well grown up person and had had a long work experience from Ethiopia as well. Basically, we have not discussed this question among ourselves in our congregation. So, it is not easy to say if everybody has similar experience. However, I have not heard any complaint from other Ethiopians either.

According to her, the harmony in the social setting at the work places between Ethiopians and non-immigrants depends on individual interest:

This is very individual. Some do not have any trouble at all. They do their job; join the talks about weather and stuff, topics Norwegians enjoy. So, they are not left out in social gatherings. But not all connect in this manner. However, I have never heard anybody complaining about being neglected or segregated in their work places.

She says the following about the social contact between Ethiopians and Norwegians outside of work connections,

There are some who have contact with Norwegian families like who celebrate holidays together with them, take trips to cabins and so on within the frame of Norwegian culture. ... Only a few have this kind of network. The majority of us do not connect with Norwegians in this manner.

Only one informant, who is a married man in his mid thirties, says that he is appreciative of Norwegian life style and friendship. He says that he has made good Norwegian friends and enjoys hanging out with them:

Most of the time, I have friends from other nations. With the whites, the Norwegians, they are my friends.... I prefer to spend my time with them. I like to go out for coffee together with them. I have some friends who are from other backgrounds. So, you get a lot of information. When I ask them concerning ... what I need to do or where I need to go, they tell me automatically, especially, the whites, the Norwegians, or they check it and call me afterwards..., when I am outside the church and work, I socialize more with the whites. We go for a walk, a weekend outing or skiing. I have a lot of activities, with the whites. ... I have taken several trips to cabins. ... done a lot of fishing. They bought me a fishing rod. ...Some say, 'What is there in Norway to see? It is just snow.' But there are many sites in Norway. I also know it because I hang out with them (non-immigrant friends). Even indoor recreation possibilities, there are a lot of things.

However he acknowledges that this kind of contact with non-immigrants is not a common practice among Ethiopians,

You can say that it does not exist. ... When I see people of my own group, they choose to hang around their own. They have their coffee together. They spend their time together. I do not think they are so integrated. In my age group, in my circle, I do not think there are many who have been invited over to the whites.

According to him, Ethiopian immigrants miss out a lot because they are locked up in their own views and they are not passionate to explore new things. In his view, it is the immigrants who need to strive to adapt to the new setting and not the other way around:

You need to know something. It is us who came to this people and not the other way around. It is you who must learn their language, their culture, their food, everything that belongs to them. It is not the other way around. They have sufficient culture. They have adequate language. They have enough of everything they need. Your extra stuff, they do not want. ...So, your initial intention has to be integrating with the nation here. You need to know them, how do they communicate to each other? How is their culture? As I get closer to them now, I see that they are really interesting people. They have a lot of interesting things and sense of humor (with a smile and expression that looked like he was remembering incidents that impressed him). ....The thing is, once you have come to this place, you need to integrate. 'It is a closed society, it is like this, it is like that,' do not build walls. You have to be able to penetrate.

A middle aged man, who is married and have two children, gives a different reason for why Ethiopians remain in their own social circles. He says that Ethiopians are guests and it is the Norwegians who are the host.

The one who comes from the outside is a guest. He is an outsider to everything. An outsider to the society, outsider to the country, generally he is a stranger to the system. Even if the guest attempts to integrate, there are things that are closed. It is the host who can open those. Unless the host smiles at you, unless he talks to you, as a guest you would have hard time to even know where to start. Creating such relations is imperative. But, if they are in place is a difficult question to answer affirmatively.

So, according this informant, it is the host community that is not open towards the immigrants and not the other way around. Whichever or both may be the case; the fact is that most informants have not made much individual social connections with people of non-immigrant background.

## **6.2 Ethiopian networks**

One of the ways immigrant religious communities provide linkages to outside communities is by themselves being part of larger networks. So, in what follows I will show if Ethiopian Evangelical communities provide bridging social capital through collaborating with other Ethiopian voluntary organizations.

### *Ethiopian congregations in Oslo*

Although regular participants in the different Ethiopian congregations interact freely in various occasions, there exists obvious tension on the leadership level. Attempts have been done to do away with the tensions in multiple occasions throughout the existence of the congregations. Creating a formal network between the Ethiopian Christian congregations in Oslo or even merging some of them is a visible interest among many. Discussions and efforts of creating some kind of unity take place often within informal small groups. Thus,

organizational cooperation between the five congregations does not exist at the time of this study.

The Adventist fellowship has a committee whose mandate is to keep it connected to other bodies of Ethiopian communities in Oslo. So, the committee follows upon issues that engage Ethiopians whether the Christian congregations or others and suggests what the contribution of the Fellowship should be.

Cooperation between Yewongel Berhan and the Eritrean Pentecostal congregation in Oslo is an old one. The reason is not very clear but it may be that Yewongel Berhan is willing to embrace Eritrean members. These two congregations have been able to arrange various activities together, for example, exchange of preachers and singers, arranging worship sessions and revival conferences together.

#### *Transnational networks*

The congregations in this study have transnational contact with other Ethiopian Christian communities in different parts of the world. Yewongel Berhan Church is a member of the Nordic Ethiopian Evangelical Christians Fellowship. This network holds a week long annual revival conferences during summer in which all member congregations in the Nordic countries participate. The occasion of the annual conference, which I have also attended in one occasion, is taken by participants as a good way to take summer vacation. Since, youth activities and child care is also provided, families who have not planned extended vacations elsewhere combine their vacation to attending the conference.

Yewongel Berhan is also a member of the Ethiopian Evangelical churches fellowship in Europe. The aim of this fellowship is to strengthen partnership among Ethiopian churches in Europe so they can have a possibility to share resources and experiences. It also oversees that the member churches are protected from false teaching. Furthermore, the Fellowship has collaboration to some Christian organizations in Ethiopia. The member churches of the Ethiopian Evangelical churches fellowship in Europe contribute donations to send to national organizations like university Christian students fellowship in Ethiopia. So, a leader of Yewongel Berhan informs me that 20 percent of the annual income of the congregation goes to these two fellowships, 10 percent each.

The other Amharic speaking congregations are also interested in becoming members of the two umbrella networks mentioned above. But currently, since the Yewongel Berhan has been the oldest and has already become a member of the transnational networks mentioned above, the smaller congregations that came afterwards are not recognized by the leaders of the fellowships. However, the Adventist fellowship, which has its own denominational network, is not included in this group.

Another transnational network is the Assembly of pastors in Europe. A leader of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church says the following concerning the Assembly:

...our church is a member of what is called the Assembly of pastors in Europe. We arrange meetings in different parts of Europe. So, such ideas are now growing past national levels. The aim of the assembly of pastors is to share our visions and experience, to create closeness, to exchange ministers, to have fellowships together.... And we are already functioning.

It is a common thing among Ethiopian Christian communities all over the world to exchange singers and preachers on frequent basis. So, the link between Ethiopian Christian communities stretches to all continents and not least to Ethiopia through itinerant ministers. Additionally, many congregations both in diaspora and at home use an American based website, wongel.com, to post some of their events. This website is filled with events of many famous Ethiopian ministers. It also contains a chat room that connects Ethiopian Christians all over the globe.

There, mainly, is a tendency of more dependency on the churches in Ethiopia when it comes to receiving teachings and teachers. Often, speakers and singers are invited. Teachings, books, CDs and videos are imported from Ethiopia. The general understanding is that Ethiopian spirituality is much stronger and real compared to that in diaspora. Nevertheless, the diaspora is stronger financially and the flow of the economic remittance takes the reverse direction, from Norway to Ethiopia. The congregations send their financial donations to organizations, churches or individuals in Ethiopia.

In summary, it can be said that participation in the Amharic speaking congregations in Oslo brings linkages to larger networks of Ethiopian background through personal and media contact.

### **6.3 Networking with organizations of the host community**

Cooperation with Ethiopian organizations can widen the opportunities to link with larger networks. However, much more important in facilitating social and civic incorporation is the contact Ethiopian congregations make with organizations of the larger Norwegian society. In what follows I show if the congregations provide bridging social capital through contact to host communities' organizations.

#### *Efforts of immigrants*

Basically, all the leaders I talked to acknowledge the mutual benefit of cooperation between immigrant organizations and other civil and governmental organizations for better integration. Most leaders answer questions concerning their congregations' contact to other civil organizations affirmatively, but with some delay, a puzzled look and vague descriptions. In practice, only few sporadic contacts have been made with organizations like the Christian Counsel of Norway, some Bible schools, Oslo immigrant pastors gathering and Kristent Interkulturelt Arbeid (Christian intercultural work) at the leadership level. A leader of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church (EEC) says that they support the idea of cooperation with other organizations. Here are his words:

These (cooperation) are engagements we desire and encourage.

How is that taking place now?

At the moment, these are still small connections, which are at starting level and we are positive to.

We encourage them.

The website of the EEC mentions that one of the visions of the church is "to have strong fellowship and cooperation with churches in Norway. In practice, such cooperation has not taken place yet.

The need for Norwegian connection kicks in during the Sunday school teaching of the EEC. The EEC uses Norwegian language in the Sunday school and has adopted the teaching materials from Søndagskolen Norge (The Norwegian Sunday School Association). The pastor says,

We are a member of the Norwegian Sunday School Association. So, through the master curriculum they lay out, we educate our children every Sunday. ... Because the children are born here, we do it a Norwegian way and in the Norwegian standard.

The Selihom congregation has limited contact with the Norwegian Baptist Union whom they rent a worship hall from. According to the leaders, this cooperation is more focused on capacity building for church leadership and children ministry. The Baptist seminary sends students to the Selihom congregation for internship and the interns assist with children ministry. One of the leaders of the congregation says that they help members integrate in the economic sphere, meaning support them to get jobs and housing. Social and cultural integration remains beyond their capacity. He says that they do not have the human and financial resource to facilitate integration beyond what they are doing now.

A leader of Yewongel Berhan Church summarizes their limitations as follows:

What do you do to help participants integrate?

To help or hinder? I should have actually first asked you to explain what integration means. Anyway, as far as giving physical support, information, offering a network through which they can connect with each other, even the coffee fellowship after the service, we do a lot of work and have cut a lot of suicides. But to go beyond that into making our members to be part of the Norwegian society, I cannot see that we do any contribution....Unfortunately, we are not able to think that far.... Our daily problems, our daily trails have not allowed us to think about where we are headed from where we find ourselves today. As a congregation, we have not taken time to ponder over the question of engaging with other bodies of Norwegian society.

The response of a leader from the Ethiopian Evangelical Church to how much belonging the participants feel to the larger Norwegian society is very much the same:

Whether we like it or not there are privileges connected to just holding the Norwegian passport. Thinking that we have integrated with the people with mind and soul is another question.

Here is the suggestion he give regarding how participants' need to adapt to the Norwegian life:

You know what the problem is: some want to be transformed into a Norwegian just on arrival. Some want to be Ethiopian, like an island, injera (an Ethiopian main dish) for breakfast, injera for lunch, injera for dinner, just like it is in Ethiopia. Some integrate while keeping their own culture: the good from the Norwegian, the good from the Ethiopian, that is what we now encourage. We do not desire the one that lives in the Ethiopian island neither do we want people to assume that they are white.

There seems to be a growing awareness of the presence of immigrant members among the Adventist Churches in Oslo. According to one of the leaders of the Adventist fellowship, the Bethel Adventist Church is discussing on how to make use of the resources their immigrant members bring with them. Thus, he says that the immigrants' involvement in the faith community is growing. For example, on the annual Bible day, which is an event arranged by the Norwegian Bible Society in 2011, the Bethel Adventist church facilitated for the choir of the Amharic speaking Adventist fellowship to sing at the occasion. The connection between the two congregations seems to give a better opportunity for children and youth of immigrant background to participate in the activities of the Norwegian congregation. For example, children of immigrants go out in streets along with all the other children in the main congregation to do collections for planned charity works and so forth. Some of them are also part of children and youth networks arranged by the Adventist community in Oslo. These arrangements include long weekend or week long trips for the younger participants.

Informants from the Adventist fellowship emphasize their contribution to help participants integrate by keeping their link to the Bethel Adventist Church. They say that integration is easily attainable if they mingle with Norwegian community. An informant, who is one of the founders of the fellowship, says,

No matter what, we never stopped going to the Bethel congregation. ...Then, we said, 'if we limit ourselves just to the Norwegian service we will be weak, it is better to have a service in our own way and language in addition, the door... will have to be open for those who want to join us both for social and spiritual purposes,' so ...we discussed together.... and started (the Amharic fellowship). ... This (the continuity of the Amharic speaking fellowship) is more important for newcomers. The fellowship is a good transition point for them. Our main vision is to help newcomers practice in the smaller pool before they dive into the gigantic sea. Because of that we

have a wish to keep the small fellowship going as a space of transition.... If it stays in transitioning phase it will feed the main church and gives the newcomers a chance to grow...., the Norwegian church will always be there. Because our participation in the Norwegian church increases, we will gradually be transformed into being Norwegians, and we get better and better integrated, then the opportunities of our involvement in the main church will increase.

A middle aged woman from the Adventist fellowship supports this comment:

...most of us also participate in the Norwegian service in the mornings. That brings us into integration..... And they help us with our challenges.... We are under the administration of the church. That brings us into further integration.... Our way of integrating is being part of the Norwegian worship.

It is apparent that the members of the Adventist fellowship are benefited from the link they have to the Bethel Adventist church. It seems that there is larger proportion of individuals in the Adventist Fellowship who have gotten higher education and also professional employments. The support of the Bethel Congregation in this respect is obvious. There are programs where Norwegian language courses are offered to immigrant members. A woman who is employed in high position job in health and social services says that she received help from a Norwegian friend to get her first job:

...they help us when we are looking for jobs. For example, when I finished my preparation to work (in her particular field) here, there was another Norwegian (who was engaged in the same field)...., he arranged for me to work as his substitute when he traveled to Ethiopia. That is how I started working (within her profession).

Although the link between the two congregations can be a positive factor when it comes to education and labor market engagement, it does not seem to necessarily have gained much impact for the immigrants' social and civic incorporation. The same woman informant who received assistance from the non-immigrant participants of the Bethel congregation to get professional employment says,

..., just a few have this kind of (social) network. The majority of us do not connect with Norwegians in this way. They sometimes invite us to come along to skiing trips and so on, but we do not join on those activities. Some of the activities are beyond us. We are afraid to break our legs and so on.

Some informants recognize that one of the weaknesses of Ethiopian communities in the process of integration is lack of enthusiasm to create social networks with the host community members. A man who is married and is in his mid thirties says,

Ethiopians are timid. They do not dare to create contact with the Norwegians. Often, Ethiopians find it easier and more comfortable to congregate around their own people. When I look at our community, we have built our own circle, we have formed a boundary. We meet only with the Abeshas (a term used to refer to Ethiopians). We do not get to experience what the real life in Norway is like. Most of us get information through fellow immigrants who came before us. What people know, they know it by hearsay. Then, they frame their lives in the background of the information they gathered from fellow immigrants. Since they do not dare to go beyond that and explore it for themselves, the type of life they are exposed to is tainted by the information they receive from their immigrant friends.

The comment of the informant shows two aspects about information provided by fellow immigrants. Though the new person can benefit from the possible tight bonding social capital, the information the individual receives regarding schools, labor market, social life and politics is limited to the level the group he/she has merged to have attained. There are a number of informants who have suggested that the fate of a newly arrived immigrant is determined by the individuals the person encounters first regardless of the individual's potential.

### *Context of immigration*

In the opinion of some informants, it is not only the immigrants who lack the passion to create contact with Norwegian organizations. It is also the non-immigrants who do not show much interest to intermingle with immigrant associations. I have asked an informant from the Adventist fellowship, who have lived in Norway for close to two decades, what he would say

to those who think a lot of resources have been laid out by the Norwegian authorities to facilitate integration. His answer was,

If there are some who think this has gone a positive direction, then the ones who moved into the setting (immigrants) have not understood it yet. Or else, things have not been facilitated for the ones who came in (immigrants) to see the possibilities well enough. In this aspect there is a long way to go from the side of the majority, I mean the Norwegians. Usually, in theory it was argued that things are facilitated and so on. Often the blame is thrown on the smaller, the immigrants, in medias, in church surroundings, that is what is being portrayed. That is what we observe from the side of the government as well. 'Structures are laid out, the pamphlets are there', nevertheless, in a language we do not understand. Unless we grasp what is there and make use of it, it does not help us. And also, 'There are schools, there is language school, we have organized efforts to facilitate transition,' they can say that. In spite, I know that it is not adequate. There is more to be done. This is my view.... I think in the Bethel church, possibly, because it has a larger international influx, chances are open for foreign origin people. They encourage us very much to participate in any of the activities. But when you see other churches, immigrants simply sit in the back pews and leave without anybody recognizing that they ever were there. If they do not open opportunities, all the resources you have carried with you from your home would simply rot.

A woman informant, who is employed in high position job in health and social service, suggests that Norwegian authorities should recognize the potential of immigrant congregations in the process of integration:

Our church provides a lot of psychological and emotional support. You know problems are better handled if we deal with them before they occur. So, we can prevent many problems. ...Church has a potential to facilitate for better integration. But the problem is the finances. It would have been much beneficial for integration if the Norwegian society sees the potential in the immigrant congregations. But I do not think Norwegians are very interested in the culture and background of other people. They cannot be interested either. We are minorities. ... However, we could have been considered to be resources. Immigrant congregations should have been considered to be a segment in the integration process, because many helpless immigrants visit the church early on their arrival and the immigrant congregations do their best to facilitate for these people. If a person is regarded a human being, whether that person has legal papers or not, we need to provide him with the basic needs, especially, here in Norway.

A middle aged man, who lived close to two decades in Norway, gives the following advice to fellow immigrants:

Although we may have dreams, it is the reality that determines things in our lives. No matter what, we are immigrants. As immigrants, we have to strive at least double. We have to acknowledge that. That is what I learned from my own experience. For very long, I did not get what I expected. So, I learned that I needed to work even harder. After I did that, I moved into a better situation. Because of this we have to base our expectation on reality. There is no way we can impact the majority hard enough to make them change their minds. That is the advice I have for immigrants, work at least twice harder.

Finally, the congregations in this study do not seem to have much formal cooperation with other civil society bodies of the host community. Some informants believe it is their communities' choice to remain in their own social circles, whereas others imply perhaps this is coupled with lack of interest from the side of the host community. My findings in this regard is not much different from that of Ødegård who found the Veitvet immigrant voluntary organizations to be mono-ethnic and isolated.

#### **6.4 Civic skills**

It is argued that religious communities provide a platform for developing civic skills that can be transferred to public squares (Foley and Hoge 2007: 20, 35-36, 153-160; Smidt 2003: 6, 51, 87). They do so by training members in social interactions, leading meetings, writing letters and involving in discussions and negotiations. Evangelical congregations, where lay involvement is widely practiced, give more such opportunities than vertically organized congregations or congregations which are commonly focused on prayers and meditations (Foley and Hoge 2007: 51).

As it has been mentioned earlier, the congregations in this study can be categorized as evangelicals and they provide a broad opportunity for members to participate in different activities. Often, members are part of activities like choir, prayer group, worship team, bible study group, social committee, deacon and so forth. A common service in Ethiopian congregations begins with a prayer time for about thirty minutes followed by singing and

worship for about thirty minutes and then a sermon which is at least another thirty minutes. Then, follows a session with singing and prayer for individuals by laying on of hands. A regular worship service is finalized with coffee/tea fellowship. Every segment of these activities requires the involvement of more people and many of both male and female participants perform in various capacities.

Furthermore, each congregation has a leadership of various levels who discuss and organize the different activities. The main leadership of the congregations, in most cases, is elected for a term of two years. The committee of leadership shares responsibilities which include making the annual plan, dealing with landlords and managing finances. Needless to say these experiences enrich civic skills among the participants.

However, the bigger question which still remains is that if the skills gained in the congregations may be transferred to public squares. Certainly, the skills gained remain with the individuals and they can be used in various settings that this research may not have covered. It is not possible to make generalizations to how individuals employ the skills in their daily life in other contexts. Nevertheless, the majority of the informants involved in this study seem neither to be passionate in involving in the civic activities of the larger society nor do their congregations have an organized collaboration with non-immigrant communities. Thus, the likelihood is that they have less exposure to contexts where the skills can be transferred into the life of the larger Norwegian community.

## **6.5 Social service**

One of the ways the communities in Foley and Hoge's study participate in the civil society is by doing charitable activities and the ties such engagement entail with governmental agencies and other community organizations (Foley and Hoge 2007: 116, 117). Foley and Hoge argue that worship communities that enjoy ties to the larger society are likely to provide their members bridging social capital extended beyond the ethnic and religious community through social services and advocacy activities (Foley and Hoge 2007: 32).

In a similar way to many of the communities in Foley and Hoge's study, the mandate of charity work is taken seriously among the Ethiopian Evangelical congregations as well. Nevertheless, unlike many of the groups in Foley and Hoge's study, Ethiopians prioritize home land needs when it comes to welfare support. The majority of leader informants affirm

that the reason is that they come from a poor country, so, their economic remittance in most cases is sent to Ethiopia.

All the five congregations in this study do some form of charity work in collaboration with other good will organizations that are on ground in Ethiopia. A leader of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church says that they send donations annually for emergency needs in Ethiopia which they assess and determine every year. In addition, they give their financial support to some organizations in Ethiopia, who every now and then send their delegates to EEC, to ask for donations for their undertakings. In the Yewogel Berhan Church members contribute 200kr each month to support an orphanage in Ethiopia in collaboration with an NGO. The Adventist fellowship is involved in the charity work of the main congregation. In addition, they send donations for pastoral training in the Adventist church in Ethiopia.

In this manner, the Ethiopian Evangelical community in Oslo sends financial support for activities in Ethiopia. Thus, their involvement in welfare activities does not bring them into much contact with the surrounding society. One distinct occasion was the donation given for the drought cause in the horn of Africa, in the fall of 2011. In this occasion, two of the Amharic speaking congregations: the Ethiopian Evangelical Congregation and Gospel United International have delivered their donation to the Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) along with the American Lutheran Congregation and some other African congregations in Oslo. In the occasion, this was described as the first time Ethiopian congregations cooperated with NCA in this manner and it is not possible to determine if this connection will continue or not. Although the incident can mark the expansion of immigrant communities' involvement in the initiatives of larger host communities' networks, at this point it cannot be concluded as an opportunity to further civic engagement.

### *Summary*

Ethiopian Christian congregations in Oslo address many of the concerns of Ethiopian immigrants. There is close interaction between participants of the different Ethiopian/Eritrean congregations in Oslo and interest to form cooperation in a formal level is large. They also network with other transnational Ethiopian communities overseas and at home. However, the social environment of the congregations does not seem to have intended to embrace civic

activities which are primarily considered to belong to the larger host community. Most informants say that they do not socialize much with the non-immigrant population.

The congregations do not have collaboration efforts with organizations of the non-immigrant community. Only a few meetings that have been arranged by the host communities' organizations have been attended by some leaders at occasions. There is a wide opportunity in the congregations for lay participation and developing civic skills. However, since there are no links between the Ethiopia congregations and other public activities it is uncertain how much of the skill gained may be transferred into the larger communities affairs. Similarly, the charitable contributions from the congregations are sent to Ethiopia, thus do not provide opportunities to be in touch with the surrounding community. Therefore, at this point it is not possible to say that social capital embodied in the Ethiopian congregations leads to further civic engagement. In some aspects it perhaps does the opposite.

During my stay with the congregations, I have not noticed any antagonism towards adaptation to the Norwegian life although some parents have voiced their concern to protect their children from some non-Biblical values embedded in the Norwegian culture. The possible way the congregations might hinder wider social interaction with the non-immigrant population could be their ability to satisfy many of the social needs the participants have and thereby holding the participants back from wanting to explore what the host community has to offer in this respect. The result, then, particularly in social dimensions is an isolated group of people within their own language and cultural frame.

## Political Participation

This chapter presents my findings about how Ethiopian Evangelical congregations in Oslo involve questions of political participation in their religious life. Does participation in the congregations have an impact on the way members approach the question of political engagement? Do the leaders encourage or discourage political engagement? Do immigration issues pressurize Ethiopian immigrants to learn the policies and want to know about their rights, thereby, making them part of Norwegian politics? Do participants have access to some political information through participating in the religious communities? If they involve in politics, which issues matter the most?

### 7.1 Views on political involvement

Informants in this study generally believe that the understanding of politics among Ethiopian Evangelicals is somehow twisted. Here is how a leader in Yewongel Berhan Church describes it,

Politics among Ethiopian Christians is a difficult topic.

Why do you think it is so?

I think it is connected to our Pietistic background from home. Most Evangelicals do not have a practice of involving in political life. But that is now changing in Ethiopia. However, the immigrants who are not exposed to this new development still live in the old practice they know before they left. ...our background in Communism has contributed to this attitude too. But not only that, many take their stand based on their reaction towards the practice in the Orthodox Church. The Orthodox Church had been recognized as a state church for a long time. Our flag was directly identified with the Orthodox Church and the followers of the church are extremely patriotic. So, when Protestantism came (to Ethiopia), it took the other extreme by completely avoiding anything that has to do with politics.

A leader in the Ethiopian Evangelical Church agrees with this opinion:

Understanding about politics among Ethiopians is a little twisted. The reason for this is the communist regime in Ethiopia. The communist regime in Ethiopia was anti-faith and denied the existence of God. So, it was not possible to cooperate with this point of view because it directly touches your faith. Then, it was right to avoid politics. But the situation now, there is freedom of faith, freedom of religion in the country. We believe we can point out both the positive and negative things. So, we do not claim to be neutral in political matters. Even we try to influence the politics to go a right direction. If possible and if there are qualified people among us, we wish that they contest for prime minister's position.

The understanding seems to be similar among the leaders of the Adventist Fellowship. Here are the words of one of the leaders:

In principle, the international church or those who are structured under it look at politics as a method of administration or governance. Governance is extremely important for a society. Furthermore, if Christians had occupied such positions, that would have helped to produce even a better society. This is the understanding. However, each individual practices this according to his own understanding. As a church, we do not organize any political activity. If individuals choose to participate in politics, there is no opposition. So, the understanding is that a Christian can also be an active politician. Now, what is the main problem is, especially, for those of us who come from developing countries, our experience is different. It deviates from the concept of governance and takes politics as to be full of violence, full of killing, full of oppression. Since that is what people observe practically, that the ones sitting on authority try to destroy the rest, participation in politics is considered to be committing crime. So, leaders of Christian congregations and believers from developing countries look at politics as untouchable. That is because what they see in practice has missed the principle.

The opinions articulated above are shared by most informants. They either say that Ethiopian Christians are skeptical towards politics or that they do not understand politics altogether. The women informants I talked to seem to be politically less informed than the men counterparts. This fact is true both among immigrants and Norwegian born informants. A married woman immigrant who is employed in a manual labor sector says,

I think this (politics and religion) is individual. You choose your own path. However, so far I have not experienced church pushing people to be part of political life. But if individuals choose to involve, I do not think there is anything that can crash with their faith. As long as you live here, you need to be part of the society and vote and participate. I guess one should not be simply limited to church. And I want to know more. I do not think there is anything that crashes. My husband says that church does not work politics. I do not know. Sometimes I am confused.

Another married woman, who is employed in a high position job in the health and social services, gives a similar response:

What is your understanding about Norwegian politics?

About this topic: I do not particularly pay attention to, not now, not in Ethiopia, not at all. Only when there is something specially, like election and so on, I follow it on the TV. So our access is through the TV. We get information through TV. What you call understanding, however, I just hear the discussion of those who have a grasp of it. There are some who understood it, like (she mentions three men including her own husband) they sit together and talk, and I listen to what they say. I believe they understand it.

A Norwegian born young woman also says that her political knowledge is not deep,

How informed are you about Norwegian politics?

I have not followed on politics all that much, so I do not understand it so much. If I start to follow some now, I will be able to understand more for the next election.

Although the pattern seems that male informants are more politically informed than women, this cannot be generalized for all participants. There are some women who are interested in politics and there also are some young women among the participants who have done the Norwegian military service.

In general, informants in this study have commented that siding with political segments is inappropriate for churches but educating members about current situations is a step in a positive direction. For example, one of my interviews with a leader of the Adventist Fellowship was done two days before the 2011 local election in Oslo took place. So, I asked

him if it would be acceptable for the individual preaching that day to encourage people from the pulpit to go out and vote. His answer was,

It does not cause any tension as long as his stand is neutral. He cannot encourage them to vote to a specific group, but he can encourage them to participate in election. ... There can be individuals who take initiatives between themselves and discuss detail political matters, but the fellowship as a whole does not mingle with political agendas. No encouragement is given to suggest which political party one needs to involve in, neither is there any discrimination based on political stands. The church encourages members to participate in voting. Here, in the western world there is a calm atmosphere. There is a possibility of electing good people. You vote for ones you believe can do what you think is right. The election is also not based on violence. It is voluntary. Because of that our members vote.

The churches calling for contributing in building a good society, governance and protecting justice is acknowledged by many of the informants. For example, all the congregations are directly involved in the case of the rejection of Ethiopian asylum seeker in 2011 in Norway, what many consider to be an unjust treatment by the Norwegian authorities. Moreover, the website of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church mentions that one of the visions of the church is, “to work to alleviate the suffering of our people in Ethiopia.” A leader of the congregation also describes their political duty as follows:

Well, politics differs depending on individual outlook. We believe that we have our own part in Ethiopian politics. We want Ethiopia to grow, Ethiopia to develop. First of all, as spiritual people, we pray for Ethiopia. On proper issues we engage practically. During hunger we directly contribute money and give. For example, this year when the asylum seekers had nothing to eat, we contributed a large amount of money and gave them. This is what we call is our political participation.

However, this type of direct engagement by the community is acceptable only on selected matters. There seems to be intentional restriction when it comes to direct involvement of mobilizing political topics basically for two reasons. The first one is that informants believe the church’s primary call is spiritual and if church involves heavily in politics, it detracts the focus away from its spiritual mission. This conception is shared by

most evangelicals as other studies have indicated (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000: 56, 73, 156, 159, 180; Foley and Hoge 2007: 51). Secondly, the church has a call to embrace people of all ethnic and political backgrounds. This is particularly important for Ethiopian churches where people come from diverse ethnic and political fronts. If church starts to indulge in political agendas, it can easily fall into favoring some segments over the others. So, the best thing for the churches is not to take political sides.

Political involvement per se is not condemned by any of the informants but the way they want to address political questions and the agendas they select, in most cases, go with biblical mandate or it is given religious explanations. A married man in his mid thirties reacts on the opinions of Christians, who are skeptical towards politics:

You know sometimes when we call Christianity, some consider it as a closed square. Christianity is open, you need to see wide. You cannot look away from politics. First of all, you need to pray.

The informant gives a theological line of argument on why Christians should be active in politics. He gives his argument basing it on the Lord's Prayer and the word kingdom in the Bible:

... 'Our father ... thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven'. ... That means God's plan is the principle of heaven, ... things that take place in heaven to come to the earth. ... God's plan in the first step is to dominate the earth in his own rule, in his own presence. The presence of God came to the earth means, everybody is free from death. People do not kill fellow human beings. People do not rape fellow human beings. People do not steal from a fellow human being.

He goes on arguing that a Christian as an ambassador of heaven must make sure that the plans of God are executed on earth. The only way to do so is to involve in politics. He also underscores the need for a system of administration and a structure of justice. He says, "I would have to have a structure where I can submit my complaints, for example, if I get mistreated by superiors. Fundamentally, there is no superior. We are all equals but we may have differences in positions that he can misuse to mistreat me and I need to have a structure that can oversee the justice system." This, then, according to him, is better actualized by Christians.

God's rule is called a kingdom. Kingdom means simply, a nation ruled by a king. First of all, my understanding of religion itself is as if it is politics. Why, if there is a king, there are citizens who are led by that king. What are the responsibilities of a king? It is not religion, it is politics. So, even religion itself is politics in my opinion. That is why it is called a kingdom, because it indicates the existence of people led by a king. If there is a king, there is a law, there is an army. So, I do not exclude our world politics because of my faith. My calling itself is to participate in politics and contribute positively to the society. God desires a good leadership, which functions according to his thoughts. We have to involve.

One of such involvements, for this informant, is voting to those who stand for Biblical principles.

A leader of the Gospel United International Church has a similar view:

How is the community around you benefited by your congregation's presence in Oslo?

This will take us to a question of why the church exists here on earth. The way we see the hierarchy of authority, we see that the authority of God is on top, then comes the authority of governments, then the authority of conscious, then under that comes the authority of the dark forces and so on. So we believe that church is a delegate of divine authority on earth and should enter the government and be a factor in influencing the earthly authority to a correct way of governing. So, we believe that church has a very important role in politics. We have no intention of holding a neutral stance. You know the Bible says that we are sited at the heavenly place. This does not mean that we have been taken up to heaven. No, it is the realm that we function under which has changed. Earlier, we were held under the authority of the power of darkness. But when we surrender to Jesus, the realm that rules over us has changed. Now we are under the heavenly authority. Although we have been called out of the world, we are still commissioned to bring our domain to the world.

He continues arguing that the conviction of Ethiopian Evangelicals concerning politics needs to transform. According to him, life has more dimensions than just the spiritual and all are connected. He argues that if we have spiritual revival, that births economic growth, which in turn produces political reform and finally the restoration of social relations.

These types of theoretical theological arguments are presented by individual informants. Furthermore, the website of Gospel United International Church depicts its mission as, "Preaching the gospel of the kingdom throughout the world and training believers on how to

live independently of this world's system and have dominion over it." Nevertheless, first of all, much of this intention of having dominion over, particularly in the political world, is not observed in practical sense. Secondly, this does not seem to be a burning question among all participants. Political talks among the participants mainly rotate around smaller practical issues, such as, immigration and job opportunities that directly touch the community.

Although informants say that the leaders of the congregations do not directly engage in political mobilization, the social space and the friendship networks the congregations provide can function as forums for discussing current issues. It also seems that there are individuals who are assumed to be better informed politically than others. Thus, it can be suggested that the social capital available in the communities plays an important role in providing settings to exchanging political ideas and actions both formally and informally. This fact is, however, true for immigrant participants and seems to have no capacity to impact the political understanding of the Norwegian born. One of them says that her congregation is neutral for her in terms of politics; it does not further or hinder. She gets information concerning Norwegian politics through media and her social science classes.

## **7.2. Top issues**

The people I talked to consider both countries Ethiopia and Norway as their home. They engage in issues that concern both nations simultaneously. This study mainly focuses on their engagements in Norway and I will below give a broader discussion of what informants say are their top political issues in Norway. To just briefly highlight the topics mentioned concerning their engagement in Ethiopia: fighting poverty, the damage caused by ethno-centric politics, corruption and care for animals. In addition, some members of the congregations have raised money for an alleged persecution of protesters during national election 2005.

At the start of my interview work, I very quickly found out that some informants showed skepticism and uneasiness towards the term "politics" and the conversations were cut short. When I used the term "politics" which probably is loaded with negative connotations, I got answers like, "I never pay attention to politics, neither here nor at home." However, I also noticed that some political topics could automatically engage people. So, I realized that I had to change my approach and ask about specific topics which I thought may have directly affected their engagement in Norway. For this purpose, I chose three actual incidents that took

place around the time I was performing my field work, namely, the rejection of the cases of Ethiopian asylum seekers, local election in Oslo in 2011 and the terrorist attack on 22. July 2011.

### *Immigrant issues*

Immigration seems to be a core political concern among Ethiopian immigrants. A leader of the Selihom church says,

We seldom discuss political questions. But, when we do, it concerns immigration. Otherwise, we concentrate our effort on providing spiritual nourishment.

The Norwegian immigration authorities treat asylum cases differently. There are some asylum seekers who are granted their permits quicker than others. A lot of times, asylum seekers are granted work permits while their cases are being processed or even are rejected. So, there are asylum seekers who have no legal permits, are members of the Ethiopian congregations and have lived in Oslo from the newly arrived to 18 years of stay (as much as I have information). Many of these have been working, buying flats and establishing families even though they did not have residence permits.

However, in 2011, the authorities denied them the possibility to work and they were in great financial trouble. This action of the government had caused a lot of reaction among most Ethiopians in Oslo. During this incident, the congregations have supported the asylum seekers and also directly involved in pleading their cases with different bodies of the government. Many among Ethiopian Christian community in Oslo have participated in demonstrations and helped feed and provide material support to the asylum seekers.

A married woman with two children says that the action of kicking the immigrants out of their jobs is contrary to what Norwegians say they stand for.

They claim to be humanitarian. But they want to send out people who have no chance of going back. ... We wondered why they (the asylum seekers) would not be allowed to continue working as they had always been doing while their cases are being seen....If the situation in Ethiopia gets better and they go back, that is of course fine.

One of the leaders of Yewongel Berhan church says:

Yes, then we were directly involved but in a much politically neutral way. We prayed for them, we visited them in the shelters, we supported them financially and we even sent letters of petition to all the political parties. But, when we present our concerns, we dealt with it in a more humanitarian base than political. Our argument was that the people have to work, earn and survive. We also gave advice to the asylum seekers. We told them that if they demand to stay in Norway, they would have to present legitimate cases.

Yewongel Berhan Church has provided financial support for about three families for a limited period of time. A leader in the Ethiopian Evangelical Church also argues that the immigrants' case concerns them,

The Bible says, 'The Lord watches over the alien (*sidetegnawun*). Do not oppress an alien (*metsategnawun*).... Therefore, first of all this people are Ethiopians, and as Ethiopians it concerns us. Secondly, even if they were not Ethiopians but Chileans or Afghans, their case concerns us. As a church we cannot be passive.

The Amharic translation for the word "alien" used in the English Bible is *sidetegna* or *metsategna* depending on the context. In a daily talk in Amharic *sidetegna* is used to refer to immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers or even exiles. So, the argument recorded above allows the individual a stronger Biblical base to combine his faith and his political concerns in his discussion. In his argument he indicates that Christian faith can be a positive element in political deliberations. So, he emphasizes his point of view that they support appropriate political steps and oppose the inappropriate ones. He says,

For example, if they (the asylum seekers) say that they want to block roads or subways, we rebuke them. If they say that they want to present their claims about their rights to the prime minister, we do it ourselves on their behalf. Our church has sent letters to the parliament and the justice minister.

The Bethel Adventist church on behalf of the Ethiopian Adventist Fellowship has also written a plea to the Norwegian immigration authorities asking them to reconsider the cases of the asylum seekers. Besides that they gave consumer goods to the asylum seekers who stayed in shelters by the Oslo Cathedral.

### *Election*

The informants in this study have amazingly strong conviction on their voting power. Both immigrants and Norwegian born emphasize the importance of voting. Almost all informants, who have the right, have voted in the local election in Oslo in 2011. I have asked a leader in the Ethiopian Evangelical Church if they mobilize people during election. He says,

Yes, there is. ...Of course, everyone chooses their own political opinions. ... We encourage people to use their rights. We encourage them to vote. Because... those who use their voting rights take an upper hand and control the media. To passively sit at home and be shy benefits nothing. So, this gift that God gave us, the Norwegian citizenship, those of us who have it, we encourage them to use it. ... Those with no legal status can go out and scream all day, not much happens. If we join together, the Norwegian Ethiopians and our number becomes significant and we vote, it can impact the Workers party or the Christian party or the Progressive party. We are thinking about the possibility of mobilizing people at that level.

A married man in his mid thirties explains why it is important to use his voting right:

When you vote, you vote on the law. So, the law would be established. Law has a tendency of becoming a culture. You understand? When you do a certain selected practice over a long period of time, it forms a culture. ...You must show that you do not support certain directions even if it means you are the only one doing it....You do not have to think just for yourself. You think for generations to come.

Here is a comment of a Norwegian born woman informant:

I have my convictions of what is good for the nation. I vote for those who see things the way I see and I need to vote in order to be able to influence through them.

She says that it is very important for people like herself to vote because Norwegians often get the impression that foreign origin people do not vote. So, for her, it is important to change the image Norwegians have towards immigrant background people.

It is probably correct to conclude that the informants in this study have two primary concerns in mind when they vote. The first one is immigration/integration policies, “treating foreigners with fairness” as some of them call it. The ability to work and advance their lives seems to be a crucial goal for Ethiopian immigrants. A middle aged married woman says the following concerning her top issues during election:

Of course, I have a reason (why she votes). I consider those who give better opportunities for foreigners. I prefer groups who prioritize the integration of foreigners. For me, not only for me but the discussion of many in our group during election emphasizes on this issue. Everybody has a chance to vote for a party that is interested in integrating us.

One informant has mentioned that integration is beneficial for both immigrants and non-immigrants. He says, “It is good for them (non-immigrants) it is good for us (immigrants). As long as we live here, it is imperative that we integrate to their society. We need to have a society with good harmony”.

Biblical values and moral reference, particularly with their children in mind seems to be another political consideration during election. For a male informant in his mid thirties, good moral values are considered to be a path to a stable and prosperous society and he links a good society to Christian scriptural teaching:

To say a nation is civilized, it has to be where the ten commandments of God are observed. If it lacks that, you cannot call it civilized. Do not steal, do not kill, these things. If I just come and kill someone, it means there is no law in that nation. Because of that I respect those who emphasize Christian values.

One individual has mentioned that more opportunities come with competition and privatization. So, he supports political wings who are more towards the right. A Norwegian born informant has said that quality education is her top political concern. Here is what she says why education policy is important:

It is because children and young people are the future of this country. If they use recourses on the younger generation, the nation will be good. It is us who will lead the nation in the future.

Although individuals highlight variety of priorities as their top issues, at this stage, when the flow of immigration seems to still be continuing and the length of stay of most participants is short, much of the political concern seems to attach itself to the question of immigration and integration policies. But, this does not seem to be shared by the Norwegian born participants in the same intensity. The Norwegian born informants emphasize subjects like quality education and welfare.

## *22. July*

Informants express a mixed feeling concerning the terrorist attack on 22. July 2011. They say that, on one hand, as part of the society, they were shocked and affected by it. On the other hand, once it is known that the perpetrator is a non-immigrant background person, they were relieved. They say that the fact that it was done by a non-immigrant resolves many more troubles that would have followed in the aftermath. First and foremost, it tones down the consistent antagonism immigrants face from the non-immigrant population. For a married middle aged man, the incident can be turned into a learning experience:

Some of the Norwegians have a generalized impression of all immigrants. They look at them all as dangerous people. People from Africa are considered to be criminals, distant people. Most Norwegians, when they first heard about the bomb blast, they automatically generalized that it was conducted by an outsider and it never crossed anyone's mind this may have been done by one of their own. Now that they have learned it is their own fellow who did this evil, that will create a realization of not all non-Norwegians are dangerous just in the same way as not all Norwegians either are kind. This will help them to get rid of their naive hatred towards foreigners and helps them detect evil where it is.

A married middle aged woman with two children said the following:

How did you react about 22 July?

We were all shocked over that. It was a very shocking incident. The main thing is that we are glad that it was not done by a foreigner. That is actually what the whites themselves are saying. Even one of my neighbors said, 'for God's sake, I am glad that this person is not one of the foreigners.' We have all cried for what happened. Nevertheless, we are glad that it was not done by a foreigner. Why? That would have caused stronger hostility between each other.

For the Norwegian born informants, the experience is shocking and simply an attack on their own nation. One of the Norwegian born informants has said that the incident has triggered interest in her to know more about politics. She has this to say concerning the views of the perpetrator:

In one way, I understand what he says. He thinks that if more immigrants come in, they will take over our country. Ok, he can protest, but this is not the way to go about it. I do not think either that foreigners and Muslims will take over the country because there will always be Norwegians and if it goes in that direction, they will bring another solution. Of course, it is their country, it belongs to the Norwegians. I do not think it is a good thing that foreigners come and take over the country. And the important thing is to live together in peace. I also support the fact that people who are in difficult circumstances can come and find refuge here.

In summary, informants say that what happened 22. July 2011 is sad. But the fact that it was done by a non-immigrant background person has saved a lot of further damage.

### **7.3 Role among the larger society**

The question of their role within the larger Norwegian society does not seem to be an urgent one among Ethiopian evangelical community. At the moment, the congregations are occupied with establishing their lives here in Norway and facilitating for the newly arriving fellow Ethiopians. Thus, informants do not give a socio-political definition concerning their role in the larger society. Their explanation basically is more loaded with religious definitions. For example, all the informants replied that they pray for the wellbeing of Norway in the same heaviness as they do for their country of origin. A leader in the Adventist congregation described their contribution to the Norwegian society as follows:

As a Christian organization, our goal is to produce a healthy society. ... Jesus' objective was also to produce healthy people, self sufficient people. Healthy people are an important resource of a society. If a segment of a society is well and healthy, that adds strength to the larger society. ... We reach out to people in trouble and help them overcome the challenges. The way we help them may vary but the outcome is wellbeing; not only physical well being, but also mental and spiritual.

What this informant implies is that by overseeing the wellbeing of the immigrant participants, they indirectly contribute to the larger Norwegian society because if immigrants are in trouble, it in turn affects the whole nation.

Some informants mention their contribution to a better standard of living through their taxes. By the same token, they are grateful for the benefits they receive because of that. A female informant is grateful for a long maternity leave with pay. Whereas a male informant is happy to pay annual fees for car use since the roads are built nice. As he says:

When I look at the asphalts, I would not mind paying double what they charge me for road taxes. Look at it, they have made it to look like a plate. When I drive an old car, the sound is like shoooooo, as if you are driving a new car. You know what, I save on car repair.

It is obvious that Ethiopian Evangelical community is on a stage where it is stabilizing its existence in a diaspora setting. Thus, bridging social capital in such a way that it defines

the community's role in the larger society is less apparent. A few suggestions given by the informants are the support they give to fellow immigrants and the taxes they pay.

### *Summary*

Political involvement among most Ethiopian Evangelicals was anathema during the communist regime. However, my findings suggest that this tendency is gradually changing among the people I interviewed. Unlike informants in Bredhal's study who say that church should stay out of politics (Bredhal 2008: 68), informants in this study believe that both Christians and the church need to involve and be a positive influence in politics. However, in practical terms the skepticism that comes from historic and religious causes still creeps in.

Leaders of Ethiopian churches in Oslo do not collectively mobilize political engagement. Nevertheless, the social capital that ordinary members share as a result of socializing together is vital in orienting their political opinions. Informants say that they hear the discussions of knowledgeable individuals. The leaders also say that they encourage participants to vote.

Analyzing the connection between the social capital present in the communities and the level of individuals' participation in politics is a complex task. On one hand the religious ideologies and historic background slow down the people's passion for politics. On the other hand, pressures of the actual context push them to be part of political matters around them. Immigration and integration policies seem to be the prime concerns of Ethiopian immigrants and force them to contact government officials and use their voting power. Other concerns include protecting the possibilities of bringing their children up in Christian moral values.

In spite cautious proximity to politics, Ethiopian Christian community in Oslo is sources of bridge building social capital through providing the ties and space for interaction where participants engage in critical reflection on selected political subjects. The congregations provide opportunities for exchanging ideas, encourage people to vote and in some issues they actively involve in taking disputes directly to governmental officials.

## **Future Direction**

One major question that occurred to me during my stay with the Ethiopian Evangelical congregations is what the long term prospects of the congregations may be. The leaders of the congregations also admit that they have been confronted by this thought. Of course, the answer to this question at this point is only speculative and doing exactly that is the aim of this chapter.

### **8.1 Factors that can determine the future**

There primarily are two main factors that can determine the future of the Ethiopian Evangelical congregations in Oslo. The first one is the flow of Amharic speaking immigrants, and the second one is the preference and the ability of Norwegian born participants to take over the responsibilities of the congregations.

If immigration from Ethiopia continues long term is hard to predict. In the same way as the longevity of Ethiopian immigrant congregations can be determined by the flow of immigration, the flow of immigration in turn is determined by a couple of factors that cannot be assessed in this research. These are the immigration politics in Norway and the socio-political context in Ethiopia. It seems that when immigration policies in Norway are somehow flexible, there is a wider chance of receiving more immigrants. But, as the policies get stricter as at this point, some of the immigrants I have talked to say that they do not even advice other people to come.

This study has not attempted to investigate the socio-political situation in Ethiopia, where the people emigrate from. However, it can generally be said that if the economic and political conditions in Ethiopia become better, there probably will be less Ethiopian immigrants coming to Norway. Nevertheless, neither of the two conditions specified above can be determined in this research and are hard to predict. So, the conclusion we can draw at this point is that if there will be more Amharic speaking immigrants coming to Norway, chances are that the congregations will continue. But if there will be less and less Ethiopian immigration, the possibility of leaning on the new immigrants for the future of the congregations fades away as time goes by.

As it has been stated earlier, Ethiopian immigration to Norway is a recent one. So, there are too few adult Norwegian born participants connected to the congregations to allow a systematic suggestion of the pattern of their preference when it comes to religious affiliation. However, in what follows I will present the opinions of the informants who participated in this research.

The question of accommodating Norwegian born members is a tough one to all the congregations. The leaders wish their decedents take over the responsibility in the future. However, undeniable uncertainty is observed when they try to reflect on how this may take place. The social capital that is generated in the congregations is enriched, first and foremost, to benefit immigrant participants and activities to involve Norwegian born are not well developed.

The Yewongel Berhan Church has not developed any specific strategy to organize the young adults as one of the leaders admits:

We have failed in this regard. Our children come to church only when they are under our control. When they are around 16 years of age, they start to say that the services are boring and they do not understand the language. Then, they drop out. You know, we have language shortcomings and we have difficulties to combine our faith to the context of our children.

Another informant, who is in his mid thirties, married and has two children, says,

We have not thought so much about our Norwegian born members. The wish and the desire to organize suitable programs for them are there but we have not been able to go beyond our daily fights and struggles to put our desire into practice....As they grow up, many simply leave. Most young adults quit their involvement in the life of the congregation.... Some simply walk away from faith. Some join Norwegian speaking churches. But the majority stays in Christian faith without necessarily having to go to any church.

For this informant, the problem lies in the lack of the leaders' ability to minister to the young people within the frame work of the culture they grow up in. This handicap can be Norwegian language command but also ways of communication play a significant role. For

example, I was told that in one occasion one of the leaders volunteered to arrange Bible study aimed on the Norwegian born. However, the Norwegian born participants found the teaching very strong and quit coming to the meetings. So, it seems that leaders lack tools to integrate their Ethiopian/Eritrean cultural background to the Norwegian form of communication in the way it is palatable to the generation that grows up in Norway.

Nevertheless, how to overcome these obstacles seems to be an ongoing discussion among individuals. Some of the members of Yewongel Berhan have a far stretching vision of organizing the younger generation for the purpose of reaching out to the non-immigrant Norwegians. One of the leaders shares this vision:

I cannot claim this as the congregation's stand. But now on individual level we have started discussions on how our young people can be instrumental in our vision to reach out to the Norwegian society. We Africans, we have the gospel, we can share our faith with the Norwegian community through our young people who know the language and the culture well. .... Our children are the bridge we can access this community through. That is the reason we want to strengthen our youth ministry. For right now, this is only on a thought level.

This informant believes that children of immigrants are a resource through which the community can link to the larger society because they have a combination of both backgrounds. In other words, even though they are not functioning in that capacity at the moment, children of immigrants are recognized to have owned a potential bridge building social capital by which the communities can transfer their messages to the larger society.

The Norwegian born in the Ethiopian Evangelical Church are still underage. However, a leader of the congregation says that one of their focus areas is to secure ways they can continue to shape the congregation's undetermined future. Here is his response:

Where do you see your church in the longer future?

Our aim is to produce a generation that can take over the tomorrow church. ... There was a large influx of immigrants from Chile somewhere around Stockholm. They were Christians who were very much on fire. But they do not exist any longer. Their children have sunk into the Swedish life. We will not let such a thing happen to us. Our children will take over the tomorrow church.

Generally, it seems that immigrant participants hope their children will stay in the congregations. In all the congregations, children and youth are called forward and prayed over during the main services. The content of the prayers often reflect on the fact that the congregations are shelters for the children from the evil influence outside. Moreover, parent informants say that Christian instruction for their children is one of the important benefits they get from their faith communities. Nevertheless, the place of children as they grow into adulthood does not seem to have been defined well. This becomes clearer as one sees the discrepancies between the wishes of immigrants and the level of optimism among the Norwegian born to follow that. I will highlight some of these differences in what follows.

## **8.2 Opinions of immigrants**

Generally, the wish of the immigrant informants is that the Norwegian born stay in the congregations to take over the responsibilities of running the congregations in the future. As it has been mentioned above, the Yewongel Berhan Church is still working on how to accommodate their Norwegian born young adults. At least two reasons can be given to why Yewongel Berhan appears to be less successful in its effort to offer a sustainable ministry to their Norwegian born members. Firstly, Yewongel Berhan is the oldest of the congregations in this study. Thus, it consists of older members of Norwegian born compared to the other congregations. Some of the Norwegian born in the Yewongel Berhan have now reached adulthood and can freely choose their paths and their obligation to rely on parents' choice may have been diminishing. If that is the case, the other congregations are yet to face a similar challenge in the near future.

Secondly, Yewongel Berhan is a combination of immigrants from both Ethiopia and Eritrea. This unity may work fine for the group that shares a common language and has the memory of when Eritrea was part of Ethiopia. The newer immigrants from Eritrea arrive from a separate nation that does not use Amharic as its lingua franca any longer. If some of newly arriving Eritreans consider Amharic speaking congregations as their destiny is another empirical question. However, all common sense would assume that they probably choose to join one of the several Eritrean congregations situated in Oslo. So, it can be correct to speculate that the Yewongel Berhan congregation perhaps lacks the binding national factor which members of the other congregations say that they have a wish to pass on to their children. If that is the case, we cannot easily predict in what form the Yewongel Berhan

church, which is the oldest, largest and a more stable looking congregation at the time of this study will continue in the future. The likelihood is that its Ethiopian fiber will grow stronger while the Eritrean declines. That perhaps makes the Yewongel Berhan the future church for Evangelical Ethiopians in Oslo.

The Ethiopian Evangelical Church seems to have a good Sunday school. But, since the Norwegian born in the congregation are still young, it is not possible to compare these two congregations. However, according to a leader informant in the congregation, they are aware of the challenges and they are trying to tackle the problem at its early stage. According to the informant, it is the future that determines in what form the EEC will continue. He says that they know that the language for the Norwegian born is going to be Norwegian, hence, they have adopted a Sunday school material from the Norwegian Sunday school association. Some of the options mentioned are running two separate groups, one Norwegian and one Amharic or use of simultaneous translation equipment.

The Adventist Fellowship seems to have found a way to involve the Norwegian born participants. As one of the leaders responded, they, on a hope and thought level aim on cultivating the skills of children and youth for future leadership:

...we have organized children and youth ministry. We think about the continuity of the fellowship and the possibility of our children continuing within the fellowship. Should the fellowship weaken, they have at least been rooted. The fellowship desires for the children to maintain their Ethiopian background.... we hope, as the older people grow older and leave the space, the children will take over. Those who are born here have Norwegian as their first language, but because they have been involved in the fellowship right from the beginning, they are now involved in different branches of different ministry. They sing in a choir, they teach children, they contribute a lot. As they assume more responsibilities, we hope that they continue to strengthen this place. Our wish and hope is that if conditions are facilitated, there will be chances for the fellowship to continue. The grownups have a job to do. We have to facilitate. We do not know if they will fulfill our anticipation, but we will have to try and see. The trend so far shows that it is likely.

The young people in the Adventist Fellowship participate in various activities and the ones I talked to have a good level of the Amharic language command. A Norwegian born young woman says that she likes to hang around the church. She says, "... it is a church in

one way and in another way I look at it as a family.... a second home.” Moreover, she agrees in the comments given above concerning more involvement leads to more sense of ownership.

Earlier, I did not have responsibility in the congregation. So, in the past, that created distance between me and the congregation. Now, I sing in a choir and I also take care of the smaller children. That helps me to stay around the congregation.

She, however, wants to be given responsibilities in positions which she feels comfortable and is capable of handling.

If they ask me to lead the worship service, that does not help me. But it is when responsibilities are given to me in the direction I desire to give my contribution that I feel it helps me.

This comment might imply that in spite the hard work the Fellowship puts in, the young people may be willing to participate only in selected activities. Thus, although some like to hang around the Fellowship, there is no guarantee if they will take over the major responsibilities. However, since the Adventist participants keep their membership in the Norwegian speaking congregation, they say that they will always have a church home even if participation in the Amharic Fellowship declines.

### **8.3 Norwegian born**

Since the number of Norwegian born informants who participated in this study is low, the views presented here cannot in any way be claimed to be representative. However, the impression I got from the few who participated, was that they are pessimistic towards their ability to take over Ethiopian congregations.

The Norwegian born informants acknowledge that they value the role of the communities in their growing up. They admit that their childhood religious involvement and the ethical references taught by their parents have set them apart from their non-immigrant background peers. One of them says, “The congregation has a big part in my life. I have been taught a lot in the church.” She describes how she basically is different from her non-immigrant background peers:

But when it comes to upbringing I do not quite relate to Norwegians. When Abeshas (Ethiopians) scold their kids they really correct them. But if the Norwegian parents are upset with their kids they kind of scold them but then it is not a big deal. ... I was raised up under a different take on life. So, my view on life is slightly different from those whose parents are Norwegians.

Another Norwegian born young woman indicates that the way non-immigrant background Norwegian peers spend their time in their social setting is not always favorable with her, thus, her level of friendship with them is restricted.

I like hanging around the Abeshas (Ethiopians). With the Norwegians, I am not all that close, earlier yes... now I find it easier being around foreigners. Especially, with Muslims we can easily connect. Although their religion is different, in many things, the way they think is the same. But the Norwegians do many things I cannot cooperate with. It is more complicated to hang around them.

The tight bond within the community that stretches from family ties to social circles is another aspect the Norwegian born say they treasure. Here are the words of one of them:

They (Ethiopian parents) may scold you sternly yet they love you deeply. For example, the Norwegians, what belongs to them is their own and what the children own is only theirs. They cannot see it as shared. But in the Abesha family, you know that what your mother owns is yours also. Many Norwegian parents want their children move out. But Abeshas want their children to live with them as long as they want.... So far, I do not have any plans to move out. I have lived alone .... Then, I felt responsible for everything, reading, going to bed and so on. I controlled my own life. So, in some ways it is nice to move out. However, looking back, it is kind of boring to live alone. It is much more fun to live together with family. In my plan now, I do not hurry to move out, it is economic too.

Another Norwegian born shares this opinion but she actually wants to move out when she is in a position to do so. Another one again, who is in her early 20s, lived with her family, saved enough money to buy her own flat and moved out.

. In spite their appreciation for the positive connection to the congregations, the Norwegian born do not believe it is possible for them to take over the congregations. One informant wants to continue to involve in her congregation but says that she is not in a position to assume major responsibilities. She suggests that her friends who immigrated at a young age can probably run the congregations but not the ones born in Norway.

When I compare myself with other young people who are born in Ethiopia, it is harder for me to consider certain responsibilities. I think they find it easier. They also show greater interest in the activities in the church. On top of that the church in Ethiopia and the church here are not identical. Those who are born in Ethiopia, learn everything very quickly. But here we learn things after we are grown and also step by step. The difference is that when you learn something in your childhood it sticks to you. You learn it quick and passionately. But when you get older it becomes harder and the passion is also low. You simply hang in the middle.

Another informant finds it easier to join Norwegian youth group. So, has already minimized her involvement to the Amharic speaking congregation.

Where is your future church?

I am not decided yet. But the previous year I was more involved in the Norwegian church youth activities. I actually used to go there even earlier (in addition to the Ethiopian group). So, most likely I will continue there. Amharic is not very suitable for me. So, it most likely will be a Norwegian church.

What is your thought concerning the Amharic congregations as a church home for Norwegian born members?

If we talk about the congregation I have been going to, the kids and youth, who came from Ethiopia, they sit in the main service; they behave in the same manner as the grownups. So, the congregation is fine for them. I believe they can stay. But for those of us who are born here, I do not think so. Now those who went there (her Amharic speaking congregation) and are around my age do not go there anymore. It basically is those kids who came from Ethiopia who continued in the congregation.

Why do you think the Norwegian born leave?

Basically, there are no activities that are suited for us. So, they drop out.

For example, if someone gets a vision to organize youth programs that are aimed on you guys, do you think many would return?

I am not sure. This has been attempted but not many came. Some drop church all together. Some go to Norwegian youth groups. They prefer activities run in Norwegian. Even if there may be some who wish to come (to the Ethiopian arrangements), if they know that the other friends are not coming, they do not come either, because they do not want to be by themselves. Besides, regardless of language, some of the young people have a tendency of distancing themselves from church as they grow independent.

I have been told that at occasions, some Norwegian born have attempted to actively involve in some activities but dropped after some time simply because they were unable to cope. In some of the big events like holiday celebrations it is a common thing to see the Norwegian born hanging around the Narthex and socialize together when the service is going on.

So, it is clear that the harmony between Norwegian born members and the rest of the community faces challenges much beyond language. In some of the cases, not language but ways of communication seem to be the stronger factor. The social capital produced by immigrant participants does not seem to benefit the Norwegian born in all aspects. The immigrants build settings that enable them acclimatize and duplicate what is familiar from home. However, this is not the primary challenge the Norwegian born have. The concern of the Norwegian born seems to rotate around forming identity whereas the immigrants work on preserving identity. Although the Norwegian born seem to appreciate some of the moral values and family ties, the spiritual nurturing and the social contact seems to lack relevance to some of the Norwegian born.

Then, we can ask what other options the Norwegian born may have. Apparently, Norwegian setting does not seem to remove the problem either because the Norwegian born do not seem to identify themselves to the non-immigrant background peers totally either. The Norwegian born informants in this study have said that if they have to choose between immigrants and non-immigrants, they connect easier to non-immigrants. However, they prefer the most to hang around Norwegian born to immigrant parents.

They point out that the way Norwegian born to immigrant parents relate to their non-immigrant background peers is affected by the setting of their childhood. For example, if they

grow up in a neighborhood where it is dominated by non-immigrants, go to school where non-immigrant background children are in the majority and if they have parents who interact with non-immigrants, they have easier time associating with peers of non-immigrant background. However, if their growing up is the opposite of what is mentioned above, the likelihood is that they have less desire to connect to non-immigrant background peers.

Fortunately, I have had informants from these two different contexts and they both independently mention the factuality of the premises mentioned above. However, each of them defends that their own way of identity forming is more beneficial. The one who grew up in non-immigrant dominated setting says that she has easily integrated to the Norwegian life as opposed to those who are in a segregated immigrant context. Whereas, the one who emphasizes her immigrant background says that those who are fooled to think that they are Norwegians will face identity challenge later in life. However, these two informants agree on one issue, they say that it is the easiest for them to identify with Norwegian born to immigrant parents than any of the other groups. Here is a comments from the informant who grew up in fewer immigrant neighborhood:

Some of those, who have moved to Norway, for example, when they are 10 years old, I actually do not identify myself with them. If it is in either or situation, I prefer to identify myself with Norwegians. However, I identify best with the Norwegian born foreign origin.

Thus, if we were to draw a conclusion from the few data we have, the ideal condition to embrace the interests of Norwegian born seems to be a separate activity of their own. Other studies have also shown that children of immigrants show more stability and develop assured identities when they are part of separate organizations which take into consideration both backgrounds they represent (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000: 178). This seems to be the future task of the Amharic speaking congregations if they are going to have a chance to keep their children in their congregations.

### *Summary*

There is a level of uncertainty among the leaders of the Ethiopian Evangelical churches in Oslo concerning the future of the communities. All leader informants in this study see the

deep need for keeping the congregations continue as religious home for their children and also for immigrant Ethiopians who possibly will arrive in the future. However, the task of forming the future of the churches while addressing the present needs is not easy. The dilemma lies on two factors: uncertainty of whether or not more immigrants will come from Ethiopia and how to transfer responsibility to the next generation.

The congregations seem to tackle this dilemma in different ways. The Adventist fellowship remains connected to a Norwegian speaking congregation. So, should the need for Amharic diminishes the connection with the Norwegian speaking congregation shall be adequate. Nevertheless, as far as things are now, Norwegian born members are involved in various activities. Amharic use is encouraged and practiced in all activities, including the children ministry. The leaders hope that their children will take the congregation over. The Ethiopian Evangelical congregation holds its children ministry in Norwegian and has adopted a teaching material from the Norwegian Sunday school association. Their vision is to possibly continue holding two separate services depending on the need, one in Norwegian and another in Amharic. Yewongel Berhan does not seem to have reflected so much on the question at the time of this study. Leaders say that they are discussing on how to use the Norwegian born members in mission outreach to the larger society.

Although the leaders have a desire to help their offspring remain in the Amharic speaking congregations, the flip side of the coin narrates a different story. The Norwegian born are skeptical of their ability to take over the responsibilities of running the congregations. The social capital produced based on the needs of immigrants seem largely non-relevant for the Norwegian born young people. Therefore, unless the congregations start to design new activities based on the needs of the new generation, the coming years will see many of the Norwegian born participants drop out.

## Conclusion

The main research question of this study is, “What is the role of Ethiopian evangelical congregations in Oslo in the process of the participants’ incorporation into the Norwegian life?” Social capital is the tool of analysis in this research. Since social capital generated in smaller communities can affect the dynamics of integration in different spheres differently, this study assesses the level of incorporation from four different dimensions and asks four corresponding questions. 1) Do Ethiopian congregations in Oslo provide practical support to their members as they cope with their new setting? 2) Do Ethiopian congregations in Oslo organize community activities beside their focus on religious education? If yes, which ones? 3) Does participation in the congregations leads to further civic engagement? 4) Does participation in the Ethiopian congregations has an impact on the way members approach the question of political engagement? Do the leaders encourage or discourage political engagement?

In an attempt to find answers for these questions, I have done participant observation among the five congregations for about two years and have done interviews with eleven participants of the congregations. Myself being an immigrant from Ethiopia and had previous connections to the community, I did not face much challenge in accessing the data included in this thesis. Nevertheless, I have also done a professional preparation in order to be able to collect unbiased and objective data.

Ethiopian immigration to Norway is a recent phenomenon. The earliest flow took place in the early 90s as a result of the split between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Thus, the Evangelical congregations in Oslo are also correspondingly young. The first Ethiopian Christian fellowship was initiated in 1985. Since then, the community has grown larger and developed in to a condition where different groups are established along line doctrinal and language preferences. This study focuses on five Evangelical congregations situated in Oslo. These are Yewongel Berhan Church, Ethiopian Adventist Fellowship, Ethiopian Evangelical Church, Selihom Church and Gospel United International Church. I, however, have been informed, after I have finished analyzing the data included here, that Gospel United International Church does not exist anymore. I do not have enough empirical data to present this development, nevertheless, the members, apparently, have joined the different

congregations that are included in this study. No matter the reason and the outcome of this development, I do not believe it causes any difference to the findings of this research.

### *Practical support*

Provision of practical support primarily touches the concerns the newly arrived immigrants may have but also all participants who have specific needs. The types of needs can be material, social or psychological.

For the majority of Ethiopian immigrants, the context they emigrate from perhaps is not very different. However, the challenges on arrival are far from uniform. First, not all immigrants from Ethiopia have a chance to arrive in the same way. Some have secured legal entry while others travel illegally through long routes sometimes facing life threatening situations. Second, some have family members who immigrated before them, whereas others have no connection what so ever in the country. The challenge doubles for the later if they speak no English or Norwegian. Thirdly, there is a grand difference on the determinations the authorities make on asylum cases. There are some who get a permit within a short time, whereas some reside and work without obtaining any legal status for years. For certain groups, authorities cover living costs and facilitate conditions for education and job while others have to figure their way out on their own. This is to argue that individual circumstance suggest different premises to how immigrants pursue their dreams in the land of immigration.

This differential distribution of resources as described above based on immigration cases does not exist within the churches. The congregations seem to stretch more towards those who are less advantaged. They go out to the asylum camps to meet new arrived and assist them in various ways. They provide transportation and accommodation for those who are interested to visit the churches. They also provide financial support in occasions. It is apparent that asylum seekers get information about asylum regulations from individuals participants. Mainly, the congregations assist them with finding housing, jobs and information about some public systems when they are ready to leave the asylum camps.

Existing members of the congregations also support each other in many ways. Visitation in difficult times, counseling and information networks are some of the benefits existing members appreciate. The congregations offer practical support to participants both in

organized manner and informally through the network they provide. The networks make it possible for the participants to share the recourses that different individuals have access to.

The congregations included in this study can be categorized as rich in bonding social capital. The bonding social capital generated among the communities has a crucial significance in terms of providing specific support for individuals who experience various difficulties in their new home. However, the tight network among the participants is at the same time instrumental in facilitating for labor market engagement and creating links to public institutions. In that way it also partially functions as bridge building social capital.

### *Community activities*

Ethiopian Evangelical congregations in Oslo are settings where social and cultural events of home land nature take place. Because of their multi-functional nature, the congregations satisfy various collective needs the participants have. First of all the congregations provide a space where participants can socialize together, speak their language and create sense of community. Immigration in many ways is an experience tainted by various forms of loss and degradation. Most of the time, immigrants uproot from their original setting and move to a context where the culture is different, the language is new and communication is difficult. Immigrants face many barriers to quickly associate to the systems of the host community. Thus immigrant religious communities provide a transitional phase and have the potential to compensate for the loss of acknowledgment immigrants feel. They also safeguard the identities of the participants by giving them a sense of belonging.

The strong bonding social capital among the participants of the congregations of this study allows them to be able to reproduce some of the home land cultural practices. Some of the important socio-cultural events include celebration of national holidays, weddings, arrival of a newborn and not least ceremonies and support connected to a loss of loved ones.

Nonetheless, the congregations face various challenges to function in the scale the participants desire them to. One of the main challenges is lack of financial means. Particularly, the smaller and newer congregations have problems covering rental expenses and wages of fulltime pastors. Another problem is linked to their bi-national and multi-denominational natures. It seems that participants have conflicting interests based on their denominational or national backgrounds in some of the details of the congregations' function.

Some informants have voiced that contest for leadership position causes tensions. That is said to be triggered by sense of status loss experienced as a result of immigration.

My conclusion is that in terms of social networking, the community belongs exclusively for Ethiopian Evangelicals.

### *Civic engagement*

The community's ability to link participants to non-immigrant civic organizations is very poor. Informants give various reasons for why it is so. Some say that Ethiopians are not interested in making contacts with non-immigrants since they prefer to be with their own people. Others say that immigrant congregations are very busy with daily pressures so they do not have extra charisma to think about cooperating with outside bodies. Yet others argue that Norwegians are not open or not even interested to make contact with immigrants. No matter the reason may be the conclusion is that the community is the poorest in the aspect of providing bridge building social capital to the civic activities of the larger Norwegian society.

There is a wider opportunity of improving civic skills in the Amharic speaking congregations in Oslo. Lay participation in leadership is an accepted practice and individuals involve in various capacities. However, since the exposure to other civic settings is narrow, the possibility of transferring the skills gained to public square is also low. Ethiopian congregations in Oslo do a lot of charitable work. Nevertheless, these activities are totally focused on home land needs, thus, provide no opportunity to collaborate to other Norwegian organizations.

### *Political engagement*

Ethiopian evangelicals in Oslo seem to be cautiously interested in political affairs. There exists some sort of uncertainty as to whether they engage in politics or not. Four major reasons have been highlighted: the Pietistic background of Ethiopian Protestantism, the antagonistic approach of the communist regime towards religion, the extreme reaction towards the patriotic character of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and finally, violence experienced in connection to political authorities.

Political participation per se is not criticized by informants. All informants were of the opinion that Christians as individuals should be part of politics and influence the society in a good direction. However, church as an organization mobilizing politics is not acceptable by informants for two reasons: one for fear of deviating from its religious mission and secondly, because church should embrace all segments of people and political engagement might entail bias.

Although the congregations do not build direct bridges to political engagement, again the social space and the informal network they provide seem to be vital in exchanging political opinions. There seem to be individuals who are well versed in politics and informal discussions with and among them can be one of the important channels through which many gain information concerning political matters. Some of the burning themes seem to be immigration politics and job opportunities. The communities have actively involved when Ethiopian asylum seekers were rejected in 2011. They have participated in demonstrations, providing basic needs to the asylum seekers and sending letters of plea to the governmental officials.

Moreover, Ethiopian evangelicals seem to be very intentional in using their voting rights. They seem to believe in their ability to influence the politics through electing segments who further political concerns that matter to them. The 22 July 2010 attack on the government building and Utøya and the various attitudes surrounding it is a subject discussed among all members of the community. The general comment was that as bad as what happened during the incident is, it is good that it is done by a non-immigrant background individual.

In conclusion, the community provides a rich linkage to selected segments of Norwegian life. The informal social ties seem to play an important role in finding niches of employment, education opportunities and important locations for various issues. Hence, Ethiopian community has achieved a relatively good level of integration in the labor market and many have obtained higher education. My findings in this regard support Bredahl who argues that all Ethiopians who can work are out in the labor market (Bredahl 2008). The only hindrance that is mentioned is lack of work permit and serious health issues. Informants are content with their lives as long as they have a chance to work. Not having to be able to work is considered to be a total disaster. At the time of this study, the frustration among the community has been tremendous because there were some Ethiopian immigrants who were denied their tax papers and as a result could not work. The support network among the

communities can primarily be defined as a strong bonding social capital. Nevertheless, by the way the communities provide appropriate information in a personal way and help people integrate in the Norwegian labor market, they build a very important bridge between the immigrants and the larger Norwegian society.

However, social contact with non-immigrants and involving in the larger society's civic affairs presents itself to be a much more optional need to the community. According to informants in this study, Ethiopians love to hang around their own folks and constructing social contact with non-immigrants is an issue they do not put a lot of emphasis on. There exists a big gap between the immigrants and non-immigrant population when it comes to leisure time interests and modes of socializing. Guro Ødegård's (2010) study clearly shows the concern of the Norwegian authorities regarding the immigrants' lack of interest in participating in Norwegian voluntary associations. That can be affirmed about the participants of Ethiopian Christian congregations in Oslo as well. There is, however, some difference between the Veitvet community and the Ethiopian congregations. The Norwegian authorities have noticed the isolated ethnic groups in Veitvet and have portioned out resources to help better integration. Unfortunately, that is not the case for the Ethiopian congregations. According to the informants, bodies of host communities have not noticed them. To use Ødegård's preferred expression, there is no linking social capital stretched out towards Ethiopian Evangelicals.

Although most participants may be skeptical towards politics, they actively engage in some selected political agendas that directly affect the communities. The churches try to remain neutral when it comes to holding political stand, yet they in occasions move collectively on issues like asylum cases. It seems that immigration and integration policies are one of the top political concerns that can be discussed openly among the members of the communities. Individuals are conscious of their voting rights and they seem to use it actively. Moral matters and Christian values are emphasized by many informants. When questions of moral values merge political themes, individuals seem to use their voting power to influence the directions of the society. The congregations are sources of bridge building social capital in terms of political participation. There is no mass political mobilization led by the church leaders. Nevertheless, the social gatherings facilitate situations where people can discuss topics of political interest.

The future of the Ethiopian Protestant congregations in Oslo is very difficult to speculate. It is primarily determined by the future flow of immigration and the preference and ability of the Norwegian born participants to take over the responsibility. At the moment, we do not have a proper overview of any of these two elements. First, it is hard to predict whether Ethiopian immigration to Norway will continue or not. This is determined both by the Norwegian immigration policies and the conditions in Ethiopia. Second, the limitation of the number of Norwegian born informants who participated in this research warns me against making broad generalizations regarding the role the community has in their lives and vice versa. The few I talked to seem to primarily desire activities that are focused on the needs of Norwegian born foreign background people. However, the congregations have not yet organized activities of such sort.

Finally, in their social setting most participants of the congregation prefer to be around other Ethiopians. Thus, the immigrant associations are extremely important to satisfy the profound social and cultural needs the immigrants have. The communities are definitely strong in providing bonding social capital that occupies a crucial role in helping individuals adapt to the new life in the difficult circumstances of immigration. They are places where friendship and advices characterized by the various human capital individuals own are provided. Moreover, by providing a setting where use of native language is possible and the communal interest of home land culture can be practiced, the communities address the deep needs of immigrants which organizations of host community cannot satisfy. Thus, I contend that the communities provide both strong bonding and bridge building forms of social capital to various aspects life in Norway. Nevertheless, I also admit that the communities are weak in providing social linkages to members of the host community.

This study does not represent the whole of the Ethiopian Christian community found in Oslo. For example, the features in Ethiopian Orthodox congregations or congregations that use single ethnic languages may vary from those presented in this research. A comparative study of these congregations can bring out the result the different variables would attain in terms of integration. Unfortunately, this particular thesis is limited by time and space from including all of them. I believe that covering the Ethiopian Christian communities in Oslo at large is an important future project. Furthermore, social capital and ethnic religious communities in Norway is a totally unexplored area. The number of immigrant Christian communities is increasing regularly. So, it is extremely important that future research takes into consideration which role these communities may have in the process of integration.

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