Saved and healed

Illness, illness causation and healing among Ethiopian Orthodox Christians at holy water sites in Addis Ababa

Marta Camilla Wright

Thesis for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor (PhD)
University of Bergen, Norway
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Abstract

The overarching theme of this thesis is the intertwined roles of religion and health. The thesis is a qualitative investigation into illness, illness causation and healing in the context of religion. The investigation is carried out by studying holy water healing practices among Ethiopian Orthodox Christians at holy water sites in contemporary Addis Ababa. Holy water sites are particularly suited for investigating this theme, as they are both spaces for religious veneration and spaces for handling *bäššəta* - illness.

The dissertation is a monography which comprises ten chapters; three introductory chapters, six ethnographic chapters and a concluding discussion. The field research was carried out for one year and employed several methods in combination: free listing method, participant observation and interviews. This broad ethnography forms the basis for a wide exploration of the main research question: How is religion embedded in the understanding of illness, illness causation and in practices of healing? And the subquestions: How is illness comprehended and explained? What are the roles of spirits, things, spaces and interaction in illness causation and in healing practices?

The ethnographic chapters are organised as a trajectory of how informants experience illness. Chapter 4 analyses how illness and illness causation are seen by informants, while chapter 5 describes the holy water sites, the agency of space and its healing efficacy. As illness and evil spirit are words often used interchangeably, chapter 6 explores the world of spirits, including a discussion of new spirits which seem to appear in contested areas. In chapter 7, the role of things is explored. Things have both an active role in making informants ill and in healing them, as well as a mediating role in enabling relationships with spiritual beings, which is further explored in chapter 8. The centrality of faith to obtain healing, and an exploration of what faith means to informants is treated in chapter 9.

One of the main contributions of this thesis is the ethnography it presents on religion and on holy water healing practices in Ethiopia, which is an understudied area.

Informants to this study express that they experience a threatening, changing world, where communal life is decreasing, and *bäššəta* is increasing. Harmful magic is commonly mentioned in the accounts of the interlocutors, often carried out by relatives, or friends because of envy. The informants turn to holy water sites to tackle the challenges they experience. At the same time, do informants' understandings and holy water practices represent continuity.

The study pays particular attention to things, spaces, bodies and sensations in the analysis of the ethnographic material. Situated in theory of materiality of religion the study uncovers how things and spaces are both active agents for making ill and for healing, and media for long lasting relational ties between human and superhuman beings.

I conclude that illness is a broad concept to the informants in this study. Illness is explained in a religious world view which includes biomedical therapies based on the understanding that God is above all, permits all and may both save and heal all according to His will. Illness may thus, in the context of this study, be seen as a religious concept as well as a spiritual and transformative experience. Doing religion, rather than believing, and practicing religion at holy water sites, help informants in obtaining a life in the proximity of God and other superhuman beings, whom they relate to in day-to-day life. I thus argue that, as illness is often caused by broken relationships and lack of relationship with the divine, healing is most profoundly about (re-)establishing relationships.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

On one of the most heavily trafficked roads in Addis Ababa there is a gate. It is a green, anonymous gate, and behind the gate is a compound of a little more than 1000 square metres, not much larger than that of a domestic compound housing a well-off family, some decades ago. That was before the modernisation project of the Ethiopian government started to dominate in many parts of the city, demolishing entire neighbourhoods to build new residential areas, socalled condominiums, constructing new, wider streets and the light rail crossing the city west to east. However, these kinds of compounds are at large spared from the city development.

The gate is situated on the road that goes from the busy Meganaňa roundabout in the north-east of the city towards the Arat Kilo roundabout near the city centre. Many pedestrians, street vendors, minibuses, trucks, cars, beggars, playing children, herders tending their sheep and many others use the road, and to some, the road is their home.

Along the road, there are shops and groceries, and a bus station with transport routes taking people around the city. Many of them are commuters coming from the outskirts of the city and beyond the city borders to the north. Looking beyond the road, one sees construction cranes, tall buildings and prominent churches under construction that dominate the view, foregrounding the hills surrounding Addis Ababa. Near the green gate, in the large roundabout, are busy cafés, like the trendy coffee shop, 'Kaldi's Coffee', where they also sell hamburgers, French fries and ice cream. The now more and more numerous middle classes go there for their amusement, a kind of activity that contradicts the modest ideals of austerity and humility[1] fundamental to Ethiopian Orthodox Christian values and practices, which in the view of the pious contrasts the amusement people have in the feasting and celebration that takes place in the context of their religion.

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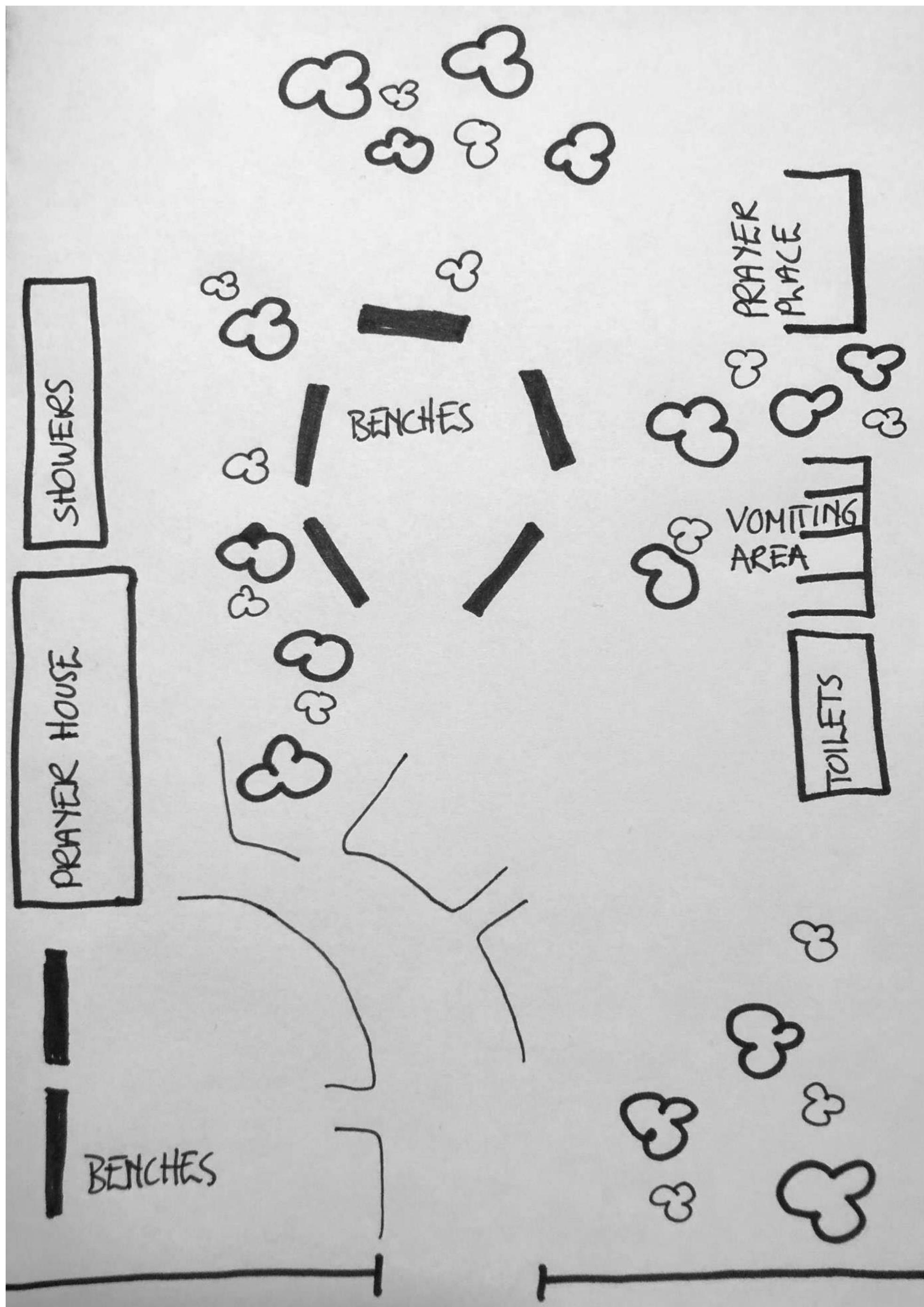
[1] See Messay Kebede for a discussion of humility and arrogance (Messay 1999, pp.196-200).

The gate hides a special space[2], a space that is important in the lives of its visitors and which marks a contrast to the space outside of it. This is related to both the physical area per se and the kind of activities that are carried out in it. Behind the green gate on the busy, dirty road there is a beautiful and tidy area, with tall trees, flowers and birds singing. In Amharic, the lingua franca in Ethiopia, this space is called a *ṣäbäl bota* and is one of many organised under the Ethiopian Orthodox *Täwaḥədo*[3] Church (EOTC). Ṣäbäl[4] is the name of a kind of water, which, in the context of the ṣäbäl bota, may come from a source in the ground, from a river, a stream. This water is used in a variety of ways, most commonly showered in or drunk. *Bota* means place or area. An essential ingredient of the space, and what initially was the immediate reason for which the space was established, is the ṣäbäl.

[2] I distinguish between place and space in that place is the geographical area, whereas space is the lived area.
[3] *Täwaḥədo* refers to the Church's Christology, and means 'be one, united with each other' (Abraha 2010, p.873). The term corresponds to the Greek *miaphysis*, and stands for 'a composite unity' (Wondmagegnehu and Motovu 1970, p.98).
[4] The word ṣäbäl or ṭäbäl is originally a Geez word meaning 'dust, earth' (Gori 2010, p.431).

This photo from the Mikaʾel holy water site shows people sitting in the site, praying in front of an icon (to the left), visitors vomiting in the vomiting area (at the back of the picture), and the building to the right is where the toilets are. Photo: Marta Camilla Wright

To the left from the entrance are a few benches before a quite large prayer house containing benches, icons and an area for prostrating and sitting on the floor. Next to the prayer house on the left-hand side, there are several shower rooms where people queue up outside waiting for their turn. There are three rooms for women to shower in, and one for men. There are some banners with biblical quotes on them. Inside the gate to the right there are two toilets in a cement building, one for each sex. Next to it a vomiting area, a place with five niches where people can vomit.



Sketch of the Mikaᵓel holy water site. Courtesy of Elisabeth Helene Sæther.

The ṣäbäl bota is open most mornings from 6 am and for a few hours. Located on the British Embassy Road, it is well situated for quick visits by people on their way to work or schools. It belongs in a category of sites where only day-to-day visitors come. There is no accommodation, unlike several other ṣäbäl bota[5]. Visiting ṣäbäl bota is part of everyday religion. Keeping some of its holy water at home is common practice among Ethiopian Orthodox Christians. This specific holy water site's patron saint is the Archangel Michael, who is often perceived as holding a particularly important place as protector and defeater of evil (Levene 2019; Wright 2019). Other sites have other patron saints. Diligently practicing Ethiopian Orthodox Christians visit such sites frequently. Others who suffer from long lasting *bäššəta* (disease, illness) visit every day or even stay long time, weeks, months or even years, at a ṣäbäl bota. Others again visit more rarely, for example on specific holidays or during *pagʷme*, the liminal month, which carries with it a tradition of visiting holy water sites as preparation for the new year.

This specific, quite busy morning[6], at this specific ṣäbäl bota on the British Embassy Road, people are coming and going. Inside the prayer house a man is on his knees at the back of the room with his arms straight out. One elderly woman is praying in a low voice with her head to the floor. Others are praying half aloud. Others again are moving their hands. A woman touches her arm, rubs her chest and finally her forehead with a book. One priest is sitting outside, blessing visitors with his cross touching their forehead with it and letting them kiss it.

Two young men, around twenty years old, are sitting near the entrance. They have three one-litre bottles of ṣäbäl in front of them. My assistant and I chat with them for a while, and they explain that they come to the site as often as they can to drink the holy water. I ask why they drink the water. One of them answers: 'It is medicine, it is our religion.' The response to my follow-up question: 'Are you ill?' is: 'No, but athletes

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[5] Throughout the thesis, I will use singular form of Amharic words even if the meaning is plural.
[6] Field visit with assistant Tirsit Sahle, Addis Ababa, 22.04.2016

exercise even if they are athletes. It is like a backup, to stay well.' We also meet some teenage boys drinking the water. They explain that they are passing by this morning to drink the water because they have an exam later that day. When my assistant and I are about to leave, we meet a woman who works in one of the university cafés. She explains that she comes there sometimes if she is off duty. She tells me that she had gastritis and 'kidney'[7] previously, and after that she continued coming to the site. On this day she is carrying with her twelve litres of ṣäbäl.

The initial example demonstrates that the ṣäbäl bota is used by different people in different ways. It is a place for prayer and for a variety of practices. The water is used in religious practices, against failing an exam and against bäššəta. Significantly, one of the young men has explained: 'it is our religion'. Somehow this space accommodates issues pertaining both to religion and health. The link between the two seems obvious. Exactly in what ways, however, remains to be explored further.

Religion and health separated and intertwined

The account from a holy water site introduces us to the overarching theme of this thesis which is the intertwined roles of religion and health. Holy water sites are particularly suited for investigating this theme, as they are both spaces for religious veneration and spaces for handling bäššəta. Another place to start the investigation in this case is in the Amharic language, which is dense with religious expressions. In this context, the Amharic verb *danä* is central. According to the dictionary it means 'to be saved, be spared (life); to escape (harm, s.th. unpleasant); to heal [vi], to be cured, to recover, recuperate, get well again' (Kane 1990, p.1791). It appears that the verb has a twofold meaning, one which concerns being saved in a religious way, and another which concerns being healed from illnesses. Religion and health are clearly entangled in this specific verb. Another example is the widely used greeting *ṭäna yəsṭälən̄*, which

[7] Kidney denotes an illness in the kidney.

means ‘may God give you health on behalf of me’. Now, health is given by God, another indication of the close ties between religion and health.

This intimate relationship has been shown in research on healing in African cultures (and in other cultures): that physical treatment and spiritual treatment are tied to each other. A vast literature on topics like traditional medicine, affliction, illness, misfortunes, spirit possession, healing rituals and witchcraft has since Evans-Pritchard’s famous study on the Azande (Evans-Pritchard 1937), taken different approaches to studies of these topics. In a frequently quoted work, anthropologist Susan R. Whyte argues that studies of illness, healing rituals, spirit possession, afflictions and witchcraft have gone through a shift in perspectives (Whyte 1989). Starting with Evans-Pritchard, she argues that the topics had for a period been subject to analysis from a perspective of religious studies. Then during the 1980s, there was a turn towards placing these topics in the realm of medicine and medical anthropology (Whyte 1989, p.289). Whyte says that ‘What we knew as divination now appears to be diagnosis; what we analysed as ritual is termed therapy’ (Whyte 1989, p.289). Importantly Whyte suggests that ‘medical anthropology meets the anthropology of religion more directly in Africa than elsewhere’ (Whyte 1989, p.289). More recent studies, which will be presented and discussed in chapter 2, are either placed within this split or they merge the religious and the health and analyse them contextualised and interconnected. Examples of the last are those of Katherina Wilkens and Anita Hannig which have influenced this current study (Hannig 2017; Wilkens 2011).

In African contexts, illness is often perceived as coming from spiritual forces, for instance from the *pepo* or *jini* at the Swahili coast (Giles 1989; Swantz 1990), although other forms of causation are prevalent, for instance human causation and natural causation (Westerlund 2006; Foster 1976). In African cultures, faith-based healing is commonly believed in and practiced (Dilger 2007; Dilger, Burchardt, and van Dijk 2010; Westerlund 2006; Wilkens 2011; Nieber 2017). Healing is often taken care of by spiritual forces through healers and witch doctors (Swantz 1990), and through spirit possession (Dahl 1989). A study of Pentecostal movements in Tanzania reveals a

similar pattern (Dilger 2007), but also that there is a plurality of healing strategies (Wilkens 2011; Wondwosen 2006). Illness is often interpreted in a wider context (Augé and Herzlich 1995). These examples show that local perceptions of health are integrated in the local cultures which in the African contexts are often interlinked with religion.

This project was originally inspired by Dag Øystein Nordanger's psychological study from Northern Ethiopia (Nordanger 2006), a study which importantly shows that the authoritative dogmas of the Ethiopian Orthodox Täwaḥədo Church (EOTC) inform, what Nordanger calls, the psychosocial coping strategies of his informants (Nordanger 2006). Placed within the field of psychology, the study argues that Western understanding of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as well as dominant Western trauma treatment approaches conflict with the local 'folk-psychology' and coping strategies. The study does not, however, aim at further exploration of perceptions of health, causes of illness and practices of protection or healing of it, nor does it go deeply into the interconnections between religion and health. Other contemporary studies[8] about health and illness in Ethiopian contexts, be they strictly medical or placed in medical anthropology or social anthropology[9], also acknowledge that religious ideas and practices impact upon perceptions about health and practices of healing, however, to a varying degree explore in depth how. Historically, the relationship between health, illness and religion, also specifically with the EOTC, has been documented to be an intimate one in Ethiopia (Pankhurst 1990; Kassaye et al. 2006), which I will return to in Chapter 2.

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[8] In this introduction and in chapter 2, I will draw attention to the most important research that concerns this study with regard to the interconnection between health, illness and religion. I mostly look at literature that concerns geographical areas that are predominantly Ethiopian Orthodox Christian, although there are Muslims and others who have also resided in these areas.

[9] Medical work on health and religion is for instance studies on perception about health (Jacobsson and Merdasa 1991), within medical anthropology and social anthropology, see for instance the work of Alan Young (Young 1976, 1975b, a; Young 1970) or more recent Anita Hannig (Hannig 2017) or Angela Müller (Müller 2014).

In a recent article on responses to the Covid 19 pandemic in Ethiopia the authors argue that 'bio-medical knowledge' and 'religious interpretations' and the secular and religious are less compartmentalized than assumed (Østebø, Tronvoll and Østebø 2021, p.2). The authors argue that 'these seemingly demarcated epistemes, or imagined separate domains, are more open to exchange and interaction, to integration and imagination, than commonly assumed' (Østebø, Tronvoll and Østebø 2021, p.2). However, much of the literature on illness, illness causation and healing in the Ethiopian context remains in the split between medicine and religion. Moreover, there is a tendency to explain the persistent interest people have in traditional healing and faith healing as either due to practicalities, its availability or affordability or to its religious importance or to superstition. Although most likely valid arguments, I argue that there are additional more profound reasons which I intend to investigate in this work.

Even though there is a body of literature on traditional medicine in Ethiopian studies which touches upon religion to some extent, there are fewer studies which investigate religion and health in depth from the perspective of religious studies. Terje Østebø points to a general lack of religious studies in the field of Ethiopian studies (Østebø 2020, p.4). There is also a lack of studying medicine and health from a perspective of religious studies in Ethiopia, although some have emerged, including the important work of Anita Hannig on fistula treatment (Hannig 2017), which I will discuss later in this chapter and in chapter 2.

From other contexts in Africa, I will draw on recent scholarship which combine perspectives from both religion and health and look at religion and health as having entangled roles. David Westerlund, in his book about African religions and disease causation, emphasises the importance of 'focus on issues of heterogeneity and pluralism' (Westerlund 2006, p.2). Concerning disease causation, Westerlund discusses the tendency that human causation is increasing whereas spiritual causation is decreasing in Africa (Westerlund 2006).

Studies within the area of health, for example on perceptions about health (Mulatu 1999; Jacobsson and Merdasa 1991), and particularly anthropological studies point to close interconnections between religion and health (Wilkens 2011; Hannig 2017). One example is a study from Tanzania carried out by religious scholar and medical anthropologist Katharina Wilkens. This is a case study of religious healing within the Catholic tradition as it is practiced in the Marian Faith Healing Ministry (MFHM) in Dar es Salaam, which is defined by its leader, Father Nkwera, as a place for education and healing and a battleground for the war against evil. Wilkens has pointed to the fact that the two terms 'religion' and 'medicine' and, in particular, their separability from each other are tied to specific Western developments (Wilkens 2011). Wilkens argues that African religion and spirit possession is not the only form in which religion and medicine are combined. The combination of religion and medicine is also found in Europe, in alternative religious movements like New Age or Buddhist meditation groups, and one could add certain strains of yoga (Wilkens 2011, p.4). Exorcism and pilgrimage to healing sites are features of Catholicism. This study will, placed in the field of religious studies, contribute to further discussions of illness, illness causation and healing, especially in relation to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The study moves beyond distinctions like health and religion, secular and religious, biomedicine and traditional medicine, and mental and somatic.

However, a note on terminology is necessary. The study explores the understanding and experiences informants have of illness and is a study which aims at investigating illness, illness causation and healing in the context of religion. A distinction often made by medical anthropologists between disease, as the diagnosis made by a specialist, and illness as the experienced sickness (see chapter 4) is useful only to a certain extent in this study. The study does not aim at exploring or discussing the diagnosis informants may or may not have. In addition, illness is a term which may or may not correspond to the term disease and may encompass more than the term disease does. Thus, the term illness suits this study better, and I have chosen to use

illness as the main term in English. However, the emic term, bäššəta, will also be used to a great extent, as it is a term whose content is specific for the context of this study.

Developing the research questions

This research started out with the following research question: How does religion influence perceptions of mental health and healing? Encountering the field of research and more concretely the holy water sites and Ethiopian Orthodox users of such sites, I realised that I had to include both something more and something else. Firstly, to limit health to mental health was misleading because the way Ethiopian Orthodox understand and treat illness was demonstrated early during field research to be more inclusive and comprehensive and did not follow the Western mental-somatic taxonomy. Thus, adding to the point underscored by Wilkens, that health and religion are commonly combined rather than separated, another concern is that there seems to be a need to extend the area of research to a comprehensive health concept and not distinguish between mental and somatic health. Biomedical terminology may appear in the thesis, because informants use it, or other researchers apply such terms. However, in this current study, the aim is to explore illness, illness causation and healing in a religious studies perspective, and move beyond biomedical taxonomies and terminology.

Secondly, the idea of scrutinising people's perceptions proved insufficient. The reason is that what informants shared during initial interviews and what I experienced and observed during participant observations at holy water sites called for 'bridging' of information, by which I mean to analyse information given in interviews considering the observations, and vice versa. Although interviewing people about their perceptions gave many important insights, the conversations and the participant observation pointed to the importance of carrying out extensive participant observation at holy water sites.

Paramount in the contextual and spatial framework of illness and healing was, in the view of this researcher, that people engaged with a broad range of things together with the prevalent interaction with spiritual beings, with clergy and with each other. The variety of common and individual practices and rituals[10] engaging with things and what seemed to be a frequent presence of non-human beings at holy water sites (as informants dealt with it, both evil spirits, saint, angels, Mary, Christ and God were present at the holy water sites), gave way to a shift in focus towards the roles of things and space in the context of this study. Thus, I will use theory about materiality, focusing on things, to analyse illness causation and healing, particularly Bynum's analysis of active things (Bynum 2012), and Birgit Meyer's concept of media as 'thing in the middle' (Meyer 2020).

From aiming at scrutinising perceptions and beliefs only, I widened the scope and included a strong focus on materiality by looking at things, space and practices. I chose holy water sites, ṣäbäl bota, as the context of the study because they are, as demonstrated in the initial example, both places for religious veneration and places Ethiopian Orthodox Christians may turn to when troubled by illness in search of a cure. The spaces as such evidently played a role in people's veneration and search for healing. Practices and interaction also seemed to play important roles. I turned the research towards exploring ṣäbäl bota, the interaction and the practices there, using things (in a broad sense) as keys to open new insights, aiming at bringing new perspectives, and hopefully add to the current scholarship of the area of religion and illness, illness causation and healing.

Bearing these main points in mind, this thesis aims at:

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[10] Following Catherine Bell's discussion of the term ritual (Bell, 1992), I refer to behaviour that has meaning related to a religious framework carried out at holy water sites or elsewhere, as both practices and rituals.

Investigating illness, illness causation and healing in the context of religion by studying holy water healing practices among Ethiopian Orthodox Christians at holy water sites in contemporary Addis Ababa.

The overarching research question of the theses is:

How is religion embedded in understandings of illness, illness causation and in practices of healing?

The following subquestions will be explored:

Firstly: How is illness comprehended and explained?

Secondly: What are the roles of spirits, things, spaces and interaction in illness causation?

Thirdly: What are the roles of spirits, things, spaces and interaction in healing practices?

The Structure of the thesis

This thesis' ethnographic investigation of illness, illness causation and healing in the context of religion is contingent to a particular place and time. Moreover, it is specifically a representation of the stories, views and experiences of a limited number of people that this researcher met during the field research. Given that the specific time and place and the specific people are always contextualised and situated and never isolated, the representations in this work will also reflect a wider community in time and place. Consequently, the experiences and life trajectories of informants may point to more general points about the entangled roles of health and religion in Ethiopia today. So may also the findings on the concept of illness, contextualised understandings of illness causation and healing. However, the design of this thesis is not suitable to generalise, but rather to dig deep into the specific cases.

In the progression of this thesis, the topics that the three subquestions relate to, illness, illness causation and healing, are not consistently separated in the chapters. Even though an effort is made to separate them for analytical and structural reasons, the fact underscores one of the arguments of the thesis; the understandings of illness, explanations and healing are rooted in a holistic and religious world view and thus, in the view of the informants, illness needs to be taken care of in a context of religious healing.

A certain tension between continuity and change underlies the topics of the chapters. This is the tension of history and tradition, the holy water and the practices of the ancient Church, on the one hand, and the recent developments for the good and for the bad. This possibly changes the way Ethiopian Orthodox Christians explain illness. But perhaps it does not change their healing strategies.

The first chapter provides an introduction of the area of study and clarifies the aim of the study and the research questions. The theoretical framework will be presented along with the key concepts. The next chapter (chapter 2) introduces the broader context of the study, situating the study in time and place and positioning the study in relation to other relevant research literature. Responses to illness are always situated and contextual, and a main concern is also to introduce the geographical and religious area of research to situate the study. A chapter on method (chapter 3) contains reflections on methodology, including ethical considerations. My researcher role will also be addressed, preceding the ethnographic part of the thesis.

The empirical, ethnographical section of the thesis consists of six chapters (chapter 4-9). The intention of chapter 4 is to lay a foundation for the chapters that follow about two of the main issues I investigate; illness and illness causation. The chapter thus gives in depth information and a discussion about understandings of illness. The discussion on illness causation is meant to be an initial treatment of the issues, which I will broaden in the following chapters and discuss comprehensively in the concluding chapter.

Chapter 5 sets the scene further by presenting the holy water and the ṣäbäl bota. The chapter is about the roles of spaces to informants in illness causation and healing and presents empirical material on the structure of the holy water sites, their rules and behaviour, and informs about their users. The chapter gives examples of why people visit the places and explains how places are organized. The chapter goes even beyond the sites to understand thoroughly what space may be to the informants to this present study. I follow their life stories and discuss how they represent spaces in the narratives, in ways that have an impact upon their lives. A discussion of holy and unholy, sacred and profane is included in this chapter.

Evil spirits are ubiquitous at holy water sites. Spirits and spirits' behaviour are topics that are entangled in how interlocutors understand illness and illness causation and will be treated in chapter 6. In chapter 7, things are discussed related to their roles as healing in more detail. How is a book *mädḫanit*, as a remedy or a medicine, as one informant, Meseret, claims and which is observable at holy water sites, when visitors touch themselves with holy books during prayer? The role of things will be discussed with a specific focus on books, words, blood and water.

In chapter 8, I discuss experiences with spirits further, more specifically focusing on interaction at holy water sites, where evil spirits, humans, angels, saints, Mary, Christ and God interact, with the intention to excavate further how informants explain illness. Transcriptions of spirits talking, not only as exorcisms, but as monologues, conversations and discussions between spirits, will be scrutinised. People I met at holy water sites and elsewhere expressed commitment to and deep feelings towards saint, angels, Christ and God. How do these relationships come about? I will, again, discuss the role of things, their place in the veneration, in illness causation and healing. In chapter 9, which is the last empirical chapter, the focus is upon healing practices. Here I explore things and relationships further and how they are tied together by investigating practices and what I have labelled 'doing religion'. This is done in individual practices as well as collective in the *maḫbär*. Finally, chapter 10 presents

the findings of the study and contains a concluding discussion on illness, illness causation, healing and things as active or as media.

So far, I have presented the area of study and highlighted the areas of concern for this thesis. In the remainder of the chapter I will present the theoretical stance of this study.

Materiality of religion theory

The paramount role of things (in a broad sense) has led me to choose theory of materiality as a tool for analysis and as a theoretical perspective to dismantle the ethnographic material. This material includes the water, the showering and drinking, the vomit and the vomiting, the incense and the fumigation, the perfume and the spreading of perfume, the books and the kissing of them, the crosses and the touching of crosses. Visitors to the ṣäbäl bota related to supernatural beings, be they evil spirits, saints, angels, Christ or God, and what in their view were spirits who spoke back, for example through human beings, or were the initiators of dialogue at ṣäbäl bota. To informants, this took place in material form, in bodies, words and a variety of other things, including the spaces. In the views of informants, it was obvious that the supernatural beings were present. This was observable in how visitors to ṣäbäl bota interacted with the supernatural beings, how they carried out practices, used things and spaces and dealt with their challenges in life in relationships with other people and with superhuman beings.

Starting from this emic point of view, a concrete and tactile way of living with spirits and dealing with what is often perceived as abstract or metaphysical and beyond the material world unfolded. I chose this concreteness in the spiritual as the starting point of my exploration of illness, illness causation and healing, seeking understanding by thinking through things, with theory of materiality of religion as a lens for the analysis. I thus see the materiality both as an analytical tool, where I analyse the ethnographic material by scrutinising the role of things (in a broad sense), and as a theory about religion.

To study religion through the lens of materiality started to be established as a theoretical approach within religious studies in the 1980s (Meyer and Houtman 2012, p.5). The theory of materiality was born out of a critique of a Protestant legacy. The focus on belief and religion as a matter of the mind was an ethnocentric perspective, for the greater part coming out of a typically Protestant perspective (Asad 1993). Also, it is born out of a critique towards what Birgit Meyer and Dick Houtman call an antagonism in the relation between religion and things that place spirit above matter, belief above ritual, mind above body and inward contemplation above outward action (Meyer and Houtman 2012, p.1). One may even describe it as a fear of things mirrored in historical events like iconoclasm or the encounter between missionaries and locals in Africa.

Birgit Meyer understands religion as 'a practice of mediation between humans and the professed transcendent that necessarily requires specific material media, through which the transcendent is being generated and becomes somehow tangible' (Meyer 2020, p.4). This stands in contrast to definitions of religion by other anthropologists, like Clifford Geertz, who emphasises in his definition religion as a system of symbols (Geertz 2004). 'Materializing the study of religion means asking how religion happens materially, which is not to be confused with asking the much less helpful question of how religion is expressed in material form. A materialised study of religion begins with the assumption that things, their use, their valuation and their appeal are not something added to a religion but rather inextricable from it' (Meyer and Houtman 2012, p.7). Material media, Meyer argues, must include also the body, which is essential to how human beings experience the world: Birgit Meyer argues that the body is 'the sensorial and material ground of experience' (Meyer 2013, p.93). The basis for religious practices is, in Meyer's view, mediation, where things and bodies are essential. Media is in this perspective 'things in the middle'.

Similarly, according to David Morgan, who has also engaged with religion and materiality, the project of materiality is to examine 'the conditions that shape the feelings, senses, spaces and performances of belief, that is, the material coordinates of

forms of religious practice and seeing belief as part of this' (Morgan 2010, p.6). David Morgan argues, like Meyer, with Merleau-Ponty (and Damasio), that all consciousness and awareness is grounded in the body with the senses (Morgan 2010, p.10-11). This means that everything we believe or think is part of and carried out in a material world. The materiality perspective aims at an understanding of the role of things and what things do, not as symbols, but in their own right. In this work I understand 'things' along the lines of Meyer and Houtman '(…) in a broad sense, encompassing images, artifacts, bodies and bodily fluids as well as spaces (…)' (Meyer and Houtman 2012, p.17). However, I will discuss if other entities subject to human senses, like words, are also part of the category, which defines 'things' more broadly than Meyer and Houtman. Concerning the demarcation of the category, Matthew Engelke argues: 'All religion is material religion. All religion must be understood in relation to the media of its materiality. This necessarily includes a consideration of religious things and of actions and words, which are material no matter how quickly they pass from sight or sound or dissipate into the air.' (Engelke 2012b, p.209). The point that words are material is relevant in the present study, for instance in how words are healing and how words are media of relationships between abstract entities and human beings. Thus, the role of things, the demarcation of what the category of things consists of and the agency of things are central topics to this theoretical perspective, which I will discuss in this thesis.

Linked with the perspective of materiality is also a focus on the body and embodiment. Embodiment and healing have been thoroughly discussed by Thomas Csordas in his work about healing among Charismatic Catholics (Csordas 1997). Csordas builds on the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who developed a phenomenology of the senses and of embodiment, mainly arguing that human experience starts with the senses and with, or in, the body (Merleau-Ponty et al. 2012). The body must be seen as one of the material coordinates, in Morgan's terms (see above), and is one of the important things which need exploration. A specific topic which concerns the body, as well as other materials like space and things, is spirit possession. Studying spirit

possession in Candomblé, Paul C. Johnson labels it spirit incorporation. In his work, he emphasises the materiality perspective. He says: 'Instead of bodies, senses and materials expressing spirit possession, spirit possession is the ritual expression of competent material and bodily work' (Johnson 2020, p.151). He argues '(…) the materials mediating spirits' appearance themselves wield agency and act. The bodies, places and things through which spirits, gods, and ancestors appear, exert force and act recursively on those entities shifting their very nature' (Johnson 2020, p.165). I will discuss if spirit embodiment in the case of this study is in line with the argument of Johnson about how bodies, spaces and things can be seen as agents and actors in making and materialising spirits.

I locate my starting point here in the materiality, the things and the emphasis on the body sensing the world. The analysis in the present work discusses in depth the materiality as informants engage with it in practices, and like Morgan argues for grounding an understanding of belief in practice 'since making, exchanging, displaying, and using artifacts are principal aspects of human doing' (Morgan 2010, p.7).

Studying Ethiopian Orthodox Christians in Zege, Ethiopia, the anthropologist Tom Boylston argues that his informants experience a world where the divine is overwhelmingly present, and a challenge is thus insufficient regulation of boundaries (Boylston 2018). This, he remarks, is also the case with the boundaries of human bodies in general. Boylston sees prohibitions and regulations as the organising principle of the boundary between humans and the divine. One interest of the current study is how illness may also be seen as a consequence of insufficient regulation of boundaries. Anita Hannig (Hannig 2017) analyses the body as a permeable entity, with openings making it vulnerable and which is also regulated by abstaining from a variety of such things as food, drinks and sex. Purity regulations is a long-established topic in anthropological and religious studies (Douglas 1966), and they are often mentioned in studies about Ethiopian Orthodox Christians. Here in this study it is highly relevant at holy water sites and related practices, and Old Testament regulations are rigidly

followed by followers of the EOTC. However, I intend to discuss regulations of the body and the role of the body further, asking if the insufficient borders and permeability is also the opportunity for human beings to engage with and be in the proximity of the divine.

Things as media or as actors

Studying topics through a materiality lens is described by Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell as 'With purposeful naïveté, the aim of this method is to take 'things' encountered in the field as they present themselves, rather than immediately assuming that they signify, represent or stand for something else' (Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell 2007, p.3). This perspective also relates to the ontological turn within anthropological studies, looking at things not assuming that they are material *objects*, but studying them as phenomena heuristically to excavate what they are in the context of study.

In Meyer's view, mediation 'entails a broad understanding of media as material means for religious communication among humans and as material harbingers of a professed beyond' (Meyer 2020, p.6). She also says that 'Media are not only *means* but *things in the middle*, through which people are able to relate to each other and the world.' (Meyer 2020, p.11). This view seems to entail a perspective on things as passive conveyors, rather than active.

Caroline Walker Bynum discusses Christian materiality focusing on late medieval Europe, where she analyses medieval objects '(…) in how they functioned and what they meant religiously.' (Bynum 2011, p.31). She establishes the concept 'holy matter' which includes many types of things, such as relics, sacramentals, the Eucharist and other sacraments, miraculous objects and devotional images (Bynum 2011, pp.25-28). Holy matter was active, according to Bynum, and not just representatives of something else, mediating something beyond or being a thing in the middle.

Birgit Meyer argues that all religion is mediation (Meyer 2020). Meyer sees mediation as the solution to a problem of presence, or how to make the abstract, for instance God, present, with a wide range of media. The point of mediation has been discussed in an Ethiopian setting by Boylston (Boylston 2018, pp.1-15). His area of study is Zege, a countryside area near Bahir Dar. Contrary to seeing 'the problem of presence' as the driving problem, Boylston suggests that the followers of the EOTC begin with the opposite problem: 'the boundary between God and humans is insufficiently stable' (Boylston 2018, p. 4). One of Boylstons points is that among his Orthodox informants in Zege the sacred is potentially in all matter, and he argues with Engelhardt that Orthodox Christianity has a mediatic nature, making things and substances 'divinely charged' (Boylston 2018, p.5). Concerning mediation, Boylston's focus is slightly different from that of Meyer. He sees mediation as in how saints, for instance Mary, mediate contact with God, because humans cannot relate to God directly. Boylston employs the concept 'mediation' and argues that contact with the divine is established mediated by a ritual regime.

Boylston's point is different from Caroline Walker Bynum's discussion of things in medieval Christian Europe. In Bynum's work, material things in a religious context could have status which differs from that of other things, for instance have agency, not because it was projected by a human being, but in itself (Bynum 2011, p.34-35). Bynum argues that things are (sometimes) actors in the eyes of medieval Christians. In her commenting on theories about things and agency, she extrapolates that medieval Christians did not see things the way Bynum understands Latour and Gell; that things' agency is '(…) finally, a metaphorical agency; it is *like* that of human actors' (Bynum 2011, p.281). Rather '(…) medieval cult objects had agency in a more literal sense. They were not like life; they (at least sometimes) lived.' (Bynum 2011, p.282).

As mentioned, Tom Boylston sees mediation as core to Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity. He bases his argument upon the concept of intercession. He discusses how food in the form of religious commemoration of a saint, mediates the 'beyond', for example a relation with Mary or other saints (Boylston 2018, p.13). He states that

Ethiopian Orthodoxy in Zege is basically relational in character, defined in the main by with whom one shares food and when (Boylston 2012, p.79). Now, is the commemoration meal then representative of something, is it 'thing in the middle', or does the concept agency come into play, like Bynum argues about things as actors in medieval Europe?

In the tension between things understood as media and things in the middle (Meyer), mediation as making relationships present (Boylston), and active things (Bynum) is mainly where I place my discussion of the role of things in illness understanding, causation and healing.

Thus, the thesis will discuss the question of things, in a broad sense, as actors and/or media, and discuss this, related to the main areas of interest of this work: illness, illness causation and healing.

Chapter 2 The geographical, religious and cultural context of the study

The aim of this chapter is to contextualise the study and provide necessary background information. Relevant for this study are topics related to illness, affliction and religion in the African context, the Ethiopian context, the context of Addis Ababa, and historical and contemporary perspectives. The chapter introduces the religious context, mainly the context of the EOTC with its links to illness and healing among Christians in the Early Church, and gives a brief overview of the religious terrain in which the holy water sites are placed. The chapter briefly touches upon socio-political context of Addis Ababa, the city where the study is located, and its recent developments and available health services. The holy water sites that inform this research were in various parts of Addis Ababa. However, this study does not go into the demographic, social, economic, ethnical, religious or gender specific particularities of the localities of the sites.

Even if the study is placed within the study of religion, it is also to some degree cross-disciplinary. Consequently, it draws on literature[11] from several fields of research in addition to religious studies: medical anthropology, social anthropology and to a limited degree psychology and history, specifically Ethiopian historical research related to illness and healing.

Religion and affliction in changing African societies

Many studies about religion and affliction in Africa, be they about spirit possession, witchcraft and within Islam, Christianity or other religious traditions, have during the last decades engaged in a discourse about continuation and rupture, about times of

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[11] Literature used both as a background and as dialogue partners in the thesis has been found by searching in Oria and Google Scholar, by looking through bibliographies of central work, searching the local book market, searching libraries in Addis Ababa (in particular that of the Holy Trinity College, a theological college under EOTC) and via my academic network.

(political) change and insecurity, discussing concepts like modernity and globalisation (Geschiere 1997; Moore and Sanders 2001; Sanders 2008). Researchers argue that because of increased competition following from political changes, for example, people turn to religion, witchcraft and sorcery. For example, about the situation in Zanzibar, anthropologist Kjersti Larsen says: 'The Swahili are experiencing worsening economic, political, and social conditions. Within these circumstances, Islam is invoked as a source of knowledge that not only explains the current state of life and living, but also gives directions on how to cope with and to change the situation for the better' (Larsen 2009. p.11). Hansjörg Dilger builds on discourses of modernity when analysing the neo-Pentecostal movement in Tanzania, arguing that the growth is embedded in the combined approach of the church of social, spiritual and economic factors. He calls for a stronger focus on practices of healing and community building in studies on Pentecostalism, which may shed light on the continuities as well as the ruptures that are produced by the rise of Neo-Pentecostalism in the context of globalisation, modernity and HIV/Aids (Dilger 2007). In a recent publication, the role of religion, affect and emotion in African urbanities and cityscapes are discussed, and religion produces spaces for catharsis, peace and elation and hence offers an outlet for the discord and anxiety of city life (Dilger et al. 2020, p.2). The importance of the insecurity which Africans deal with in quickly changing cityscapes must be considered also in this study.

Addis Ababa – context of change and continuity

Ethiopia has 36 million Orthodox Christians, the world's second-largest Orthodox population after Russia (Diamant 2017). Ethiopian Orthodox is the majority religion among the population in Addis Ababa, a city which has been and is going through changes at several levels: economic, political, structural, religious and demographical, like many other cities in Africa, which represents change and invokes insecurity (Dilger et al. 2020). Political unrest, lack of trust in authorities and strict control have been historically, and is today, the normality for the population in Addis Ababa, also since the Derg regime (1977-1991) (Tronvoll 2011). The political situation in the

country has during the last decades been both authoritarian and fragile and has created an environment of insecurity and fear.

Another factor concerns the physical development of the city due to the modernisation project of the former government (Weldeghebrael 2020). The cityscape has during the last three decades gone through dramatic changes, which has also made an impact upon the population (Yidnekachew 2015), developments which have been welcomed by the international community, but which have not reached the poor population (Di Nunzio 2017), as well as waves of political insecurity, as mentioned. In addition, in the capital of one of the poorest countries in the world, many people have been living, and live, in dire situations. Despite the economic boom during the last approximately twenty years, the economic development has not necessarily led to improved life of the majority of the population in Addis Ababa, as described by Marco Di Nunzio in his book about marginalized men in the central area called Arada (Di Nunzio 2019).

The EOTC has since the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) came to power in 1991 had a constitutional status similar to Islam and Protestantism through the Religious Freedom Act. However, despite structural changes, the influence of the EOTC is still strong[12]. The religious engagement of the Ethiopian Orthodox in Addis Ababa remains. Cultivating relationships with the divine is still important (Di Nunzio 2019, p.204), and the use of ṣäbäl bota seems to have remained important and even have increased (Berhane-Selassie 2015, p.121). Others report of an increase in activities that involve exorcism, taking place at various ṣäbäl bota (Malara 2017, p.45; Dejene 2016).

The EOTC was state church until 1974 with the fall of Haile Selassie but has survived with a strong standing in society. The establishment and development of Addis Ababa city has evolved hand in hand with political developments and developments of the

[12] The historically influential role of the EOTC and 'religious nationalism' has been discussed in depth recently (Østebø 2020, p.209-233).

Ethiopian Orthodox Church (Zewde 2005). Churches and the close ties between the rulers and the Church have been important in the development of the city, to such a degree that churches have given name to areas (Zewde 2005, p.123). It has developed according to political agendas (Terrefe 2020) and influenced by being a diplomatic centre (Van Gameren and Tola 2017) and a modernisation project reflecting the policy of the former government as well as the current leadership.

The religious landscape has changed. Protestant churches, particularly the Mekane Yesus Church, have grown remarkably. Since 1984, the number of protestants was 5.5 per cent of the population, and in 2007, the number had increased to 18.7 per cent, whereas the EOTC had been reduced from 54 per cent in 1984 to 43.5 per cent in 2007 (Haustein and Østebø 2011, p.758). The decline in membership has represented a challenge to the EOTC, which could explain the appearance of the heretic spirit of Ṗente. Recently, the EOTC has experienced reformist movements (Zeleke 2015). The active Sunday School movement is another example. The religious freedom following a secular state has created a new era for the EOTC (Marcus 2008). The religious landscape is changing, both physically, materialised in mosques and churches being built, and in the soundscape in Addis Ababa, which is often dominated by loudspeakers from churches, mosques and shops competing for people's attention.

This overarching theme of change is one dimension in the lives of the Ethiopians whom I worked with during the research. There are many changes in the city. Some of my interlocutors interpret them as improvements, and some see them as threatening and interpret both the physical, political and lifestyle changes eschatologically. These changes undoubtedly influence upon people's lives, and others have also argued that Ethiopians interpret changes and challenges in a religious framework. Anthropologist Marco Di Nunzio demonstrates how his interlocutors, male street-dwellers in Arada, which is reckoned a city centre in Addis Ababa, relate to the economic growth which the country has witnessed partly in a religious framework (Di Nunzio 2019, p.177-182). Di Nunzio's informants explain the economic success of some people, as compared to their own absence of economic change, to the rich's use of sorcery in

order to gain wealth, explained by what they see as a fact: the rich are always sick (Di Nunzio 2019, p.206). The association of success and sorcery, related with envy, failure and illness, is another complex theme discussed in studies on affliction in Africa, and is also relevant in the context of this study.

Two recent studies from Addis Ababa discuss issues concerning modernity and change. Both are studies of the controversial healer Memher Girma, who is not accepted in the EOTC establishment, but who has many followers in Addis Ababa. Girma emphasises the battle between good and evil spirits and places his practice within a modernity and globalisation context (Dejene 2016; Malara 2017). Economic growth, modernity and illness are linked together, and according to Bethlehem Dejene 'For pious Orthodox Christians, the modern and the demonic are intertwined in dangerous ways' (Dejene 2016, p.3). As I have argued in a previous article on this topic, envy and sorcery are features of the stories people tell about how they have become ill. Their social insecurity rests mainly upon family and neighbours, and sorcery often features in the life trajectories of informants (Wright 2017). Also, in this study I will engage with topics related to modernity, change and insecurity.

However, as much as some of my conversational partners at holy water sites in Addis Ababa talk about a threatening and changing world pointing to *discontinuity*, it must be considered that the use of holy water healing is a longstanding tradition, used as a religious practice and an important part of the Ethiopian Orthodox veneration, and not only as a remedy for insecurity and health issues. This point is also linked with the understanding of illness, health and well-being, which has also been described historically and is thus not a recent phenomenon, but deeply rooted in Ethiopian society and in Ethiopian Orthodox religious practices and *continuity*.

The EOTC and the religious context

Christianity was introduced to Ethiopia as early as the fourth century, and the EOTC is a church that still has features that are applicable to the Early Church, such as ascetic

practices and hermitage. The EOTC was one of five churches that were excluded from the mother church after the Church Council in Chalcedon in 451 upon the dispute about the nature of Christ. This group of churches is counted as the Oriental churches, now also encompassing the Eritrean Church. Even though the EOTC was under the Coptic patriarch up to 1950, the EOTC has developed influenced by indigenous African culture and religion and Judaism (Kaplan 1982, Levine 1974, Ullendorff 1973). Zar[13] adherence is widespread and has been studied extensively (Kahana 1985; Leiris 1934; Messing 1958; Young 1975b).

The Church has seven sacraments and eleven sacramentals defined as 'certain prayers, actions, and things which have been blessed by the church that we might obtain from God spiritual and temporal benefits by their devout use' (Wondmagegnehu and Motovu 1970, p. 69). Holy water is one of the sacramentals, together with the sign of the cross, according to Wondmagegnehu and Motuvu the most important sacramental of the Church, the cross, vestments of priests, holy oil, candles, rosary, palm branches, incense and church bells.

The EOTC is a church with great variety throughout the country. In the countryside, the role of priests is still inherited in many cases from father to son, combined with farming. In the cities, priests are more educated, some in traditional church education only, and some have undertaken theological training. Priests either live in celibacy or are married. The Church is strongly influenced by ascetic ideals, and the monastic community has a strong standing. Thus, even though the Church is strongly hierarchical, and the central authority has most power, monastics, both monks and nuns, may break out of general norms and still be protected due to their status as spiritually mature human beings.

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[13] For more information on zar, see chapter 6.

The EOTC, with its history, doctrines and its clergy, is undoubtedly a very influential force upon people's lives. Nordanger shows in his study in Tigray that the priests have the most significant influence upon the choice of solutions people make when they have what, as mentioned, Nordanger classifies as post-traumatic experiences (Nordanger 2005). For instance, its followers commonly have a ‘soul father’ who will advise them about religious, moral and other issues. Orthodox Christians faced with various kinds of problems turn to holy water healing to find remedy. Holy water sites are vivid, moving, at times characterised by spirit performance of enthusiasm and total involvement perhaps of the sort described by I.M. Lewis (Lewis 2003), which also reminds of the fact that the EOTC is a church situated in Africa. According to an article analysing various statistical material on Orthodox Christians, Orthodox Ethiopians have much higher levels of religious commitment than do Orthodox Christians in Central and Eastern Europe (Diamant 2017). Ethiopian Orthodox Christians ‘are more likely than Orthodox Christians in Central and Eastern Europe to wear religious symbols (93% vs. median of 64%), to say they believe in God with absolute certainty (89% vs. 56%), to fast during holy times such as Lent (87% vs. 27%), and to tithe (57% vs. 14%).’ (Diamant 2017). The analysis also shows that Orthodox Ethiopians are more conservative on social issues and argues that these gaps between Orthodox Christians in Ethiopia and Europe mirror broader differences in religious commitment between people living in sub-Saharan Africa, where religious observance is relatively high among all major religious groups, and those in more secular societies in Central and Eastern Europe (Diamant 2017).

Importantly, EOTC is situated amidst other Christian churches, Islam and other religious traditions. At a country level there were in 2012 34 per cent Muslims, 43 per cent Orthodox Christians and 19 per cent Protestants (Britannica n.d.). The EOTC has lately found itself under pressure, as there is a tendency towards converting to Protestant Churches (Haustein and Østebø 2011). The current study does not, however, intend to investigate roles of other religions in the context of this study, although acknowledging that the religious landscape is part of the situatedness of the EOTC.

Heritage from the first centuries of Christianity

There is an important link to religion in Syria and Egypt which lies in the connection the Axumite kingdom had with the area. Christianity was established in Ethiopia when King Ezana converted to Christianity in the fourth century (Babu 2022; Kaplan 1984; Marcus 2002).

Healing has a longstanding tradition within Christianity. Healing is a theme in the New Testament, which contains many miracles and healing wonders. Ethiopian Orthodox Christians that I worked with root their practice of holy water healing in the miraculous practices of the Apostolic time, and in many interviews, informants referred to stories about healing by words, water and other things, found in the New Testament.

Similarly broad, as we shall see, to the context of this thesis, the conditions that were cured in the Apostolic time were, according to Eijk, illness, weakness, trial, scourge, fever, evil force, sinful mode of living (Eijk 2014). According to Eijk, in the New Testament, Jesus and his disciples are reported to have cured '(…) numerous people from the wide range of health problems (…) physical and mental illnesses, demonic possession affecting mental and physical health, chronic diseases and disability, congenital conditions, gender specific affections and a number of other health issues' (Eijk 2014, p.341).

To Christians living in the first centuries, illness had important functions, sometimes to such an extent that ascetics chose illness (Crislip 2012). Illness was an aid in the formation of the ascetics. On the other hand, illness was ambiguous, as it was also understood as a punishment for trespasses against God. Historian of religion Andrew Crislip points to illness as a contentious topic in Christianity. Amanda Porterfield,

historian of religion, argues that healing has played a major role in the development of Christianity as a world religion (Porterfield 2005).

Healing in the form of exorcism and baptism of the sick is mentioned by several Christian authors, like Origen, Tertullian and Cyprian, and at the same time there is a growing emphasis on demons in the early Christian writers (Ferngren 1992). There were hundreds of healing shrines in the Mediterranean (Ferngren 1992). The first Christians were influenced by aspects of the Mediterranean religions, especially that a function of religion is to heal the soul and body, and the perception that illness enters from an external force. In Greek culture in Antiquity, which influenced ancient Christians, the view that supernatural powers inflict madness was common (Padel 1995).

Historically, within Christianity the understanding and treatment of illness has been entangled with spirituality, the link between medicine and religion is strong in the environment Christianity developed from in the Middle East (Ferngren 1992; Porterfield 2005), and also embedded later in medieval Christianity, as Caroline Walker Bynum shows clearly, the mind-body split was not part of a medieval understanding of the person (Bynum 1995).

Illness, illness causation and healing in Ethiopia

A historical review is outside the scope of this thesis. However, a few examples point to a historical continuity of contemporary religious practices connected with health.

The historian Richard Pankhurst, who specialised in Ethiopian history, describes a society, mainly from 1800 to today, where emphasis was put on treatment by spiritual powers embedded in the material reality people lived in (Pankhurst 1990). Although different methods not associated explicitly with religion were employed, religious

practices and magic[14] played a considerable role in the traditional treatment of illness. The treatment was often accompanied by prayers and appeals to God as for instance to say 'Glory to the heavens' while taking the remedy. Pankhurst's work conveys many interesting examples of how illness and religious healing are intertwined (Pankhurst 1990). Pankhurst mentions the use of holy water and other remedies and importantly he says that the categories of illnesses and the treatment of them are different from common western categories and understandings of illness. For example: An early 20th century medical text written by a *däbtära*[15] prescribes treatment of illnesses and 'magic formulas to assist in dealing with …' a variety of issues, like bad memory, evil eye, and obtaining a good wife (Pankhurst 1990, p.113).

The historical role of specific Ethiopian Orthodox methods of healing is also discussed and documented in other literature. Pointing specifically to one method, magic scrolls, Jacques Mercier explores in his work, 'Art that heals', how scrolls were used to heal illnesses (Mercier 1997). The scrolls consist of images and words, the things which Mercier calls 'art that heals'. It demonstrates another link to the important role of the material as healing in a literal sense.

Gonder is an area in the north of Ethiopia in which anthropological research on traditional medicine has been going on since the 1930s (Leiris 1934; Messing 1958). Extensive work was carried out in the 1970s by the Canadian social anthropologist Allan Young. Young provided an in-depth analysis of the medical experts and the medical system in Gonder. He studied zar practices in depth and showed interconnections between religion and illness causation (Young 1975b). Building on this body of research, more recently, Angela Müller has carried out research in Gonder

[14] The usage of the concept magic has been criticised by scholars of religion because it implies a difference between institutional religion and magic which ranks them in a hierarchic system where magic is the inferior.
[15] *Däbtära* is an unordained priest and formally the musician during church services in the EOTC. He has generally many years of traditional church education, for more details, see for instance (Otto 2002; Shelemay 1992; Young 1975b).

within medical anthropology, where she documents developments in terminology use concerning names of illnesses relevant for the present research (Müller 2014).

Looking at government attitudes towards the common practice of traditional medicine[16], Mekonnen Bishaw contributed[17] to the matter (Bishaw 1991). Bishaw points out that in the period after the change of government in 1974, the official attitude towards traditional medicine became more positive. That means that during the period of the Derg, government policies were more in favour of traditional medicine, although, as he emphasises, 'in actual practice there continues to be considerable uncertainty' (Bishaw 1991, p.193).

The authors of a recent article trace holy water healing as having survived during the communist Derg regime and thrived towards the end of the period, where there were also built several new churches in Addis Ababa (Berhane-Selassie 2015). The authors argue that the trend continued when EPRDF came to power in 1991 (Berhane-Selassie 2015, p.121).

This study's main interest is in illness, illness causation and healing in the context of religion. As pointed out, much of the literature on connections between religion and health or about healing are placed either in a medical paradigm or in religion, as for instance Whyte has pinpointed (Whyte 1989, p.289), and although the interconnection between health and religion is recently focused upon, illness causation, healing and religion in combination are studied to a lesser degree. Nevertheless, there are valuable contributions to build on, and this section will first investigate some of those placed in the medical and medical anthropological tradition.

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[16] Many of the practices and beliefs that will be discussed in this thesis are what would often be categorised as either witchcraft, sorcery or magic. When I use the term magic it is not to distinguish the phenomenon from 'religion' but to denote a type of practice.

[17] Reviewing official policy toward Ethiopian traditional medicine, a category in which holy water healing is included (notably the article was published in 1991, the year the EPRDF came to power).

It is well-established that illness is a culturally defined concept in Ethiopia (as elsewhere) (Young 1976; Nordanger 2006; Otto 2002; Hannig 2017). Recognizing this point and the various meanings of the concept has led to establishing different ways of dealing with the multiple and situated meanings within medical anthropology. One way is to distinguish between disease, the medical diagnosis of a sickness and illness, as the felt sickness (Young 1982). Another is to distinguish into three concepts: disease, illness and sickness, where the term sickness concerns social roles.

Illness causation will be discussed in depth in chapter 4 (and explored further throughout the thesis), but I will mention a few points here as well. Firstly, in Ethiopian studies, explanations of illness interconnected with religion are researched to a limited degree. The points made are often brief and among other points rather than discussed in depth. For instance, it is mentioned that spirit possession is often described as one of the causes for illness in Ethiopia (Giles 1989; Jacobsson and Merdasa 1991; Vecchiato 1993).

An exception is the work of Allan Young within the field of medical anthropology. In an article from 1976, Young discusses aetiology with reference to the two terms externalisation and internalisation (Young 1976). The two terms refer to whether the explanation or responsibility of the illness is placed outside the afflicted or in the afflicted (Young 1976). In Gonder, Young finds that the two types of explanations are mixed among the Amhara, whom he emphasises are pragmatic in their approach to therapeutical choices.

Another way of distinguishing is part of an analysis by Wondwosen in a study from Addis Ababa late 1990s. Wondwosen argues that his informants distinguish into two categories, natural and spiritual causation, but he points out that people seek resolution for both types of illnesses by spiritual healers, in order to find out 'why such disease happened to that particular person' (Teshome-Bahiru 2004, p.30).

The perspectives of Young and Wondwosen upon how Orthodox explain illness has inspired this work. Yet another perspective, pointed out in a study from Tigray, is how

explanations of illness may differ at an individual level (Massa 2010, p.128). Some refer to the mix of perspectives on illness causation, for instance in contextual explanations for illness; that it comes from sin in seven generations and also from curse, magic spells and evil eye (Hamer and Hamer 1966; Messing 1968; Mulatu 1999; Kassaye et al. 2006). The widespread use of holy water methods has been pinpointed by several (Hermann 2012b; Malara 2017; Berhane-Selassie 2015; Fekadu et al. 2015; Hannig 2017).

Contemporary researchers point out that religious beliefs play a role in perceptions of disease (Jacobsson and Merdasa 1991; Mulatu 1999), disease causation (Kahissay, Fenta, and Boon 2018) and healing strategies (Anderson 2007; Alehegne Forthcoming; Giel, Gezahegn, and van Luijk 1968; Hannig 2017; Messing 1968). In Aspen's study among Amhara in Mafoud*,* health problems are important to informants in the context of a religious cult (Aspen 1994).

Addis Ababa is one of the areas in Ethiopia with the highest density of health services. Primary health services with governmental health centres are, although unevenly distributed (Andarge 2016), quite well distributed, mainly with nurses and health workers working there. In 2014, there were 12 public hospitals along with a growing number of private hospitals, more than 40, and it has several specialised hospitals, like the public Alert hospital which treats patients with lepra for free, and the Hamlin Fistula hospital, a charitable organisation. When explaining the indisputable stronghold of religious healing and traditional medicine[18] among Ethiopian Orthodox Christians, one explanation brought forward connects it with the lack of health services (Berhanu 2010). The popularity of traditional medicine in a broader sense is

[18] The term traditional medicine is here used to denote what is also denoted ethnomedicine or indigenous medicine, as it is close to the Amharic word used: *bahəlawi*, which is normally translated as 'traditional'. See (Müller 2014, p.183) who argues along similar lines. The term biomedicine is chosen instead of 'Western' or 'modern' medicine in line with most research in medical anthropology. However, the usage of the term 'biomedicine' has also attracted criticism, see (Gaines and Davis-Floyd 2004) for a discussion of the term.

researched by, for instance, Kassaye et al, who document the wide usage of traditional medicine. They find that: 'In Ethiopia up to 80% of the population uses traditional medicine (…)' (Kassaye et al. 2006, p.127). Another common argument is that services at holy water sites are free, contrary to the often-costly biomedical medication and health services at health centres and hospitals. Moreover, explanations often involve an argument combining both culture and tradition and limited access to modern health services. Kassaye et al argue that Ethiopians seek help within the realm of traditional medicine 'due to the cultural acceptability of healers and local pharmacopeia, the relatively low cost of traditional medicine and difficult access to modern health facilities' (Kassaye et al. 2006, p.127). This thesis will explore if there are other supplementary or perhaps competing explanations. This study will look further into the use of holy water and how it is linked with understandings of illness, illness causation and healing.

Several also associate holy water healing and religious healing practices with what is in the biomedical perspective seen as mental health problems (Giel et al. 1974 ; Jacobsson 2002). Often one is presented with a narrative that in traditional medicine, in particular, faith healing and mental illnesses are bound together. This is a point which will be explored in the thesis in terms of how informants explain their situation and how they have been diagnosed by others and by whom, and how they interpret their illnesses, and not in terms of biomedical diagnosis. The point has to do with *who* are the users of the holy water sites, which this study gives some, however limited, information about.

From contexts in Ethiopia, recent research has explored other aspects of the importance of the holy water practices. Some recent important studies have either one of their main focuses on holy water practices (Hermann 2012b; Hermann 2012a) or discuss it as one among other themes (Malara 2017; Hannig 2017). Pointing to changes and development in the views on medicine, recently Müller finds what she describes as a big change in Gonder concerning female fertility, a synthesis of

traditional and biomedical views (Müller 2014). Also, Herman shows that biomedical approaches and Ethiopian Orthodox Church practices are combined, and there is a cooperation between the Governmental Health Care system and The Church. It started officially in the 1980s when Ethiopian authorities asked the EOTC to collaborate in HIV/Aids programs (Hermann 2012b, p.60).

Anthropologist Judith Herman discusses in her PhD dissertation holy water healing in the context of HIV/Aids discourse and sees the healing process as a rite de passage (Hermann 2012b). Her research sites are places where users stay for shorter or longer periods. She sees holy water healing more as individual processes of marginalised HIV victims set apart from society while at holy water sites, who go through the stages of the rite de passage as described by Van Gennep (Gennep 1960), and discusses it in light of the international HIV/Aids agenda which the EOTC has been partnering with. Holy water rituals as going through a separation from the world and a rite de passage, which is an interesting observation which this work will to some extent explore as the main group of informants may also be seen as marginalised in society. Hermann also discusses sacred and profane, and argues that the introduction of using antiretroviral drugs (ARV) together with holy water marked a challenge and thus a change in the practices, because a profane entity became part of the sacred holy water site and consequently people started going to another site nearby, rather than the now profaned Entoto Mariam. Hermann's argument, inspirational as it is, is nevertheless built on a presumption that the sacred and profane dichotomy is unquestionably there, which I will seek to scrutinise in the thesis.

Taking a rather different approach, one which the present study is more in line with, social anthropologist Anita Hannig demonstrates how health and religion are tightly linked in the case of Ethiopian Orthodox women with fistula injuries, where she, with for instance Jean Comaroff, finds that there is a productive potential inherent in bodily affliction (Hannig 2017, p.32). Hannig emphasises aspects of the body and how religious beliefs are traceable in perceptions of the body and bodily practices. Hannig interestingly shows that the stereotyped picture of fistula-injured women as

marginalised, social outcasts is not correct, but their life trajectories are more flexible and nuanced, as they follow a religious avenue, not unlike others who do not suffer from fistula. Lastly, one of Hannig's conclusions is that surgery seems to be a deeply religious experience. I wish to dig further into this, discussing illness as a religious phenomenon, and suffering as healing and redeeming, with things and the materiality perspective as a prism.

As I was standing there, waiting, in the holy water site looking at the people in 'my' *maḫbär*[19], my eyes moved from one person to the other and finally they ended up on the person standing next to me: the priest. I was looking at him from the side. His fine wrinkles, his turban-like headdress, his concentrated joyful look as they started singing spiritual songs, his soft move to the music while clapping his hands. I could not stop looking at him, even though I was thinking that this may look awkward. Me, the white woman, staring at the priest standing only a short distance away from me. I continued staring at him, thinking of how much I would like to leap into his head, into all his memories and experience and just know it all. All the secrets that he knew. The tacit knowledge that I never came to think of asking and the answers he would never think of giving me. His lifelong experience in the Church, his education starting from he was a *kolo temari*[20] as a little boy, begging for his daily food and learning from the skilled priests, far away from his family. What exactly did he learn? What was it like to be a little boy so far away from his family? Were the priests good to him? Did he learn the secrets, the ways to use herbs, names, stars and numbers to invoke the Devil or pull demons? And today; does he make money from using his spiritual knowledge to help people harm others? What is his perception of evil spirits, angels, God? Does he really think that as the Holy Spirit is in the water, the water literally burns the one touched by it? Or does it imply a symbolic meaning when he says that the evil spirits are burnt by the holy things? My flow of thoughts and the waiting are interrupted. 'Oh my, I am burnt!' A woman interrupts the harmonious singing of spiritual songs. The woman, a regular at the maḫbär meetings who is often bothered by an evil spirit approaches the group shouting. She, or I mean HE[21], starts insulting people, talking, and saying

[19] Association, in this context it is a religious association.
[20] Student in the traditional church education.
[21] The members of the fellowship talk to her as if she were male, because usually when people believe that a spirit is talking, it is spoken to in masculine form (*antä*) as the spirits are often classified as male.

inappropriate things like: ‘Today is fasting day, we don’t drink *ṭälla*[22]‘. After a little break s/he adds: ‘We only drink *ʾaräqe* (liquor)’. I cannot help laughing, quite exhausted after long hours of participant observation. The liquor is much less accepted than the ṭälla, and the look on her/his face as s/he says it is as if s/he is teasing us. S/he is dancing and making fun, flirting with one of the male members who talks to her as ‘ante’ (you masculine). She is acting like no one else in the group, in ways that are not common among Ethiopians. In general, (or in the perspective of a Norwegian researcher?), Ethiopians are raised to be able to control feelings and to be polite, and for girls even more so (Poluha 2004). So, is this what is happening? Does she find a way to act in the way she really wants, freely? Does the situation give her the psychological space she needs to live her life? Alternatively, is she just different and her behaviour is so odd that the other people place her outside the social norm and call her ‘he’, a spirit? Or is she simply possessed by an evil spirit? And there may be many more alternative interpretations. From which perspective am I interpreting the little scene I am part of? Do I see it from my own perspective, from their perspective or from a mix of both perspectives? Their view, at least seemingly, is that a spirit embodies her, so why do I need to analyse it in any other way, which is simply to say something about Ethiopian culture related to my own culture, my background reference and, ultimately, me?

These questions were among the many I asked through the contextualised, hermeneutical, reflexive and ethnographically sensitive process of this research. The kinds of observations portrayed here, I believe, were the main tool for enabling me to integrate what I believe to be essential knowledge and construction of meaning concerning the people I studied. However, this type of research naturally involves many choices, dilemmas and challenges which I will discuss in this chapter as I present the methods used during this research. It includes discussions on strengths and limitations in the choice of methods, followed up by a discussion on the analytical

[22] Locally brewed traditional beer.

strategies. The chapter also scrutinises issues concerning reflexivity, research assistants, language and trust in the field, important ethical dilemmas that I encountered in the field, and lastly, I discuss issues relating to the credibility of the research. Firstly, however, I will further anchor the study epistemologically and make a few notes on the research design.

Epistemology, hermeneutics, ethnohermeneutics and reflexivity

Clifford Geertz argued that doing ethnography is doing hermeneutics (Geertz 1975, 1994). Conducting this research and making this written representation of it, I have drawn on hermeneutical theory (Gadamer 2004). I have made many choices throughout the field research based on observations, the interactions and discussions I have had with informants. I have taken many turns when organising the material and presenting it, still in dialogue with the people and the context, back and forth between myself, my background and them.

Following hermeneutical theory and ethnohermeneutics (Gadamer 2004; Geertz 2014; Geertz 2003; Geertz 2000), I believe that understanding and interpretation in field research are in a broad sense a dialogue process. In a study that employs anthropological field research methods, such as participant observation and interviews, the researcher is part of verbal and non-verbal communication with the people participating in the study. The process of interpretation involves all steps of a hermeneutic circle and aims at understanding in depth and detail what the world(s) of the people studied looks like. In other words, quoting Clifford Geertz: 'In order to follow a baseball game one must understand what a bat, a hit, an inning, a left fielder, a squeeze play, a hanging curve or a tightened infield are, and what the game in which these "things" are elements is all about' (Geertz 1975, p.53).

The process of understanding develops between the researcher and all her experience and people in a living and changing culture/social reality. Reflexivity is an important

practice, which I found to be an ever-ongoing process, which I will get back to in the next section.

The gap between cultures can be small or large. In this research process, I found the gap to be large even if I have previous research experience in the country, and I spent much time and energy pondering my own ideas about health, illness, spirits, things and how they all relate to each other in the study. The interpretation needs to consider the social, cultural and historical context. Interpretation as such cannot be understood only as a cognitive process. It is also a sensory, emotional process and a social process, and the area of study should be understood and interpreted in a dialogue process.

The historian of religion Armin W. Geertz's theory and method, which he calls ethnohermenutics, is particularly suitable for the anthropology of religion (Geertz 2003). This perspective is an effort to overcome Western hegemonies and orientalism (Geertz et al. 1994, p.2). 'Ethnohermeneutics attempts to locate the scholar and the people under study each in their own network of discourse, traditions, texts and meaning in the context of their social and intellectual circumstances. The result is a third perspective whereby the frames of reference of the scholar and the people under study are transcended' (Geertz 2003, p.309). Geertz' intention is to combine two perspectives: the reflections of the researcher and the reflections of the indigenous person. In combination, they will be greater than the two separate. That is the third perspective, which is similar to Gadamer's concept fusion of horizons (Gadamer 2004). However, the horizons that the field researcher is trying to fuse are not constant entities, as emphasised by for example the social anthropologist Michael Agar (Agar 1980, p.263 ff).

According to Armin Geertz, this perspective needs to be integrated with '(…) concerns of meaning and interpretation in the study of religion if we are to understand other cultures. Interpretation in this respect is the interpretation of indigenous hermeneutics (the indigenous act of constructing reality) in its entire social, historical, cognitive and linguistic context' (Geertz 2003, p.314). Geertz underlines that the creation of meaning

and the construction of reality of the people studied are essential to understand, along with the reflexivity of the researcher, as I have mentioned. Moreover, ethnohermeneutics aims at considering the perspectives of the people studied and allowing them to influence upon the interpretation made by the researcher. The interpretation should be rooted within the culture that is studied, respecting the local perspective, and a plurality of perspectives may be incorporated in the interpretation. Ethnohermeneutics opens way for many voices and opinions. That is, in my view, a strength of the approach. The experience I have in this research project is that the findings go in various directions and cannot always be united into one perspective. Sometimes one perspective may dominate, but there are many other perspectives, some of them contradictory to each other.

In line with this way of thinking, one can take it further and argue that knowledge is constructed in the process of understanding. The empirical material is a construct of what I gather from the research I carried out together with the informants, the holy water sites and so on, and, not least, together with my research assistant (Alvesson and Kärreman 2011, 25).

The research design

This study is placed in the study of religions, drawing also on anthropology of religion and anthropology of Christianity, and, to some extent, medical anthropology[23]. This study has not been designed as a study of religious texts or theology. It is a study of how people live the religion related to the research themes. However, by this I do not mean so called 'folk religion', 'popular' religion or 'everyday' religion. But I follow the line of argument of Leonard Norman Primiano (Primiano 1995), who challenges what he calls a two-tiered model, where folk religion is understood as different from 'official' religion. The project is therefore designed as a qualitative study with an

[23] My focus on healing lies specifically in the religious and cultural aspects, as I have no competence in medical science.

inductive approach (Primiano 1995; Bowman and Valk 2012). Qualitative methods are well suited for capturing complex understandings of individuals' practices and expressions (McGuire 2008, p.5), which are emphasised in this study. I study how people (including clergy and monastics) talk about religion, how they practice and live it.

An inductive approach represents some profound challenges, both epistemologically (there will always be a theoretical approach) and in terms of research process. I have found that finding a path through the field research is time consuming and challenging, and so is the process coming after. With little direction in terms of theoretical approach, with a few research topics I wanted to explore, the approach was openminded. This openness can serve as a risk mitigating strategy against bias and preunderstandings taking too much lead, and against the risk that one theoretical point of view would lead to selectivity and influence upon the interpretation of the collected field material. My strategy was to collect as much information as possible, guided by the broad research questions, rather than answer a more specific and narrower list of questions. Yet another challenge is that the strategy generates a large material with less directions to begin with. In this case, what kind of theory would be my lens and dialogue partner during interpretation took time to find.[24]

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is also a key to the reliability of the research project. There is a need to form some basis of reflexivity and formulate what has influenced the project, as well as continuously throughout the research return to this area of concern. I have hitherto mentioned a few; the pondering of my ideas about central concepts in the research and the gap between 'me' and 'them', and I will mention a few more further down that concern an issue of rich and poor and of the emotional dimension of encountering

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[24] I do not find myself agreeing with Michael Lambek, who in his doctoral thesis formulates so nicely that '(…) my interpretations, as if pulled by an invisible current always seem to lodge on the same sand bars' (Lambek 1978, p.24), at least not in terms of theoretical approach.

suffering in the field. However, in this section I will highlight some issues more specifically related to reflexivity.

In this project, themes that concern religion and materiality are among the important ones. Thus, what is my relationship to religion, many times requested by informants (is she Orthodox?), and more specifically my relationship to religious things does matter. I have a long history of exploring religious contexts, not only as an academic discipline, but of more personal interest, and a history of visiting churches and monasteries, of looking at religious things and experiencing something which I imagine could resemble something like what my informants experience. Concerning my religious affiliation, the answer to the question 'Is she Orthodox' did get standardised after a while, and my assistant usually explained that there is no Ethiopian Orthodox tradition in Norway and that I was more like a Catholic. Even though I was a member of the Church of Norway, the Protestant tradition that the Protestant Church in Norway belong to is far from what Ethiopian Orthodox think about being Protestant. Protestant is also sometimes understood as equal to *Ṗente,* and the Ethiopian Orthodox and the Ṗente are even further from each other than Catholics and Orthodox, and the relationship is complicated and sometimes conflict-ridden.

Another dimension of this is my take on materiality in general, a theoretical perspective that involves a perspective upon the world which I do not see as part of my cultural background, and which I 'discovered' encountering the massive presence of things at the holy water sites. It interested me and triggered my curiosity, and I wanted to explore it. However, it has been a journey across paradigms.

My training as a gestalt therapist raised my interest in health and religion in combination and made me assume that people in general think along the lines of a distinction between mental and somatic illness. So I formulated the research question as a project orientated towards mental health. As I described in chapter 1, I had to reorient when encountering the field of study.

At a more private level, I identified some areas that I deemed to be particularly important. I brought my two young children (at that time 1 and 3 years old) and my husband to Ethiopia. Moving two small kids to Addis Ababa for a year did give some limitations to what could be done, in a practical sense. More importantly, however, being a mother of small children I had some limits to what I could do. On the one hand emotionally, which to a certain extent guided me in selecting holy water sites for in-depth-study. On the other hand, for security reasons, not choosing those where there tended to be users with aggressive behaviours. A third element, which I believe mitigate the risk of bias towards the field, is my long experience and previous research in Addis Ababa as well as other parts of Ethiopia.[25]

Participant observation

In this research project, participant observation holds an important place. The ethnography presented in this thesis is to a large degree based on observations and interviews made at holy water sites. I visited 30 different holy water sites in Addis Ababa, out of a total of approximately 100-150 sites. The sites were scattered across the city. As a start, I made a small survey asking fourteen people to name ten holy water sites that were the most important in their view and used the result as one of the parameters guiding my selection of sites for study. Then, as I started visiting sites and talking to people, other sites were mentioned. In some cases, I visited a site when I had the opportunity. It could be close to an area where I would go, stories people told caught my interest, and I did choose to visit as many as thirty to get an impression of the variety of sites that exist. I also chose one at which I spent more time and a few that I visited more often than the rest. More specifically, twelve holy water sites were

[25] I conducted research for my Mphil degree (Hovedfag) in History of Religion at the University of Oslo when I studied life of Ethiopian Orthodox nuns. Secondly, I was part of a group carrying out research on the election process in 2000 for the Institute of Human Rights and NORDEM, University of Oslo. In addition, I have been travelling to Ethiopia since 2000 until the latest field work which I enticed in 2015, however, mostly in the capacity as a journalist.

visited once, fourteen were visited two to five times, three were visited more than five times, and one site was visited twenty times. The total of participant observation at holy water sites is 89 sessions, spending between one and five hours each time. On average, I visited a holy water site two-three mornings a week throughout the field research period. During the visits, I met people and had informal conversations, which also generated opportunities to carry out interviews with some of the people later. Sometimes a lot of activity took place, and many interesting things happened. In other sessions, little was going on, just a few people doing the 'normal' things. However, the important sequences of observation do not necessarily stem from the 'exciting' observation sessions. On the contrary, the quiet mornings, with fewer people, were often productive hours. Suddenly, something would happen, or I could just pay attention to the small things, have time to integrate the observations, wait for people rather than approach them (Tafjord 2018). Observing what seemed to be everyday activity at the sites was valuable information per se.

In addition to participant observation at holy water sites, I visited some of my informants' homes. These visits, along with long experience with visiting Ethiopians' homes during my time in the country, gave me information about how people organise their lives around religion. Moreover, I spent time in a monastery located in central Addis Ababa. There I got the chance to discuss the issues with nuns and monks, people who are usually more connected to the teachings of the Church.

Participant observation bears in it a paradox, as it requires from the researcher to both participate and maintain a cognitive distance to the field of study (Gobo 2008). The researcher can choose from various positions on an axis from distance to intimate contact and full participation (in religious studies an example of the more extreme type could be conversion), the 'go native' stance (Harvey 2011).

Participant observation involves another paradox. The more I immerse in the field of study, the more I adapt to the social reality and acquire a way of behaving and understanding the world closer to the people whom I study. This closeness makes the

behaviour seem natural, and it becomes more of a challenge to distinguish and grasp the field of study (Gobo 2008, p.7).

I found that a practice of waiting and of awareness[26] was important in this process (for an account of awareness (see for instance: Skottun 2021; Yontef 1993). This practice of awareness rests on what has been established by psychologists, that we tend to complete our observations and make them a complete whole and that we structure our perceptions into figure ground (Köhler 1970). Knowing and being aware of these facts, it is possible to shift focus to something in the ground and thus enlarge the observation. Observation can be carried out in many ways, and the result depends on the person carrying out the observation. It depends upon what I prioritise to focus on during an observation, as well as what I bracket off in that specific period. In addition, an ability to be reflexive and able to bracket off that which may influence me from my background is important. The use of this reflexive capacity to become aware of prejudices and own horizon of understanding is crucial for the research process.

Awareness of the situation and of myself are in my view tools to mitigate the risk of collecting random observations. This kind of conscious or aware observation, focusing on different aspects, is an ongoing process as well, and it enables me to be open and at the same time focused. It is different from for example structured observation. Structured observation is a method that is planned, scheduled observation carried out in a 'natural' field setting (Stausberg 2011). It includes preparing a coding scheme and a plan for when and where and how many times to carry out the observation. Such an observational method can easily miss important information if it is not combined with awareness.

The other aspect of the method is participation. I chose to participate without immersing myself into practices like holy water baptism, other than when I was invited to. For example, once an *aṭmaki*[27] invited me to participate in the cross healing, where

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[26] This take on awareness is inspired by my gestalt psychological training background.
[27] A priest who works at a holy water site.

I experienced physically how he used the cross and his hands gently patting my back. Another time, at another holy water site where I was for the first time and someone showed me around, the aṭmaki serving in the showers decided to give me a treatment, and he threw water at my face with great force. I felt I got some more understanding of the healing practices, a bodily experience of power. These kinds of invitations were rare. Apart from that, I did participate in the movements the others made during prayers, and I did kiss priests' crosses when I was offered.

The informants

Informants were chosen in a combination of opportunistic sampling and snowball sampling, and most were met at holy water sites. I chose to follow up with further interviews when an informant provided rich information and was willing to be part of the research project.

The informants can be grouped into four according to the extent of interaction and number and type of interviews and conversations I had with them. Most informants did not have any kind of relations to each other. An exception is the members in the maḫbär, where I interviewed several of the members and the involved priests several times.

Group one consists of the nine key informants, whose stories are briefly presented in Appendix 2. These informants were interviewed repeatedly, focusing on elaborating more of their life history. They were all people I met at holy water sites. I spent more time with these informants first and foremost based on their interest in and willingness to spend time with me to talk about issues concerning illness, illness causation and healing. I followed them over time and met them several times. Some of them I visited in their homes and sat with them in church yards and holy water sites. The backgrounds of the nine key informants are varied both in terms of age, education

level, profession and family background[28]. Their ages span from 25 up to approximately 60 years old. One is illiterate, one studied at university level and the others varied from a few years of schooling up to a finalised grade 12. Workwise, one was a housewife, with previous experience as a house worker. Another was a university student. Most in this group had or had previously had different jobs. There was a shop keeper, a government employee, a cleaner, a mechanic in a garage and a shoe repairman. There were also two priests whom I talked with many times throughout the period of field research, and whom I also categorise as key informants.

Group two consists of around ten others who were willing to tell their stories, and whom I met from one to three times, which means that the degree of contextualisation of the story is less. Among these, one was from Harar, nine were from Addis Ababa and its surroundings. Among the informants in this group there was a plumber, a teacher and two housewives. One was a novice that I knew from my interest and research on monastic communities in Ethiopia whose background was related to holy water. In the monastery where she lived I also met a monk and a nun who are mentioned in the thesis.

Group three is a more composite group of around twenty-five informants whom I met only once or only briefly several times. With a few of them I made narrative interviews. Other interviews with them were more thematic; focusing upon their engagement with holy water healing and related issues. In this group are a few academics, business people, students, two psychiatrists, nurses, three diaspora Ethiopians (two of them coming back for holy water), three young women who had been migrant workers in the Middle East, housewives, deacons, priests and teachers in the EOTC. And also others whose professional background I never got to know.

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[28] The ethnic background of informants was not part of the study, and informants did not focus upon ethnicity in their accounts. The open research approach chosen in the study aimed at letting informants introduce the topics of their interest, and then the topics were followed up. The issue of ethnicity was not one of those.

Group four are the 31 interviewees in the free-listing survey[29]. The respondents in this survey were recruited both at holy water sites, among acquaintances and in different areas of Addis Ababa, randomly on the street. They were for the most part from Addis Ababa, although five were from outside Addis Ababa. Their ages ranged from 18 up to 58. Half of the respondents had grade 12 and above, three had no education and the rest had some years of schooling.

Even though most informants were people I met in the context of a holy water site, I also had several informants I had met elsewhere who also reported that they used to visit holy water sites. I also mentioned holy water healing to most people I met under all kinds of circumstances and normally they would get interested and tell me about their experiences with it. Only once did I meet a person who said he did not believe in holy water healing.

Some informants feature more prominently in the text than others. This has two main reasons. Firstly, a few informants were persons I spent more time with and who yielded a larger and thicker story of their life and more in-depth explanations about issues of interest for this study. Secondly, some have given more clear or well formulated examples of points I aim at making, which makes them more useful as examples. It should be noted that not all key informants are cited in the thesis.

Again, I want to underline that this qualitative research cannot generalise to larger groups in the population. The methods used to identify informants in this study do not secure a randomized selection, and the informants who became key informants (see Appendix 2) were users of holy water sites with long experience with bäššəta (illness, disease). There is a possibility that the informants belong to a category of users who are more marginalized in Ethiopian society. This must be taken into consideration when looking at the findings of this study. Some informants have chosen what may be

[29] See separate part of this chapter.

quite radical viewpoints concerning illness, illness causation and healing. Even though several of the key informants have suffered since early childhood, other informants to this study with less marginalized lives express similar views upon the main topics under scrutiny. The many hours of participant observation have also contributed to balancing the representations of the key informants. However, the use of opportunistic sampling and snowballing necessarily has made an impact upon the selection of informants and thus the findings, and the views represented in this thesis are necessarily closely connected to their views and experiences.

Field notes

Field notes are another important part of the material which has informed this thesis. During the observations I made notes, and I spent much time after the participant observation to fill in the notes and add from my memory. I finished my notes as soon as possible after, sometimes over breakfast with my assistant, or alone. These two processes would be slightly different, because with my assistant I added some of our discussions, and then I finished the field notes on my own later.

Another aspect I find important is how I reproduce what I have observed in field notes. Field notes are the beginning of the analysis, and never mere observations. A phenomenological description of what happens is different from an interpretation. In my practice I aim at being as true to what I see as possible, and I see it as a way of assuring the quality and trustworthiness of my work. The last version will be of much greater use than the interpretation because it gives way to an interpretation in the analysis later in the course of the research.

There is a risk of describing the empirical material through an ethnocentric lens. For instance, terms like traditional medicine, mental health, physical illness, traditional healer or biomedicine all have connotations and belong to a certain cultural sphere, as well as to a time in history. However, terms necessarily must be understood through the lens of the ethnographer, who aspires to understand the emic perspective(s) and

interpret or translate to a common language. I have found the translating of terms in this research challenging because of the difficulty in expressing the contextualised meaning of terms. Moreover, drawing the line between emic and ethic perspectives is harder the more 'native' one becomes.

Terms

I have chosen to use local terms for concepts that are challenging to translate and/or have strong connotations in the English language, for example words for sorcerers, magic or sorcery. These terms have a different meaning in Amharic. For instance, the term *mätät* involves a broad range of meanings, practices, intentions and results, so a translation to 'sorcery', 'witchcraft' or 'magic' does not cover the meaning. I have thus chosen to contextually explain some terms and use the Amharic term. These are: *bäššəta, ᵓəmnät, maẖbär, mätät*, *nəssəḥa,* and *ṣäbäl bota.* I sometimes use English terms, particularly for bäššəta (illness) and ṣäbäl bota (holy water site) for better readability. All the terms that are used in the local language or are mentioned in Amharic are listed in Appendix 1.

The free-listing survey

Classification and categorisation are to a certain degree important in this research, as it is generally in research. Classification is necessary and it is done constantly. Classes of things or categories give meaning and system and are also useful for enabling comparisons. On the negative side, classifications can be simplifying and reduce complexity, they highlight but are never exhaustive, and they leave something out.

Initially, one of my main challenges was to know which terms to use for one of the key topics of my research: illness or disease. With what kind of language do I talk to people to get the contextualised understandings of a certain topic? Which are the correct words to use in asking questions about people's perceptions of a phenomenon? Which are the contextualised words, not the researcher's words and culture imposed upon the informants? Without insight into the emic understandings of language and

classifications, the research may not be of much value. It may tell us more about the researcher's terminology, classifications and culture and very little about the people he or she has studied.

To look for these contextualised terminologies I carried out a free-listing survey with the intention of understanding how respondents categorise illnesses. Free-listing is particularly useful to elicit information on categories, classes or cultural domains. Free-listing typically requires a sample size of no more than 20-30 respondents (Stausberg 2011, pp.245-55). 'Free-listing is a tool to explore salient data, i.e. data that is widely shared/distributed and considered relevant, either in terms of being distinctive and attention-grabbing or typical.' (Stausberg 2011, p.246).

Free-listing aims at finding out how people classify things and what kind of terminology they use by asking them to list all x they know (Stausberg 2011). Stausberg argues that 'it can also be useful for other purposes where it is important to know the vocabulary people use to conceptualise things, events and affairs in the world' (Stausberg 2011, p.246). Initially I[30] intended to ask the question: 'List all illnesses/diseases you can think of.', but after the first test interviews I expanded the free-list survey by adding three questions. The first one, 'List all illnesses/diseases associated with mental problems that you can think of.', was added with the aim of trying to discern if or how the respondents distinguish physical from mental illness. The second, 'List all reasons for illness/disease that you can think of.', was included because I wanted to get a first impression of how illness was explained. The third question I added was: 'List all illnesses/diseases caused by evil spirits.', as I had got the impression from initial participant observation at holy water sites, that evil spirits had central roles and were of high importance.

[30] It should be noted that after five test interviews, most of the free-listing interviews were carried out by an assistant.

The results were useful, as they generated a list of different kinds of illnesses and an initial impression of what Ethiopian Orthodox associate with illness/disease. Some of the respondents would list a lot of illnesses that are 'spiritual', and others would list more bio-medical illnesses. However, when asked about reasons for illnesses, they would say that all illnesses are caused by the Devil. The use of this method generated many questions that I could build further on. However, simply asking informants to list illness did not clarify to me the classification of illness, and the distinctions that are commonly used in medical anthropology and literature about illness in Ethiopia did not seem to apply.

Interviews, life history interviews and informal conversations

Another large component of the empirical material are interviews, many of them informal conversations[31], and I have collected 17 life histories based on a number of interviews. One of the life histories that I collected I have excluded from the material I have analysed because the informant deliberately stopped the process of being interviewed.

In order to open up the conversations, I invited my interlocutors to tell me about their life (Ammerman 2013), with the intention of collecting stories that revealed their way of talking about illness and healing, without asking specific questions about the topics. I was also in search of which term for illness they used most commonly, which turned out to be *bäššəta.* Because of the context of the holy water site, where I often met the informants, the stories were usually narrated around events leading up to the decision of embarking on a holy water healing process or the moment that they perceived to be the healing moment. After that, I was able to link new questions to what they had told me. This strategy, I believe, revealed their interests and what were the important topics to them. The way informants link events and present their lives is not random, but has

[31] By conversation, I do not mean everyday conversations. Conversations that I had would always be influenced by the fact that I was a foreigner and informants knew I was there as a researcher.

in it a logic, a rhetoric, which presents a meaningful story. These stories are not objective, but created, constructed in a particular context (Riessman 1993).

Analysing such narratives gave useful insights into the research topics. To go beyond the terminology of the researcher in qualitative research, life history interviews, informal conversations and participant observation in combination provide a broad ethnographic material. Adding to the life history interviews, I made more thematic interviews and discussed with a variety of people I met, most of them at holy water sites, but also academics and other people I was acquainted with during field research.

The empirical material

When to stop the research process can represent a challenge. However, I did find that I reached a point of saturation when little new information ticked in and the information did no longer alter the interpretations or bring a need to reshuffle the findings.

The empirical material is composed of different types of material: field notes, interviews, life histories of people met at holy water sites generated through interviews. Most of the narratives took several interview sessions to gather and up to ten hours or more of conversations. In addition, other kinds of interviews were carried out, for example discussions with clergy and interviews with Ethiopian Orthodox Christians whom I did not get acquainted with at holy water sites. The interviews made outside holy water sites, although fewer than the former, did put the ethnography and information gathered at the sites in perspective and confirmed the importance of holy water to Ethiopian Orthodox Christians. The material also consists of collected written material, including 58 miracle stories published locally by private persons or associations of people who support one particular holy water site. I have also collected sermons given orally at holy water sites.

I have partly recorded interviews and partly made written notes. Both have advantages and disadvantages. Recordings give the opportunity to go back to and check information (when the translations are dubious). On the other hand, taking notes is

efficient in the interview session, because then I needed to understand all of what was said to follow up with questions. Moreover, I had the text immediately available for follow up interviews instead of waiting for a translation. In addition to recorded interviews, I have a special category of recordings of spirits (what people claimed to be spirits, that is) that talk. These recordings were later transcribed and translated by my research assistants.

Research assistants and language

During this and previous research in Ethiopia I studied Amharic and I was able to communicate in the local language. However, as Amharic is a very rich and complex language with a tradition of implicit meaning and poetic expressions (Levine 1972), it is vitally important to collaborate with a research assistant who can interpret interviews and translate texts. Research assistants[32] were therefore essential to the project, both with language and interpretation and as door openers to the holy water sites and to contact with people. In addition, a very important function of the research assistants was to discuss topics further and, in that way, strengthen the understanding of the cultural context I studied.

I had two[33] main assistants during the research period. The first one was a male student in his 20s. The second one was a female junior researcher also in her 20s. Both were trained in anthropology, and both had knowledge about and experience with the EOTC. The assistants have been important discussion partners during the field research, and they have made an important contribution to the research process. I view it as another voice among the informants, rather than a more expert voice, and I have kept the information clearly marked as conversations with research assistants. The aim was to reduce the risk of being too influenced by their views, as we spent much time

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[32] I worked with master student of social anthropology at Addis Ababa University (AAU) Yerosan Mesfin, and junior researcher in social anthropology employed at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (AAU) Tirsit Sahle. For a short interim period, I worked with PhD student of social anthropology Yohannes Berhanemeskel. In addition, I was helped by Yidnekachew Tadesse with translating Amharic texts.

[33] In addition to, as mentioned, one assistant whom I worked with for a short period.

together and discussed in depth. Another dimension of working with research assistants is how much the research assistant influences the interviews and the contact with informants when interviews were recorded, and the details in the conversations were sometimes incomprehensible to me. However, the challenge was minor because of my language skills, and I was always present during interviews, and always the one who asked the questions.

Stylistic conventions

A few remarks are in place concerning stylistic conventions. I do not transliterate Amharic words that are commonly used in other academic literature on Ethiopia but use what I find is a common way of writing local words. In addition, I do not translierate names and places. For all other Amharic terms, I use the transliteration system of the commonly accepted Encyclopedia Aethiopica (Uhlig 2003, 1:xx-xxi). Writing about spirits perceived as inhabiting a person may bring confusion as to whom the pronoun refers to. Therefore, I have chosen to use 'it' when I refer to spirits, although spirits are gendered, to distinguish the person from the spirit.

Interpretation of the material

Analysis represents a challenge in qualitative research both during the field research and afterwards in the encounter with a large ethnographic material. The analysis starts during field research and can go on, presumably, forever. Analysis in qualitative research has its challenges, as it generates a rich material, but finding an analytical path through can be demanding. And the analytical strategies are not clear-cut (Bryman 2012, p.565).

Technically, part of the analysis was to transfer all field notes and interview notes to the data analysis program NVIVO. I have used this program mainly to search for topics and words in the written material. There has been an element of thematic analysis; looking for repetitions, indigenous typologies, similarities and differences (Bryman 2012). Thematic analysis and coding had its limitations, as much of the

material I gathered is stories that have an inherent logic and the narratives as a whole represented information and less when it was fragmented into topics (Riessman 1993). I found it most useful to analyse narratives vertically. I read the notes over and over to discover the main elements of the story, the healing process and the emphasis of the person whom I interviewed or who told me about their life.

Trust, relationships and challenges in the field

'For that I tell you I will be thanked by the [Church] Fathers.' Meseret said to me. She was a *ṣäbältäňňa*[34] at a holy water site living in a church compound as part of the healing process. She was in her thirties and became one of my regular informants. She lived in a rented room near a holy water site. The Church had constructed buildings with small rooms for *ṣäbältäňňa* to rent. I visited her every now and then and we always talked for hours. On one occasion when I visited, she had problems with the others living there, who had made accusations and threatened to go to the police. The accusations had somehow to do with the conversations she had with me. My research assistant felt uncomfortable about the situation; because he felt that, the informant risked getting into more trouble. After some thinking through with the assistant I decided not to visit her anymore, even though she wanted to continue our discussions. She expressed that she wanted to continue explaining to me all her insights and what she found meaningful.

There is a need to try to keep a distance in order to secure a kind of academic neutrality (Harvey 2011). However, doing field research is a social, reciprocal activity. Care is one ingredient in field work, care for and respect towards those among whom one does the research (Harvey 2011). The care for people from whom I search information and people who are willing to participate, share and explain.

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[34] A person who participates in the healing practices at holy water sites.

However, informants are not there only to provide me with information. They may also have interests of their own. In my field research, I sometimes experienced people who tried to convince me to find true faith and convert to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Meseret expressed that she would gain something spiritually from talking to me. She would get *waga*, which literally means a prize or reward. She would gain something in a religious sense which she would get from the 'fathers' and God. Another interest, and perhaps more common, was interest in financial assistance. Eventually several of my regular informants would present to me a problem they or someone in their family had, hoping I would be able to contribute to solve the problem.

The extraordinary difference between us, my relative wealth and their relative poverty, was obvious. The relationship that we established over time generated some social and moral obligations. After years in the country, I had enculturated a practice that in brief relationships I was able to, and culturally allowed to, reject requests for money. However, in long term relationships it is less acceptable. I did contribute to people, although I found that it challenged the research neutrality. However, not sharing would be problematic as the relationships that grew along with time spent together also contained such obligations. I will return to this under the headline 'Ethics' later in the chapter. However, I want to raise the issue because field research is necessarily to be with people. Trying to keep a distance and a neutrality did not always help the project. I was part of a social arena and the people I met wanted to place me, to know who I was and what I was doing there and see if I was trustworthy.

Building relationships also creates problems or issues to be solved while conducting research in poor communities, as I have already mentioned. Informants had high expectations of gaining something from the relationship, and even though I in principle did not offer gifts, there were a few exceptions. When people get into situations that threaten their lives or when a mother is not able to visit her son in prison because she cannot afford the two-dollar bus ticket, I chose not to decline. However, most of the time I did not contribute, which once resulted in ending the series of

interviews with one of the informants, as s/he refused to meet me anymore after the third interview. S/he said, ‘I have met you three times and I did not get anything.’

The contributions I provided, if any, were normally limited. However, in one incident, I made an exception. I helped a girl and her mother[35] that I encountered at a holy water site and took them to hospital. Ironically, colliding worlds in practice. The background is as follows: I had spent months going to healing sites. These sites are often full of suffering people, around the gates there are plenty of beggars, children and people with apparent illnesses of all sorts. Often the sensory input is intense in these areas, both sound, visual and smell, and also feeling, when beggars came to touch me hoping for a penny, the chill in the early morning and the feelings inside of despair.

After months of this, I was not able to resist one little girl I met who was in pain. Tears were running down her swollen cheek and her mother sitting there seemingly passive while the daughter tried to get a comforting hug from her. Long story short, I searched for help for her. The girl had an infection in her tooth and needed immediate medical care. The tooth was all decayed and the dentist we eventually found who would receive her for free, took it out. The girl was well after some time, but her mother was ill with Aids and died a couple of months later[36].

Whether it is right or wrong to give to informants is not straightforward in this context, and I chose to handle it in what I consider to be a humane way. I spent a lot of time with people, which contributed to establishing trust. I spent one year from August 2015 up to end of July 2016 in Addis Ababa to carry out the research. The lengthy period was essential in making relationships and being able to follow up over time. I got to know my informants and their troubles, and they shared with me their stories and their feelings.

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[35] They were not my informants.

[36] The girl was subsequently adopted by an Ethiopian family.

Trust was the key to receiving information, the key to being able to do my work. Being able to explain to informants about my religion in a contextualised way was one way of building trust. As shown above, the issue of being accepted and trusted was to a great extent influenced by religion, especially my religion and my faith, the religious practices I participated in and the religious materials that I used. In addition, the people I was associated with (in relation to) made an impact on trust, such as the research assistants, who functioned as door openers. They had to be able to behave in such a way that people perceived them as 'one of us', particularly in the environment of the Church and the practices of its followers.

Ethics

Formalities

Clearance for the project was obtained from Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). Research permit with the Department of Anthropology, University of Addis Ababa and a work permit from the Ethiopian authorities, with a residence permit from the Immigration Office. I was also granted a permission to carry out research at holy water sites and churches from the EOTC. The clearance from NSD was based on having a written consent with informants. Moreover, I have discussed and clarified with NSD that the use of interviews with oral consent agrees with personal data protection and clearance to use recordings of 'spirit talk' without consent. I have also anonymised all informants to lessen the risk that any of my informants may be traceable.

Ethical dilemmas

There are several challenging ethical issues linked to conducting field research and dilemmas like the one discussed above about supporting informants financially. Doing anthropological field research is also a moral activity. I want to bring to the fore important ethical challenges that I must deal with in this research project.

Meeting people, talking to them about issues that may be personal and highly sensitive to them, I was aware could represent a challenge. I felt that there was a need to pay attention to people's interest in reactions to the interviews. In general, I experienced that people often approached me and that they wanted to tell their story of redemption. In the end I did not consider this problematic, however, I did keep it in mind throughout the field research period. In this section I want to point to two other concerns.

The first concern is about interviewing someone who my informant or themselves claim to be a spirit. The second dilemma is concerned with how to deal with encountering abusive behaviour as part of the religious practice when conducting field research.

Interviewing spirits

Sometimes during participant observation, I would meet a person who was claimed by others or by themselves to be not the person in front of me, but a spirit. Spirits participated in social interaction and healing rituals of various kinds. Sometimes I did not know until after some time. One main indicator was how people talk to women in he-form, indicating that a spirit has taken control. Another was how men and women behaved in certain spirit-behaviour, often defined in contrast to 'normal' behaviour. There were situations where I understood or was told that I was participating in a conversation with a spirit rather than a human being, which was my first assumption.

Concerning the recordings of spirits, which I have already mentioned, the case is rather different. These recordings seem to represent a genre more than individual accounts, and NSD has given permission to use these recordings on this basis. This means that if there is any personal information in these texts, this information will not be used, but the focus while using the spirits' talking is the genre and what it expresses about the research topic. In addition, the recordings are, as far as I am aware, among

few and as such an important ethnographic contribution around anthropological and religious studies.

This topic, interviewing spirits, does raise interesting and challenging issues, for instance that issues of responsibility are raised when a person claims that s/he is not that person. The challenges thus relate to research methods as well as ethical challenges which relate to the following point.

Violence in the field - Incompatible ethical imperatives?

During the field research, I encountered violence and abusive treatment on several occasions. This represented a challenge in several ways. Firstly, locally, many people interpreted it as a necessary part of the healing process. Secondly, on some occasions I had to decide if I was to act and defend the person I saw as a victim because I was worried about the consequences of the abusive treatment. I felt that it concerned questions of impartiality. The Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences, Humanities, Law, and Theology (NESH guidelines)[37] were useful here. The guidelines emphasise that '(…) impartiality in assessment and openness regarding uncertainty are common obligations in research ethics, irrespective of the values, positions or perspectives of the researchers.' (NESH 2016, p.10). The ethical imperative of impartiality should be fulfilled through dialogue with the locals and presented in a way that shows respect for their values and opinions. However, field research is always situated in a social and historical context, which is never neutral. There is necessarily a plurality of opinions and a 'horizon' that is constantly changing (Agar 1980). There are also underlying power structures and social hierarchies that the research must relate to (Armbruster and Laerke 2008). And lastly, there is a great risk of legitimising

[37] The Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees are independent agencies for questions regarding research ethics and investigation of misconduct within all subject areas. For more information see https://www.forskningsetikk.no/en/

abusive practices and suppression, discrimination and stigmatisation of certain groups in society during the research as well as in the presentation of the research.

Let me present two examples. I have chosen these two examples to show that the abusive behaviour was carried out in physically abusing both women and men.

Exorcism or abuse? Case example 1

As I enter the area of the holy spring it is first quiet, but as I enter the gate, I see a long queue of people outside a house and as I am approaching it, I hear screams, loud noises, clapping, music and spiritual songs. There are many people, humid air, people moving, a priest blessing people with his cross amid a crowd, a few men running around helping out.

A young woman lies still on the floor. I stand close to her. I am facing the prayer place, with a large poster of Mary. The woman is still lying there. After a while the priest approaches her with his cross, which has a long metal 'spear' which he pokes at her. She moves a little, he continues, suddenly she jumps up with explosive force, tries to run out through the door. Three men come quickly and hold her. The priest talks to her, puts the cross to her forehead. She moves, it seems that she is trying to escape from them, the priest says something, she tries to get away from the cross. The men tie her hands on her back with a special kind of church candles. She does not calm down. One of the men disappears for a while and comes back with a burner with charcoal and a thick blanket, he adds incense to the charcoal and the smoke becomes heavy. He places the burner on the floor, the men hold the teenage girl over the burner so that her head is inside the smoke, they put the blanket over her head, it covers every inch surrounding her and the burner, they keep her there for a couple of minutes. When they take the blanket away, she is calmer than before. After some time, they put her down on the floor. She lies down on her side.

Exorcism or abuse? Case example 2

A group of men with chains pass me as I enter the gate of the compound of the holy water healing site. Some have their ankles chained together, some are chained to someone else, some have chains both on their hands and ankles. The healing site is generally crowded with people early in the morning. One man who is particularly agitated, is taken by a couple of men and tied to a tree, his legs and hands on each side of the tree, sitting on the ground with his stomach and head facing the tree. He is left there.

Reflections upon the case examples

These two episodes are but two examples among several. As mentioned above, there ought to be a dialogue with the people who are being studied when one does research on other cultures to gain knowledge of local traditions, traditional knowledge and social matters. Moreover: 'When conducting research on other cultures, either in other countries or in minority cultures, researchers should avoid using classifications or designations that allow unreasonable generalization.' (NESH 2016, p.26). One of the main challenges is to reach an understanding that one can be sure does really resonate with the local values, opinions and meaning creation.

When contextualizing the two case stories, there are several factors that form the background of the rationale of the treatment. The general context of the research is the EOTC, where suffering and pain can be central to spiritual advancement, for instance in the ascetic practices of monks and nuns. In Ethiopian society, violence is widely tolerated, for instance in disciplining children or wives, and a culture of authority where vertical relationships (Malara and Boylston 2016), which often implies that people accept the place they have in the hierarchy, is dominant. Among Ethiopian Orthodox Christians, illness is commonly understood as caused by spirits as part of a spiritual fight and must be fought. Beating and other kinds of forceful treatment is understood as harming the spirit that possesses the person and thus not the person him-

or herself. This kind of healing practice is not unusual, based on the idea that the evil spirit must be beaten to be defeated and forced to leave. Moreover, an effective treatment should involve a spirit that reacts, substances coming out of the body and abnormal behaviour. The shouting spirits are by some priests seen as an ideal, or a proof of their spiritual strength and power (Berhane-Selassie 2015), and my presence could then even increase the violence.

There are, however, accounts of people who express that they do not want to participate in this kind of treatment, and priests that express that they find it unnecessary to use force of any kind during exorcisms. For the part of those who are in chains and forced to treatment, taking their views into consideration is challenging, because they for the most part, I assume, are what in a biomedical tradition would be categorised as mentally ill. However, their situation should somehow be included in the interpretative process of the research, for instance whether their human rights are violated.

My understanding developed gradually as I spent time at healing sites, not only making interviews with people, but also spending time there and, to a certain extent, experiencing what was going on. During the observation of the teenage girl in case one, the most dominant thought I had is based on a bodily sensation that I got envisioning myself in her place. This made me think that her experience must be claustrophobic and traumatizing, as she was a small, young woman held by three men as she was trying to escape. Continuing that, my thought went to that of abuse, the priest and the helpers' actions seemed abusive to me, from views I have on abuse and violence, power relations and gender. And during the session with the blanket and the smoke I was worried about her and even asked myself the question whether she would survive. However, no one else seemed worried and her relative was standing nearby. Also, in the second case nobody reacted in a way that indicated that something was out of context or wrong. Most people were busy doing other things. Everything seemed normal to everyone else.

In an article, Berhane-Selassie and Müller (Berhane-Selassie 2015) argue that the original tradition of healing in this Christian culture is not one of violence and abuse, but rather that the one that is really gifted can heal without touching the patient at all. The practice of the group of priests in case two was like what is described in the article as abusive treatment during holy water healing rituals. They argue that the EOTC does not allow this kind of treatment and that these priests act without the permission of the EOTC.

I find that these two opinions or traditions exist side by side, and there are many nuances in how healing and exorcism practices are carried out. Even if the dominant local understanding does not label the forced treatment and the beating abusive, others express the opposite: that lay people do not want such treatment and that the clergy finds it unnecessary.

On the one hand, if I go along with the dominant perspective, I risk being part of the abuse. I must take into consideration another ethical imperative: The responsibility for avoiding harm (guideline number 12). 'Researchers are responsible for ensuring that participants are not exposed to serious physical harm or other severe or unreasonable strain as result of the research' (NESH 2016, p.19). The interpretation of causing harm is broad and includes everyday discomfort, risk of re-traumatisation, serious or unreasonable pain or stress.

In my research context, this means that being present at the healing sites, engaging in dialogue and observing the violence people are being exposed to, may legitimise the violence and because of this cause discomfort, pain, stress and/or re-traumatisation. Is a combination of the imperative of impartiality and dialogue with the imperative of causing no harm possible?

On the other hand, my presence could possibly also work as a moderator of the violent practices, if the practitioner understood my background and that I would see it as 'wrong'. However, I see this option as less likely. I was working in an environment that had little understanding of cultural relativism. I should make an interpretation that

builds on knowledge of local traditions, local knowledge and social matters and 'take seriously the participants' understanding of themselves' (Guideline 16) (NESH 2016, p.22). In my research context, however, the understanding of the field generates problems as the healing practices contain elements of violence. Research on these practices does necessarily involve the researcher being present when the rituals are performed, and by being there observing the practices I can be part of the legitimisation of the practice. When I do not react in any way to what is going on, I confirm the perspective that these actions are acceptable, and thus people can be harmed through this legitimisation.

I had to be able to distinguish between local values and cultural differences, and at the same time recognise other fundamental values. In other words, there is a limit to how far the researcher can and should go in accepting the local perspectives after having carried out research based on dialogue and reached interpretations that are coherent with the studied culture. I argue that there are limitations when it comes to legitimisation of abusive practices and forced treatment during religious rituals, in particular in the two examples where the actors are women and mentally ill men, which are both vulnerable groups in Ethiopian society.

Going back to the beginning of the chapter, the ethnohermeneutical aim is to reach a third perspective. This happens in the sense that the local perspectives are understood considering the background of the researcher and through dialogue with the locals. However, in the context of this study, the common opinion is that violence and abusive treatment are good and even a requirement for the healing process.

Relating to the part of my research that concerns these two examples, A Geertz' third perspective consists of practices, values and opinions that go against each other and seem irreconcilable. To put it simply: some are values and opinions that lead to abusive practices and some that go against the same. Armin Geertz' concept of a third perspective as a common ground, a unified understanding that transcends the two, is hard to establish, at least at this stage of the research process. I believe that the

presentation of the research somehow must distance itself from the abuse, which is perhaps even more important when the researcher is a white European. This situation contains an even more asymmetric situation, for obvious reasons.

The examples chosen are not unique in my research but are two of the more extreme ones. In reflection upon these cases, implicit and explicit ethical commitments may be seen to conflict with each other. They challenge different ethical implications of doing research on and among people. As I have argued, the criteria of dialogue and understanding respecting the other are met through the approach carried out. However, the ethical imperative of causing no harm conflicts with the first and with the requirement of impartiality. My view is that the researcher has a responsibility towards expressing critical views of the treatment as described in the two examples in order not to contribute to or legitimise the fact that people are harmed. This is particularly important in these cases that concern people who are often discriminated against in Ethiopian society: women and marginalised men. This could be done by writing academic work that expresses criticism towards the practice and engage in an academic discussion on this topic.

Trustworthiness and credibility in the project

The research was carried out over a period of 11 months[38], however, based on previous research in the country, from 1998-2000. The methods employed were, as mentioned, participant observation, informal interviews, in-depth interviews, a small survey and informal conversations.

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[38] Fieldwork necessarily involves many practicalities. Establishing myself as a researcher in Ethiopia and travelling with my family both demanded getting many practicalities sorted out. While starting the research a substantial amount of time was spent on this (finding a house, kindergarden, driving license, research permit, other permits, finding research assistants and training them, buying a car and so on). I also continued language training throughout the field research. Towards the end of the field research, clearing everything for moving back to Norway did also consume time. Hence the main research work was carried out in October, November and December 2015 and February- mid July 2016.

Prolonged field research is one way of assuring the quality and a sense of credibility of the research. There is time to spend a substantial number of hours conducting participant observation and going back to places of interest. In this research I used a strategy of going both broad and deep, both visiting a significant number of sites for participant observation and visiting few sites repeatedly for deep and thicker description (Geertz 1994). In this way, I was able to make field notes from many sessions and compare similarities and differences. Moreover, I was able to point out varieties and practices that were unusual.

The use of more than one method to collect data on the same topic is another way of assuring the quality of the research by triangulation. The combination of methods also strengthens the credibility of the research (Roof 2011). The methodological approach in this study consists of material constructed using first and foremost participant observation, conversations and interviews. The free-listing survey gave additional information which I used to further secure the quality of the observations and interviews, and vice versa. This was particularly useful because the respondents were a combination of people encountered in the street and at holy water sites. The use of different types of information gathered through employing different methods gives more certainty to the findings in the research. Qualitative research does, however, not give the researcher the opportunity to draw generalising conclusions. Nevertheless, the combination of methods and an extensive research period was more likely to secure empirical material from different angles complementing each other, a triangulation of the research. Moreover, the prolonged period of research gave ground for ensuring a high level of congruence between concepts and observations (LeCompte and Goetz 1982). These factors provide a sense of trustworthiness and internal validity to the research project.

Concluding remarks

Conducting field research is to immerse oneself into a social context with constant ethical challenges and interpretative obstacles. The contradictions in much of what I

have presented in this chapter have both haunted me and carried me on through the research process. The combination of methods that I have used has given me a chance to construct a broad range of material which points in many directions, ethnography which tells many stories, all contained in the pervasive practice of holy water healing located at holy water sites.

Chapter 4: *Bäššəta*: Illness and illness causation

The rain suddenly started pouring down and Abba Abraham pushed my assistant and me gently towards a roofed area of the church compound. The churchyard was nearly empty apart from the long queue of people still waiting for the holy oil healing service carried out by a *baḥtawi* (hermit) in a room in another part of the compound, and several people sitting around us; one was the guard of the compound, the others perhaps surprised by the rain. Next to us, there were plastic bags and some textiles. A man came, took off his shoes, placed them next to the pile of plastic bags and sat down for his meal. He ate slowly for a long time, chickpeas and *ənǧära* (sour fermented flatbread). Probably blessed food from an annual saint celebration. It seemed like he felt at home in his corner of the sacred compound. Perhaps he lived there on a temporary base.

We were talking about holy water as a cure of illness, and that holy water was not the only curing entity. Abba Abraham, a key priest informant to this study, explained: Abba Abraham: This is water (pointing at the rain), but when the spirit of God is on it, it has healing power. Several verses in the Bible talk about this. Priests[39] have been given the authority to cure. A girl with a spirit (referring to Acts 16:16) generated income for her lords with the help of the spirit. Then the apostles came, called her spirit, and Paul exorcised the spirit. This shows how the word has healing power.

Camilla: Was she ill? I asked, referring to the girl with the spirit in Acts 16. I had heard many times at holy water sites people talking about those with spirits as sick people, and I wanted the priest's view on it.

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[39] One of my informants who was a deacon, explained that 'We believe that God's spirit is in priests' (Interview, Addis Ababa, May 2016).

> Abba Abraham: Everyone who has a spirit is ill. Any spirit is against normal activities of people, so it is bäššəta (illness, disease); it impairs normal thinking and creates a distance to God.
>
> Camilla: But some say that they do not know if they have a spirit until they come to the holy water site. Can someone have a spirit without symptoms?
>
> Abba Abraham: These are also bäššəta. They do not know it, but an evil spirit is a bäššəta (*ʾərkus mänfäs bäššəta näw*). When they live worldly (*alämawi*) everything looks normal. Still, it may hinder them from being successful, but they may not go to holy places. They may gossip, steal, bring conflict, spend the night in a nightclub and tell lies. They seem healthy but are not. That is also a bäššəta. It is the multidimensional work of the evil spirit (*yäseyṭan sera bäsu näw*).[40]

Abba Abraham talks about bäššəta in a religious framework. In his perspective, bäššəta is having a spirit and being at a distance from God. Among the symptoms of bäššəta are a person's actions, exemplified in gossiping, stealing, bringing conflict, lying and spending the night in a nightclub.

One aim of this chapter is to lay out the different dimensions of how informants understand bäššəta both as they convey these in conversations and observations and by some findings from the free-listing survey (see chapter 3). Interesting complementary information was also gathered at one holy water site where the administration, although not systematically, registered which illnesses people came for.

The chapter starts by a short introduction to the terminology used for disease/illness, and then moves to give a brief background of the medical landscape that informants relate to and discusses to what extent classification of illnesses is relevant in this context. Then the chapter explores how bäššəta, according to informants to this study, is at large incomprehensible without the dimension of religious belief and practice.

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[40] Interview, Addis Ababa, 22.3.2016

This view has to do with the perception Abba Abraham exposes, that informants interpret bäššəta to be evil spirits. In a certain respect this can also be turned around: evil spirits are bäššəta. In this chapter I will explore bäššəta, looking at it as a cultural and contextual phenomenon, exploring it as informants to this study experience and interpret bäššəta.

Concerning the second topic of the chapter, illness causation, the presentation of it in this chapter is a preliminary exploration discussing models compared to the Ethiopian case and suggesting an alternative understanding. However, the topic, being one of the main topics of the thesis, will be scrutinised further in the chapters to come and the findings will be discussed in the concluding chapter.

Illness - terminology

The words *bäššəta* and *həmäm* are the most common in Amharic when talking about illness. According to the dictionary, bäššəta means sickness, disease, illness, plague (Kane 1990, p.109). Həmäm is translated as illness, sickness, disease, ailment, ache, pain (Kane 1990, p.1121). The translations of these Amharic nouns, bäššəta and həmäm, do, however, tell us little about how the terms are used and how illness is comprehended in the view of the informants in the present study. The translation into sickness, illness and disease, or ache and pain, must be understood from the point of view of the user of the word, in a cultural context. The contextualised meaning will be discussed in a later section of the chapter. Concerning terminology used by informants, the terms bäššəta and həmäm were both used. I have chosen to use one of the terms, namely bäššəta, for reasons of simplification, and because it was most commonly used among the informants to this study.

Pluralism and diversification

The medical system in Ethiopia has been described as pluralistic, where a biomedical health system coexists with traditional medical system and religious healing and spiritual and religious beliefs and practices (Wondwosen 2006; Schirripa 2010;

Levene, Phillips, and Alemu 2016; Wright 2017). It is common in the literature to make a distinction between biomedicine and traditional medicine, the latter normally categorised based on indigenous explanations which often involves religion. Holy water healing is often counted among the traditional.

A däbtära in his clinic. He has an agreement with the local government authorities to issue sick leave notes. Photo: Marta Camilla Wright

However, a question is if plurality, in the understanding ‘different traditions coexisting relatively insulated from each other within a region’ (Parkin 2013, p.125) fits best. Or perhaps the term diversification covers the current context of study, understood as: ‘Diversification implies mutual borrowing of ideas, practices and styles between them, and by implication more differentiated strategies adopted by patients in search of cure’ (Parkin 2013, p.125). Informants combine treatments and make different health-related choices from different beliefs in different traditions. There are multiple views and beliefs in different types of therapies, where biomedicine may be seen as one ‘belief system’, which informants also use, although they mix and match with herbal medicine, religious holy water therapies and more. Although I often recruited informants at holy water sites, they explain that they go to medical clinics, to

ṭänqʷay[41], to herbalists and holy water to find solutions. The order seems to vary[42]. However, what informants have in common is that bäššəta, explanations for bäššəta and healing are framed by Ethiopian Orthodox Christian beliefs and practices. Some informants are quite fundamental in their loyalty to the ṣäbäl bota and claim that the religious healing practices is the right way.

Tigist is one of the key informants to this study. She is a female informant, in her fifties from Addis Ababa. I met her several times at length, the first time more briefly at a holy water site on the other side of town from where she grew up. She struggled while carrying a jerry can filled with holy water up the stairs from where the water from the holy water source was distributed. She stopped to rest for a while, chatting with my assistant and me. This was the beginning of long talks where she shared her views and her life story. She had long experience with visiting holy water sites. Tigist said:

> According to the bible, you cannot take medicine while drinking holy water and baptizing. Some people use the holy water, instead of water, to take medicine. I believe if you are at ṣäbäl bota and drink holy water you should not need to take a medicine. The holy water itself is powerful enough to heal so it does not need a support or help. It represents weak faith to take medicine and holy water together. There are illnesses such as cancer that have no medicine but are cured by holy water. So why need to mix both while God is powerful enough to heal and needs no help from medicine to cure?[43]

Even though holding radical views in the quote above, Tigist used hospitals or medical clinics:

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[41] *Ṭänqʷay* is a traditional healer, 'wise-man', sorcerer who can also perform harmful magic like mätät.
[42] I did not focus on health seeking strategies in this research, rather I noticed that informants mentioned having tried different methods and were mixing during the time I knew them.
[43] Interview, Addis Ababa, 3.10.15

> The holy water heals illnesses such as cancer, hypertension, 'kidney', and diabetes. For instance, I had a blood pressure, but I came here, and I drank the holy water, and I was baptized. Now, I am very well. I have not been in hospital to get any sort of treatment. The only reason I go to hospital is for checkups. Once I get the tests and the doctor tells me I have this or that I come back to the ṣäbäl bota. Then I go back to him to do the tests again. And he asks me what I have done or what medicine I took to get well, and I tell him I was at ṣäbäl bota. I have not taken any medicine since I was kid except for the vaccinations.[44]

In this example, the informant uses the hospital to follow up on her health. There are examples of collaboration between the EOTC and the public health system, and between other religious practitioners and the local government, as the däbtära (above) who says he is entitled to issue poverty certificates addressed to the local government, or the holy water site administration who say that they may issue sick leave notes for employers. As exemplified, informants use different health practitioners. However, informants turn to ṣäbäl bota when they encounter challenging life situations, crises or long-lasting health problems. They may be diagnosed in hospitals, and then seek remedy at ṣäbäl bota.

Classification of illness

With the purpose of acquiring some preliminary understanding of how informants classify illness at the beginning of the field research period, I constructed a small survey[45]. It was a tool to start unfolding how people classify illnesses and related issues[46]. The informants[47] were asked to list all bäššəta they could think of. Most of the 31 informants registered a wide range of names of illnesses, a total of 104 different names (table 1 in Appendix 4). Many of the names mentioned were names taken from

[44] Interview, Addis Ababa, 3.10.15
[45] See Appendix 4.
[46] See chapter 3 for more explication and discussion about this survey.
[47] The respondents in this survey were both identified at holy water sites and in different areas of Addis Ababa, randomly on the street.

biomedical terminology like cancer or HIV/Aids. Illnesses with names related to evil spirits, magic, and the like[48] were mentioned by nearly half of the informants. There were also other ways of naming illnesses like ‘loneliness’[49] and ‘talking alone’, which may point to the importance of sociability.

Concerning statistics of illnesses that people seek healing for at holy water sites, we have little extant material to rely on. However, my research has discovered a useful local archive resource. At Entoto Kidane Mehret holy water site, the administration kept books in which *ṣäbälṭänyoč* (those who participate in the healing practices) may be registered[50] as they arrived, especially in those cases where the visitors wanted a confirmation for their sick leave from the Church.

These books had information stretching over a period of 5-6 years, with 998[51] registered people. The most frequently registered illness was *čənqät* (anxiety/stress) (254 patients). The next category consisted of various illnesses with names related to evil spirits (208 patients). The third, although lagging far behind the other two, was headache (73 patients). Other registered illnesses ranged from heart attack and cancer to back pain and stomach ache. Some registered that they came to get blessing or to help a relative.

A point worth noting is that ‘mental illness’, or *yäᵓaᵓəmro čəggər,* is listed separately from the illnesses that have names related to evil spirits. This indicates that yäᵓaᵓəmro čəggər are not always associated with evil spirits, however this overlap has sometimes been argued in other research (Alem et al. 1999; Fekadu et al. 2015). In addition, illnesses that are not labelled yäᵓaᵓəmro čəggər are also perceived as caused by Säyṭan.

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[48] The kinds mentioned are *aganint, erkus mänfäs, buda, zar, digimt, ye sew edj, ye ayer ganen, eyne tela, mätät.*
[49] Ethiopian society can be described as collectivistic rather than individualistic and being sociable is a highly esteemed value. I interpret the illness ‘loneliness’ as relating to this value.
[50] One needs to bear in mind that the way people register can be from many different perspectives, and that the being in a holy water site and not a hospital may be influential in how people classify and name their disease.
[51] Registration in these books was volunteer, and judging from this low number of registered persons, most people do not register.

Another point is that the large number of illnesses with names related to evil spirits may be due to the fact that all bäššəta are understood either as caused by evil spirits/Satan or to be evil spirits. This is a finding coming through in interviews and conversations with informants.

The two sources, the free-listing and the administration books, demonstrate that informants use many different names for illnesses; names that belong to a biomedical tradition and other names for illnesses. Moreover, it is likely that names of illnesses are changing, for example is *čənqät* and *disk* (back problem) described as recent or new bäššəta. Changes in how names for illnesses are used, as mentioned in chapter 2, is shown by Angela Müller in her study from Gonder, who describes a development from using what she calls demons' names of illnesses to colloquial names on illnesses related to infertility and other, which, she argues, comes as a consequence of the state policy which has promoted biomedicine during the last 50 years (Müller 2014, p.193).

The classification informants make of illness seems to be fluid and it is not easy to make clear cut distinctions. Existing published research corresponds to this tendency (Slikkerveer 1982; Schirripa 2010; Wondwosen 2006; Otto 2002). The Ethiopian anthropologist Wondwosen Teshome proposes a classification of illnesses according to how he finds that people in Addis Ababa name illnesses (Wondwosen 2006, p.201). He argues that diseases are named either after dominant symptoms or after anatomical location. Moreover, Wondwosen says that 'popular names of illnesses and diseases originate mainly from three sources: folk knowledge, biomedicine, and religion.' (Wondwosen 2006, p.202). Finding a coherent system is not an easy task, however, a point made at a more general level by Harald Aspen, who underscores that variety and inconsistency of what he calls the religious belief system of the interlocutors he worked with (Aspen 1994, p.26). Social anthropologist Emanuele Bruni presents a case from his research in Mekele – an illness called 'mengenna' (Bruni 2010, p. 77-78), which he finds is described in several completely differing ways. He ponders the idea of a systematized nosology in his research area and concludes it 'seemed to concern more my own research's tasks than local therapists and common people's real

needs' (Bruni 2010, p.79). Another point Bruni makes about how nosological systems in Mekele is that they are overlapping in different horizons of meaning, however noting that 'biomedicine and its nosologies of reference are locally vernacularized' (Bruni 2010, p.68).

Similarly, I have not, based on the material to this current study, been able to find clear categories, rather, categories are not mutually exclusive entities, and, importantly, people's understandings of illnesses are largely interconnected with how they perceive the causes of illnesses, as will be discussed under the heading 'Explanations of illnesses' in the second part of this chapter. For now, let me just mention that the free-listing survey as well as interviews and observations also point towards such a connection.

A category of illnesses which was mentioned by informants is 'modern illness', sometimes called fashion illness or the illnesses of the rich, a category which is embedded in the eschatological view held by informants. This view entailed that the current time is the end of time with modernity as one indicator. These 'modern illnesses' include diabetes and back pain. Yet another way of seeing or categorising illnesses which is of a more overarching kind, is how people often talk about illnesses and spirits as the same thing, as has been discussed above. People have diverging distinctions between illnesses; however, the replies indicate that informants tend to associate illnesses with evil spirits, God and the Devil. They also use names which are known from the biomedical paradigm (like cancer and diabetes). There is also a proportion of illnesses or conditions with local names. In addition, there are illnesses that we understand in a certain way from a Western cultural point of view that are differently characterised and categorised among my Ethiopian Orthodox informants. Epilepsy[52] is one such illness, which among informants is rarely understood as a somatic type of illness.

[52] Epilepsy is a disease that is linked with spirit beliefs in many cultures, see for instance (Fadiman 1997).

However, as was shown in the quote of Abba Abraham, and which will be demonstrated further down, the distinctions and the choice of name is not necessarily important or well thought through. Informants place illnesses in a religious world view in a good/evil framework. At a certain level, Säyṭan is responsible for all illnesses, and we will also see how informants, when attacked by malevolent spirits/illnesses/difficult life events, search for cures in various ways. However, most informants expressed that they did also attend religious healing. Other research has argued that the clientele at ṣäbäl bota is dominated by patients with mental health problems (Fekadu et al. 2015; Giel et al. 1974). This study does not provide the same findings, rather the opposite: that patients with all kinds of illnesses seek remedy at ṣäbäl bota (in addition to those who come without a specific health problem).

Illness as a culturally defined concept

The translations of bäššəta and həmäm into sickness, illness and disease or ache and pain, as mentioned above, must be understood from the point of view of the user of the word, in a cultural context. When contextualised, the words have different meanings, and by simply translating them 'literally', we miss the meanings that these words may have for native Amharic speakers. The words will also have different nuanced meanings to different users. There are dimensions to these concepts that are not obvious and not comprehensible to us if we do not contextualise them.

Bäššəta is talked about in various ways by my informants. However, what most of them have in common is that religious beliefs are involved, and evil spirits play important roles, both as bäššəta per se and as causes of bäššəta. To continue excavating the different dimensions, I will give the floor to another priest, Abba Berhan, an unmarried[53] priest whom I interviewed several times.

[53] Priests may be either married or unmarried. The unmarried priests have vowed to a life in celibacy and are in general viewed as more experienced and more dedicated to spiritual life.

Abba Berhan was an experienced priest who had served 15 years at a ṣäbäl bota in an area in Addis Ababa. Before that, he served in an area north of Addis Ababa. According to him, he had 200 'children' whom he 'teach how to serve God, be loyal to the community and serve the Church'. The other work he mentioned that he did in his duty was baptism (at ṣäbäl bota), give absolution for the dead, perform the liturgy and pray for those 'who leave this world and join heavenly life'. During one of our conversations, I asked him about the efficacy of holy water which revealed some interesting information about bäššəta:

> Camilla: Can being baptised in holy water heal all problems?
>
> Abba Berhan: Yes, all. All problems come from evil spirits (*ʾaganənt*). God does not want to make us sick, so all problems can be healed by holy water. In the scientific world people give different names to bäššəta, but in the church all bäššəta come from *ʾaganənt*, so that God does not want us to be sick, but he has his way of doing so that we return to him and his rules and regulations.
>
> Camilla: Does he allow illness so that we may return to him?
>
> Abba Berhan: Yes, because he wants to teach us that we must turn towards him he lets us be attacked by these problems, because if we are only happy, we will forget God and engage in different sins.[54]

Abba Berhan says that the different names given to bäššəta belongs to a different world, the scientific world, which is separate from the religious world. The other point concerns causation, a topic that will be discussed further down.

This view is similarly expressed by another informant who came with an informant I had an interview appointment with. Kifle, the friend of my informant, was a male

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[54] Interview, Addis Ababa, 08.03.16

midwife who worked in a hospital and believed strongly in holy water. Commenting on the distinction between illnesses, he reflected:

> Kifle: In my perception, I believe there is spirit and wisdom to treat all illnesses. All illnesses are from ᵓ*ərkus mänfäs* (evil spirits) and for them there are remedies. If one has gastritis, one may or may not be cured, it is about wisdom from God. Science evolved from theology, theology is the queen of science – written in a philosophy textbook, medication is one of science, there are illnesses that can be treated by medication, or by holy water. Broken bones need an orthopedist. Spiritual issues cannot be healed like that. There are people who spend a long time in hospital but do not get cured but go to ṣäbäl bota and get cured.
>
> Camilla: Can all illnesses be cured by holy water?
>
> Kifle: That is up to the ᵓ*əmnät*[55] (faith, belief) of the individual. If you touch the ground it can heal you, for instance water in the church yard, on the ground. But if you ask science, it will say it is full of bacteria and so on.[56]

Another informant, Aster, a woman in her fifties living in a central area of Addis Ababa, whom I met at a ṣäbäl bota at the southern end of the city. She travelled to different ṣäbäl bota to stay well, as she felt she was constantly troubled by a spirit which she believed was inherited from her mother. Her mother had been involved in a spirit cult. When I asked Aster 'What is bäššəta?' she replied, focusing on the reason for and the function of bäššəta:

> That comes from sin, when we do not do the right thing, we are attacked by bäššəta, to teach us, get back to God, if we do not do that it will get worse, the intensity of bäššəta will increase. It is what is happening in the world of today. For

[55] A concept which I will discuss in depth in chapter 9, which in informants view have to do with actions and less with belief.

[56] Interview, Addis Ababa, 25.6.2016

> instance, my colleague who died had HIV for 12 years, and took ARV but still did not accept that the attack was because of sin. She did not return to *nəssəḥa* (penance). She said she saw different things in dreams, but she did not accept the teaching, since we do not know our last day, we must be close to God.[57]

These examples are symptomatic of how informants talk about bäššəta. As demonstrated in the discussion with Abba Abraham, Abba Berhan, and Aster, bäššəta is, in these informants' understanding, tightly linked with religion, with a person's actions and sin and with evil spirits to such an extent that the concept is incomprehensible without the religious dimension.

An interesting part of the small free-listing survey when it comes to perceptions about bäššəta was how some of the participants reacted to the survey, in particular the request to list illnesses. Some even refused to list bäššəta/həmäm, and on their own initiative made statements about illness. One informant, a woman who worked in a shop selling religious artefacts, books and music, answered to the first question:

> Bäššəta is not something you want to bring upon yourself. It is a punishment from God. God sends bäššəta to those he loves and to test them or their love to him. And holy water is not something you can study. It is the power of God you see in holy water, and it is beyond human thought to grasp its mysteries. In addition, you cannot list bäššəta. Bäššəta do not really have names; they have their names from humans. We gave them their names. Bäššəta are all tests sent to us so that we can know our ᵓəmnät and keep our ᵓəmnät in God.[58]

The woman holds a similar argument as Abba Berhan, that names of bäššəta are given by humans, but what bäššəta really is, is God testing people's ᵓəmnät. According to

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[57] Interview, Addis Ababa, May, 2016
[58] Free-listing interview carried out by research assistant Yerosan Mesfin, Addis Ababa, 5.10.2015

this view, it is not important to identify the illnesses and distinguish between them. Rather, they have a function in the relationship with God.

The category or concept of illness, or rather bäššəta, can thus, in the context of this study, best be described by two terms. Firstly, the concept bäššəta is comprehensive and may contain all sorts of challenges, misfortunes and illnesses. The term comprehensive here means that it contains close to everything that makes life complicated; from a simple cold, serious illnesses like cancer or HIV/Aids, mental disorders to all kinds of misfortunes and life crises. As the medical researcher Mekonnen Bishaw describes it: 'The distinction between illness and other personal misfortune is blurred and absent' (Bishaw 1991, p.193). In illness stories collected in this research, informants narrate illness in this inclusive or comprehensive way. The perspective can also be understood as holistic[59], by which I mean that various components are all linked. As mentioned above, often the way of interpreting a situation of illness is characterised by connecting things that can only be comprehended in light of each other. In the illness stories, the holistic perspective is also important in how informants talk about illnesses, when bodily, mental, social and religious factors are mentioned together. Secondly, one may say that the term is, in a certain respect, a religious term, as informants hold the view that the bäššəta is curable if one understands its religious function.

Explanations of illness

Explanations of illness are also placed in a religious framework. In this section I will explore further how informants explain illness and discuss whether and how these fit in models of illness causation. I will explore if this material may fit better into what I call a relational model, rather than the more dualistic and causal models.

[59] The terms holistic and holism are often, in religious studies, used to characterise features relating to new religious movements, whereas I use the term in a philosophical understanding of the concept, characterised by the belief that the parts of something are intimately interconnected and explicable only by reference to the whole.

Medical anthropological models of illness causation

Within medical anthropology and anthropology of religion, several variants of models of illness causation have been discussed. According to G.M. Foster, one of the founders of medical anthropology, most of non-western disease aetiologies can be accounted for by two basic principles, termed 'personalistic' and 'naturalistic'. The personalistic is when illness is 'explained by an active, purposeful intervention of an agent, who may be human (a witch or sorcerer), nonhuman (a ghost, ancestor or evil spirit), or supernatural (a deity or other very powerful being)' (Foster 1976, p.775). The naturalistic principle is that the illness stems from 'natural causes or conditions', such as cold, heat, winds and 'an upset of the balance of the basic body elements' (Foster 1976, p.775). David Westerlund builds on this model but splits the term 'personalistic' in two: religious and social (human), and uses a threefold model of religious, social and natural causation when comparing five different African contexts (none of these Ethiopian) (Westerlund 2006). Others do not categorise the causation as such but acknowledge the important role of a 'non-human agency both in illness causation and during the healing process' (Wilkens 2011, p.173). Researchers studying illness and perceptions of illness in Ethiopia have discussed how Ethiopians understand reasons for illness (Young 1976; Sagbakken, Frich and Bjune 2008). There is a common ground saying that illness is explained both by natural causes and spiritual causes (Bishaw 1991). Allan Young bases his model on analysis upon if people place the cause of illness within themselves or outside themselves (Young 1976). The cause can be externalised and blamed on something or someone else (and not the one who suffers) or internalised and explainable according to internal circumstances. Young finds that these types of explanations are mixed in his ethnographic material.

The following section of the chapter presents ethnography which demonstrates views of informants to this study and discusses how these views fit with the models outlined so far. Importantly, no informant expressed that superhuman entities were not central in the causation. Taking the perspective of informants, deeply embedded in a religious

world view as it is, I will explore if, rather than fitting into the mentioned models, this study's informants' explanations of illness are placed both externally and internally more or less simultaneously and interdependently, as bäššəta is on the one hand due to God's disregard or permission, and, on the other hand, the disregard has to do with sinful actions, often in communities. There are additional points that will also be elaborated on and discussed in the next section.

Contextual explanations of illness

Informants to this study explain bäššəta with a religious world view as the reference. Some say that evil spirits and Satan are the cause of all illnesses, but that God may also send illnesses to teach people and give them a chance to return to Him.

There is a strong conception that God is responsible for all illnesses, either as a test or as punishment. This must be understood in light of it being one of the most frequently mentioned reasons. Committing sin and not pertaining to the right practices pave the way for the devil and evil spirits to 'enter' a person. In the free-listing survey, a majority answered that evil spirits were either the reason for illness or among the reasons for illness. Some said it is a mix of 'natural' causes and evil spirits. Other reasons mentioned were God's punishment and not taking care of oneself. In other interviews, more variants of explanations have come to the fore, like that there are modern illnesses which strike because of lifestyle, and explanations that underline eschatological perspective of being in the last millennium of the history of the world. In addition, one informant said that illnesses are produced in Europe and the United States and then brought to Africa intentionally. The frequently mentioned reason for illness, mätät, which informants understood as others manipulating with the help of specialists like ṭänqʷay or däbtära.

In addition, some informants expressed the view that illnesses were not really different but just given different names, because all illnesses were essentially evil spirits and

not, as they claimed, in reality different illnesses. The following is an example of how some respondents answered similarly:

> All illnesses are caused by evil spirits. We just gave the illnesses different names. As people became educated and science grew, humans gave different names to illnesses. Of course, there are illnesses that catch you when you do not take care of yourself. But there are illnesses that came because God is angry. These are caused by a curse. Especially transmittable illnesses such as HIV, and others, such as back problem are caused by evil spirits. I have witnessed HIV positive persons being healed by holy water. Diabetes, 'kidney' and blindness are also healed by holy water. So, all illnesses are the work of evil spirits.[60]

On one occasion, Sennayt explained that she had heard in a holy water site that someone shouted: 'I got her through her navel'. Showing the navel, for instance by wearing a short blouse or t-shirt, is by some understood as breaking respectable, in Orthodox terms, code of conduct, which in turn makes a person vulnerable to spirit attacks. As will be discussed in depth in chapter 9, people's actions and behaviour are neatly connected with faith (*ʾəmnät*) which in turn is tied to the potential for healing. Sennayt explained that women who are in hospitals for treatment of breast cancer are often attacked by spirits because they must undress and show their breasts during examinations. Tigist expressed that:

> Religion is very good, but separation from God causes illnesses. We are punished by God and our forefathers; we have come far from God. Therefore, all this comes, all illnesses, Aids. It is written in the Bible, in Jesaja.[61]

The free-listing survey included questions about reasons for illness. Some respondents said explicitly that Satan was not the reason for all illness. Others exempted some

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[60] Interview, Addis Ababa, 5.10.2015

[61] Interview, Addis Ababa, 29.10.2015

illnesses. For instance, one said that she had never seen gastritis caused by an evil spirit. Another exempted wounds and a third said that in general, illness is not only caused by Satan.

One respondent to the free-listing survey, a deacon from Addis Ababa who grew up in Debre Libanos, and who had studied until grade 8, said:

> You can say that all illnesses are from the evil but there are some that can catch you if you do not take care. For instance, you may catch HIV/Aids if you have multiple sex partners. But HIV itself is a spirit, it shouts when people are baptized.[62]

The free-listing survey, interviews and observations suggest that it is common to think that ᵓaganənt (evil spirits) or Satan are the reason for illnesses. For example, a teacher in her 20s from Addis Ababa held this opinion when asked to list illnesses caused by evil spirits: ‘All illnesses are because of the evil spirit but when you go to clinics the result shows a different kind of illness because the evil spirit deceives you.’[63]

Mätät - blaming others

Another of my interlocutors Bechelech, whom I discussed with several times was a woman in her forties living in Addis Ababa. In this section, I will go more in depth into her story to explore the role of mätät, which is a method of manipulating evil spirits or Satan to harm others, usually someone whom you know or are related to in some way.

Bechelech talked about how she was ill, telling a story about her life and how it, in her view, fell apart. According to her, it was caused by someone wanting to harm her and her family. She was illiterate but had managed to learn how to read the psalms of David and write her name. Originally, she was a countryside girl whose mother sent

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[62] Free-listing interview, Addis Ababa, 5.10.2015
[63] Free-listing interview, Addis Ababa, 12.10.2015

her to work as a servant in the house of relatives in Addis Ababa[64]. She did not know how old she was when her mother sent her to live with her uncle, but as she said, 'I was a little kid.' Her aunt did not let her go to school but made her stay at home to take care of her aunt and uncle's babies and the family's son, who according to Bechelech had *yäʾaʾəmro čəggər* (mental problem, problem of the mind). When she was a little older, she was sent to work in other people's houses. She met her husband in her early teens, and at the age of fifteen, she gave birth to her first child. Bechelech reflected: 'My destiny was messed up from my childhood'. In recent years she had experienced her family gradually falling apart. Her marriage was not going well and eventually she got divorced. According to her, her life was miserable when she tried her luck working in a neighbouring country. She worked in Sudan for five years, but, as she regretted 'I got back here without money. I was even short of money for transport.' One son did not manage to keep a job. Another son was incarcerated. Eventually, she got a variety of somatic symptoms, like headaches and stomach pain. While telling her story, linking the events mentioned so far, she argued: 'No one would be like this without a reason. I knew something was behind when I started facing problems in my marriage, in my work and when my children started having problems, too. Then you start to ask questions inside you.' As the example shows, when experiencing the more immediate challenges, Bechelech also goes back in her history and links recent events to other experiences in her life. However, the explanation to the misfortunes she was suffering from came when a spirit at a holy water site, talking through another woman, revealed the reason for her trouble. It was the evil spirit induced illness mätät, which is a cause of illnesses frequently referred to by informants . She explained:

> I went to one holy water site. Then I went to another, but the ṣäbäl was not like the first one for me. Anyway, something black, a poison (mädəhanit), came out when I vomited. Many things came out, thanks to God. After I started coming frequently here, my queen (referring to Mary) sent me a spirit (mänfäs) and that spirit

[64] This is common practice.

> revealed that a mätät had been made on my husband. I knew it was a mätät here in the holy water site. He had even been forced to eat rat meat. The spirit told me: 'They cooked a rat's meat and made him eat. He will remember that when you tell him. So, remind him of that and tell him to go to the Kidane Mehret holy water site and we will leave then. For your marriage, a black dog has been buried in front of your door so that you would fight like dogs and separate.' I even got separated from my husband because a mätät made me to. My story contains a lot, but I got here because of *ˀƎmmäbete* (Mary) and thanks to God, I am still alive.[65]

In her account, Bechelech refers to Mary and God as her and her family's rescue. Firstly, a mätät was done to them, which resulted in a variety of challenges and illnesses. Her choice was to seek help at a ṣäbäl bota, where she got to know what had caused the problems, and she experienced that the water and the ṣäbäl bota were effective when 'many things came out' there 'thanks to God'. The various things that happened to her, such as divorce, unemployment, and spirits' influence, were in her view part of her illness story. The physical ailments, the headache and the stomach-ache were not in focus when she explicated her illness story. What motivated her to attend holy water healing was rather the troubles she experienced.

Another point in Bechelech's story is how her perspective is more collective than individualistic. She was attending holy water healing for herself, but also on behalf of her entire family. She saw the trouble that she had as caused by evil spirits and the black rat magic which was done to harm them. The entire situation needed resolution for her to be healed. Secondly, she attends ṣäbäl bota on behalf of her family, and she gets help from Mary and God.

To see illness less individually and more as a collective phenomenon is a tendency I have found in my material. There are informants who visit ṣäbäl bota on behalf of others, and stories that show how illness is perceived not to be individual but on the

[65] Interview, Addis Ababa, 8.5.2016

whole family. Moreover, Aspen documents that, among the patients in his field study of a weqabi cult, only one tenth of the cases came concerning their own health and the rest came about the health of relatives (Aspen 1994, p.335).

Bechelech's story displays similar features as are attributed to witchcraft and magical beliefs and practices we find in other cultures in Africa. One of the common explanations informants to this study give for illness is mätät. Mätät denotes practices with the aim to harm others. However, informants also often call them illnesses, which is an example of how informants tend to relate and mix cause and illness. Mätät is usually conducted by a skilled person, usually a ṭänqʷay or a *däbtära* who knows the secret of pulling demons to harm someone. Terms used with a similar meaning are *ʾəğäsäb*[66], *yäsäw ʾəğ*[67], *mädhanit*[68], *ʾasmat*[69] and *dəgəmt*[70]. The fact that the practice has many names is an indication of its importance. Among my informants, mätät is frequently reported as one of the important reasons why people get sick or are involved in accidents. Often this explains the situation when people's lives fall apart, be it economically, socially or health-related, or a combination of these[71]. Several informants have explained that they had to move away from their home place because of the risk of a renewal of the magic. One priest that I interviewed several times explained that skilled people in the Church caused people's problems.

> Abba Berhan: There are various wise people in society. They will not be taken by bullets or illness, they are wise men, and they know more about God's wisdom, but sometimes they may use their wisdom/knowledge for an evil purpose. They have been trained in the Church. They can take your opportunity/chance and give to

[66] Means 'people's hand'.
[67] Means 'people's hand'.
[68] Literally means medicine, in this context poison.
[69] Literally means 'names' but may be referred to as magic.
[70] Magic spell. Of the verb *dägämä*, which means recite.
[71] The category mätät has similarities with witchcraft in other African countries (Wright 2017).

someone else – your chance to have a child, get married, the good things you could obtain in this world, they can give to others.

Camilla: Are they priests?

Abba Berhan (talks in a low voice now): They are priests, deacons, *mämhər* (teacher in the Church). They learn from their seniors, and they try to destroy people's mental ability. Those who are victims will be attacked by these problems, and they may stay in their home.

Camilla: What happens to them?

Abba Berhan: *Yäʾaʾəmro čəggər* (problem of the mind), they shout in different ṣäbäl bota, but God can heal them.

Camilla: Are there such people in the place where you come from?

Abba Berhan: Yes, but they do not only use it for evil doing. Some use it for instance to make students brilliant and fast – they give them some herbal to drink.

Camilla: Do they also put it under the skin? (I had heard about this in other conversations with other priests)

Abba Berhan: This wisdom/knowledge may also be buried under the skin. To make someone graceful it is put under the skin on the shoulder, to make someone loveable and gorgeous it is put under the skin on the forehead

Camilla: Did you learn this?

Abba Berhan: No, I did not. And if I knew it, I would not have told you, Marta (with a smile).[72]

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[72] Interview, Addis Ababa, 8.3.2016

The extract from an interview with Abba Berhan demonstrates that purposeful harming or helping of other people is also carried out by people within the Church, often called *asmat*.

One of the respondents to the free-listing survey explained how children inherit mätät and other spirits (i.e. bäššəta) from their parents: 'If your family used to worship a spirit and stop at one point or they died and no one is doing what they used to do, then children will get sick.'[73] Another example is that one may get bäššəta because of what your ancestors have done of mischiefs.

Not taking care of oneself

Informants and respondents to the free-listing survey refer to several other important and more immediate causes for illnesses. Different reasons are argued for simultaneously. Another category is illness that comes from 'not taking care of oneself', for instance eating an unbalanced diet, a heavy workload or not paying attention to hygiene. A guard of a church compound, who was also participant in the free-listing survey, whom I asked: 'In your opinion, are there illnesses that are not caused by evil spirit?', replied:

> Most people say that a reason for all illness is evil spirits but I do not believe that. There are bäššəta you just get. For instance, a wound is not something you get from an evil spirit. There are illnesses that are cured by medical treatment. So not all illnesses are caused by evil spirits.[74]

Another informant in the free-listing survey, who held that illnesses were the test of God, added:

> There are illnesses that you bring upon yourself. For instance, if you get angry all the time you will get headaches and gastritis. In addition, if you do not eat food, if

[73] Free-listing interview, Addis Ababa, 5.10.2015
[74] Free-listing survey interview, Addis Ababa, 5.10.2015

> you drink alcohol, you will get gastritis and 'kidney', and poisoned food will give you typhoid fever.[75]

This shows examples of exemptions to the main idea that superhuman forces cause illnesses, however, in a later section it will be shown that the explanations both exist parallel and in hierarchy.

Eschatological explanation perspective

Importantly, some informants claim that mätät and committing sin are on the increase, which they link to being in a very specific historical and religious period: the end of time. Some informants make sense of bäššəta in an eschatological perspective, for instance Tigist:

> Tigist: Since this is the end of time, there are different illnesses, like HIV. In Isaiah, it is called the illness that makes people thin. HIV/Aids is the *ʿalämawi* (worldly) name. It comes because of sin, because of adultery. It transmits. Aids is decreasing, the reason why is difficult to explain, but now it is cancer, also due to sin, the church fathers say that if all are rich it will be difficult.[76]

On one occasion, Sennayt expressed that in her opinion there had been a development of increase in sinful actions in recent years, a view that other informants shared, and which can be understood in the perspective of the end of time. She explained:

> Sennayt: In the old days, in my mother's time, there were not many illnesses, and the illnesses could easily be healed. Now it is increasing because of our sin, we are disobedient, break the law and there is no love. There are new illnesses such as

[75] Free-listing survey interview, Addis Ababa, 5.10.2015
[76] Interview, Addis Ababa, 11.7.2016

> back problems, cancer and diabetes invented after the current government[77] seized power. Before we did not know these.[78]

Sennayt refers to lifestyle illnesses, which are also associated with wealth and affluence, and there is an element of responsibility, personal failing and sin. Health is to Sennayt both for body and soul, and it has been given to human beings by God from creation, but due to what she claims is an increase of sin, human beings started to suffer from illnesses.

> Sennayt: God gave us health, but disease is a result of sin. If we do not do as God says, we will be attacked. Therefore, there are different illnesses. God does not only give us health, but also wisdom – which starts with the fear of God, then we may not get bad things.[79]

Committing sin, lacking faith and not fearing God make a person and his or her body susceptible to illness and ailments. However, Sennayt also sees this in a political development perspective.

> Sennayt: It is a corrupt government system, not favouring its citizens. For example, I had a good job, the system was changed and now I have a bad job. Because now they ask diploma from everyone, people experience this, they are going mad, they cannot raise their children, the government forces people to pay a lot of tax, and people are forced to give up their shop, to give it to someone else (stores in government houses) who can pay more. Therefore, you see many people shouting in the streets these days. These things are happening now, previously we had no such problems, now people spend day and night in the street, with no shelter, no work and rising life expenses.

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[77] The current government here is Ethiopian People's Liberation Front (EPRDF).
[78] Interview, Addis Ababa, 2.6.2016
[79] Interview, Addis Ababa, 2.6.2016

Camilla: Is this because of the Government's policies?

Sennayt: In the time of Haile Selassie there were fewer people and the resources were fairly distributed. During the Derg, the population increased, but the Derg was on the side of the people, government houses were given to people. This is how we got this house. During the Derg, the main fault was shooting in the streets, and they had problems with the union with Eritrea. The government was not very educated. The EPRDF looks as if they are making nice things, roads, buildings etc, but they are not in favour of the poor, they say that vi build condominiums for the people, but the poor cannot afford paying and people cannot survive, but EPRDF doesn't hear the voice of the poor, people are displaced, outside on the street they are dying and suffering, they have lost their houses. They are enforcing to register in condominiums because the government wants these areas for other buildings. This is the result of our sin. If He forgives us, he will give us a good government, if we enter nəssəḥa and turn our face to God. This time it is very hard to have real friendship, now people do not live together and spend time together, people start living individually and they think of themselves only.[80]

Discussion of models

So far, we have seen that people use a variety of reasoning in explaining illness. Two of the important ways are illness caused by other humans and illness occurring because of sin, both at an individual level and at a society level, seen also by some informants as a sign of the time. The various sinful attitudes and actions lead to disturbances in the relationship with God and consequently attacks by evil spirits, which has earlier been put into the category of externalising illness causation (Müller 2014; Young 1976). In Bechlech's example, according to her, her destiny is spoilt from her early years, and the cause of the misfortunes is outside her control – it just

[80] Interview, Addis Ababa, 2.6.2016

happens to her. This explanation fits well with Young's externalisation model, as do other mätät-related explanations. It is also possible to fit informants' illness causation into Foster's personalistic/naturalistic model, as some explanations are due to forces, human or superhuman, or due to natural causes like hygiene or bad habits. Another model mentioned was David Westerlund's, who builds on Foster's model, but splits the term 'personalistic' in two: religious and social (human), and uses a threefold model of religious, social and natural causation. The findings in this study contain explanations emphasising these three categories: mätät as a form of human causation, God and evil spirits causing illness as forms of religious causation and 'taking care of yourself' as natural causation. Westerlund's point is that human causation is on the increase, and findings in this study may support this, as the prevalence of mätät is striking.

However, analysing Bechelech and other informants' explications of illness, it seems like there is more than placing the cause in specific agents which is important. The mätät does not come from strangers, or just coincidentally, but occurs in certain relationships in which envy is an important factor. There are magical mechanisms, for instance mätät, employed by someone close to you or in your network, designed to harm you and sometimes your entire family. Furthermore, there is a question related to how you and your family have maintained the relationship with God in terms of moral expectations. What you do and with whom are two main dimensions of explaining episodes or processes of illness. What you do affects your relationship with God. On another level, the illnesses come from evil or Satan and are cured by God. Other reasons can be categorised as socio-religious, at work in a social landscape. Most denote causes that are interpersonal and take place in a social setting, in a family, extended family, generations or with strangers. The relationship you have with other human beings and, even more so, spiritual powers will be extremely important and decisive as of what may happen to you.

Moreover, explanations nearly always point to sin and how the relationship with God is not the way it should be, due to how the sick individual lives and have lived his or

her life. To reiterate, I argue that the crucial part or the explanation of misfortunes has to do with the fact that there is a relationship between someone either between human beings or between human beings and spiritual beings, more than the allocation of blame in one of the actors. This is related to the centrality of practices and interaction in healing at holy water sites, which will be looked at in depth in chapter 8 and 9. In the healing process, making good the relationship with God is the aim, like in Bechelech's story, she refers to superhuman beings in describing how her life is changed to the better.

What further underscores the relational focus is that families can also share an illness. But even though the members do not have the same symptoms of illness, it stems from the same cause or situation (see chapter 6).

The fundamental importance of being social, of family, neighbours and other relationships is not only a social and practical dimension in life, but also mediate a religious reality. Sociability is also linked with morality and the assumed decrease in engaging in social activities is explained as a feature of the end of time. Wondwosen underlines that traditionally a person who is ill is dependent on his or her kin group, and that illnesses are considered as a crisis of the whole group (Wondwosen 2006, p.204) Two other studies have discussed in depth the importance of relations with others in the context of religion (Malara 2017; Boylston 2018). Firstly, Malara extrapolates how blessing is not individualized but something that one also may bring upon others and which may be distributed through acting on behalf of others. Other religious practices can be done on behalf of others, and then it brings blessing upon the one who carries out the action (Malara 2017, p.109). The second study shows how eating together is a way of sharing religion, the meal and the food mediates both the divine and relationships of trust (Boylston 2013). These two studies demonstrate that relationships and communality have fundamental roles in the two respective contexts of study. Looking at the context of this current study, bäššəta seems to be well understood as a social, relational concept in addition to a religious concept and relationships seem to be at the essence in mätät, in how informants explain the causes

of illness as relationships in society and with the divine being about to change and human beings live more individualistic lives, and, even more importantly, the relationship with God is corrupted. As we have seen, informants emphasise that ‘being far from God’ is a severe problem. Therefore, I suggest that these relational aspects are even more central, and that the illness comes from the way relationships to others, to evil spirits or to benevolent spirts/God are maintained.

God is the ultimate controller of illness, but there are several other explanations having to do with Satan and evil spirits, natural causes and emotional causes. I will place these explanations within a relational framework during the discussions in the next section of this chapter. Ultimately, God permits illness and Satan creates illness. God may let the suffering take place as a punishment or a lesson. Then the levels of explanation and relationships can be put into these main points:

1) God – behind all things, may punish, teach and will thus sometimes allow evil to happen
2) Satan – is behind all bad things, but not ultimately in charge
3) Mätät and other similar practices to harm others, external but also relational
4) Zar and other ‘inherited’ spirits – community (not personal)
5) Committing sin
6) Showing feelings and not taking care of oneself (hygiene, the sun, nutrition) (opens the body to evil spirits)

All the above categories are embedded in relationships and interaction between people and between people, spirits and superhuman beings. Showing emotions can create loopholes for spirits to enter and make a person ill. Illness normally comes as a result of how you live your life in relation to other humans or superhuman beings, if you commit a sin or do not follow orthodox practice. It has to do with how near or far you are from God. Many explain that if one practices the religion rightly and stays close to God (through relationships with saints, angels and so on) one is protected, both in a spiritual and a physical way, the spiritual in a concrete and embodied manner.

Therefore, even if illness also has natural causes, as in the case of diarrhoea, this problem would not exist if it were not for Satan, and God letting it happen. Now the relationship you have to God, the proximity to God, is believed to influence upon your healing prospects. However, even if an individual may influence upon his or her destiny by doing the right things, there is no foolproof way of finding healing, so even if you practice your religion in a perfect way, you may be afflicted like Job.

The EOTC stands in the long tradition of Christianity where good health and salvation are two faces of the same coin. Illness is linked to its causes and has a deeper religious meaning. One informant, Dr Alemayu, head of a research institute at the University of Addis Ababa who was also a theologian, explained:

> Dr Alemayu: From a Christian perspective all bad things are caused by the Devil directly or indirectly. It is solved in two ways: spiritually or through wisdom given by God - doctors have this. I think every wisdom comes from God; everything is a gift from God. God gives wisdom to doctors. If they [the patients] are very spiritual, they can be cured by *ṣäbäl*, prayer etc. The help of God is in many ways not restricted. [81]

The view that every wisdom comes from God is in accordance with many other informants' views. The theological foundation of the EOTC about illness, in the following expressed by the theologian Abba Daniel Seifemichael Feleke of Holy Trinity Theological University College, is that sickness has a purpose (Seifemichael Forthcoming). There is 'sickness that comes to show us the mercy of God; sickness that comes to purify us, through which we come closer to God and understand His love and providence; and sickness that results from sin, curse or divergence from a sacred life, which needs spiritual healing to enable us to understand the power and mercy of God' (Seifemichael Forthcoming). He also expresses that the Church acknowledges 'a

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[81]Interview, Addis Ababa, 29.6.2016

wise person (the physician)' (ibid, p. 50), and refers to the fact that the Church does not oppose modern medicine. 'The Holy synod, the highest leadership of the Church, made a declaration that 'there is no medicine that is not of God and every medicine is from God' (ibid, p.51). Informants in this study do hold similar ideas: illnesses have a spiritual purpose, God oversees everything – including biomedicine. Some, also informants who are clergy, do express that modern medicine is not necessary if a person has ʾəmnät, as will be shown in later chapters. However, informants do use both ṣäbäl bota and modern health facilities, as shown.

The idea that the consequence of illness is that human beings come closer to God, is often narrated in informants' stories. Informants' behaviour towards illness and language for illness show a tendency towards the mixture of distinctions between illnesses as Seifemichael expresses (Seifemichael Forthcoming). Importantly, at one level, people talk about many different illnesses, and they often base their categorisation both upon what caused the illness and upon the symptoms. At another level, the causation is irrelevant, as a common understanding is that all illnesses are under the control of God, *ʾƎgziʾabəḥer,* even though they are caused by Satan, a view which also lies in the perspective of the female religious shop keeper quoted above.

In the following example from an interview, which was carried out as part of the free-listing survey, it may seem that distinguishing in detail between causes of illnesses is of less importance in the religious perspective held by informants to this study. The interview is with a man in his forties who was asked to list reasons for illnesses:

> Interviewee: I believe the causes of illnesses are related to the psychological and emotional situation of a person. So, if you are in stress, if you get angry, if you are not happy with what you have you will be exposed to all kinds of illness. To give you an example: blood pressure, diabetes and gastritis are caused by negative/bad emotions.
>
> Assistant: Can you list illnesses that are caused by evil spirits?

Interviewee: Certainly! But we must be clear first that all illnesses are the work of the evil spirit. Nowadays we say ‘bacteria is the reason for this’; ‘virus is a cause for that’ but all are from the ᵓaganənt. To be clearer, for instance: *Yämmiṭəl bäššəta* is known as epilepsy by science but it is the ᵓaganənt that make you fall. *Ləkəft* is also another illness caused by ᵓaganənt. Others, like diabetes, back pain and blood pressure are also caused by ᵓaganənt.

Assistant: So, does this mean there is no illness that is not caused by ᵓaganənt?

Interviewee: There is. But all are also caused by ᵓaganənt.[82]

Clearly, the religious perspective takes lead, evil spirits cause illness. Therefore, God is the solution. Perhaps is identifying or distinguishing the reasons not so important to people after all, and the important thing is whom you relate to, among humans and superhumans. Physical, natural or biological, spiritual, religious and existential aspects of illness and all symptoms and reasons for them are mentioned by informants, however, the always underlying reason for bäššəta and the solution for it, the *mädḫanit*, lies in religion.

Concluding remarks

Addressing for the most part the first subquestion mentioned in chapter 1, this chapter showed the importance of contextualising understandings of illness and has distilled various understandings of bäššəta. Bäššəta is a wider concept than the English term illness or disease. There is a strong tendency to include all types of problems, including illness and disease, of human beings and call it bäššəta. In addition, a view held by all informants (although not about all illnesses) is that evil spirits are bäššəta. The distinctions between kinds of illnesses and what illnesses are relate to multiple layers of understandings and relational ties. However, at another level, illnesses are all

[82] Free-listing interview, carried out by research assistant Yerosan Mesfin, Addis Ababa, 15.12.2015

evil and caused by Satan, but above all is always God who permits and also punishes human beings allowing illness. In this perspective, all illnesses are the same and distinguishing between them is not a necessity.

The frequent encounter with mätät indicates, as in other parts of Africa, the prevalence of human causation, as has been described by David Westerlund (Westerlund 2006). It relates to success and envy in relationships, and I believe it is important to understand how informants relate to illness as it arises as a consequence of who they relate to, and how their relationships are maintained. First, with God, then also spirits and other human beings. There is also an important dimension: illnesses seem to be not only of the individual but also of the collective, the group or the family. Therefore, I have in this chapter suggested to explore further a model which may be called a relational illness causation as the dominant in the context of the present study.

Chapter 5: Space and ṣäbäl bota

The sacred landscape of the Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity is observable, as it is centered around Biblical topography. EOTC followers traditionally interpret Ethiopia as the new Jerusalem (Bustorf 2010, p. 960) and hold the view that the land is blessed. In this study, where most informants are frequent visitors of ṣäbäl bota, interviews show that holy water space (in addition to some other spaces) is an important category in their lives, both implicitly and explicitly. Participatory observation at ṣäbäl bota has also provided findings about usage of space, which points to interpretations of the role of space as sacred or profane to people who go to the sites.

Some informants move between sites, they talk about which ṣäbäl bota one should visit with different *bäššəta* (disease, illness), and which sites have more efficacy than others. There are many rumours about this. Some informants bring space into explanations of illness and emphasise the importance of different spaces in their search for healing. In this chapter I explore the role of space in illness causation and healing. I analyse space as actor in illness causation and healing to explore whether establishing space as analytical category may shed more light on the preliminary suggestions on illness causation as relational made in the preceding chapter.

Alem is a woman in her thirties who explained that she had been ill many years due to her family's engagement with Oromo religious practices, whereas Alem had chosen the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. This had, according to Alem, led to a spiritual battle in her family which made her ill. I met her in a monastery in central Addis Ababa, where she lived as a novice. She had moved between different holy water sites for many years in search of healing. She explained: 'I select sites whenever people tell me it is a good and a healing place. You know, the only thing an ill person wants is to be healed, so I select ṣäbäl bota accordingly but with *ʾəmnät* [faith, belief] too.'[83] She explains that in these places she reacts, and sometimes rips off her clothes, and that

[83] Interview, Addis Ababa, 22.6.2015

this typically happens ‘(…) at churches, at holy water sites, and most of the time when I get angry or anxious.’ Alem explained that in these sacred spaces the battle between spirits may happen.[84] I asked her:

> Camilla: Why do you think it happens when you pray in these places?
> Alem: Because it is *ᵓərkus mänfäs* [evil spirit] and it fights and opposes *Mänfäs Qəddus* [the Holy Spirit]. In addition, there is God’s fight to set us free from the *ᵓərkus mänfäs*. The angels are given to us to protect us and will always fight with it and because of this the evil spirit acts as if it is burned and anxious.

The sacred space thus seems to have a specific divine presence which evil spirits react to, and in Alem’s view, this is significant for her healing process. While ṣäbäl bota is believed to be sacred and has a positive effect upon people’s health, other spaces are defiling, dangerous and threatening, and informants directly blame such spaces for causing illness. The significance of space was expressed by what was perceived as a spirit talking through a visitor to a ṣäbäl bota: ‘A person who goes to several places and bad places like you will not be in favour of Christ. I am in your home.’[85]

Now, what does it mean that a holy water site is ‘a good and healing place’? And what are these ‘bad places’ which the spirit talks about? This chapter scrutinises what characterises areas which are perceived and treated as healing spaces and areas that make people ill, and how space plays a role in illness causation and healing.

Looking at establishment, structure, regulation and organisation of ṣäbäl bota, and how informants talk about them and include them in illness narratives, I will discuss if space works as a ‘healer’ because it mediates healing power, that means the power of God, or as active in healing in itself. Certain spaces, like ṣäbäl bota may as such be seen as having agency and being actors in people’s lives, and not limited to being

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[84] She also mentions how emotions, such as getting angry and anxious may cause a similar reaction, which was discussed in chapter 3.
[85] Recording of talking spirit, Addis Ababa, 24.5.2016

products of human agency, which is argued in other theories about the role of space. With this as a starting point, I will discuss ṣäbäl bota as holy matter in Bynum's understanding as active or actors to its users (Bynum 2011, p.25).

The water and the sites

The ṣäbäl bota is always organised around one or more holy water sources, and obviously the water is the reason why there is a holy water site in any specific place. The holy water is called ṣäbäl or *ṭäbäl,* which originally has the meaning of 'dust' in geez (Gori 2010, p.431), and it is always consecrated in the name of a saint, an angel, Mary, Christ, or the Trinity. The practice of immersion into holy water is an old tradition in Christianity and in the EOTC. More recently, there is documentation that it was common in nineteenth century Shewa, according to historian Richard Pankhurst (Pankhurst 1990, p.115). During this period, thermal baths were also widely used, many of which were associated with Ethiopian Orthodox saints, Christ and the Trinity, and Addis Ababa was founded as a consequence of Menelik's wife, Queen Taytu's preference for the thermal water Finfine, which was, although not a ṣäbäl, used to cure illnesses (Pankhurst 1990, p.126), and is still in public use.

Informants mentioned holy water by different names, which may be distinguished into types: *yäqəddase ṣäbäl, ṣäbäl ṣadiq,* and *ṣäbäl*. The first kind has become holy during the liturgy (*qəddase*) carried out by priests, and the ṣäbäl ṣadiq is holy water used in a remembrance ritual. I asked a key priest informant, Abba Abraham, if that means that there are different types of holy water. He replied: 'The holy water (ṣäbäl) is one, no difference, because all water that is prayed on is blessed. Priests can pray on it, and it becomes holy water. Ṣäbäl ṣadiq is for remembrance. To remember saints. To obtain mercy.'[86] Thus, at one level there is no difference, on the other hand the holy water is categorised according to how it has become holy, thus the distinction between the

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[86] Interview, Addis Ababa, 22.3.2016

yäqəddase ṣäbäl and the ṣäbäl. The instance of ṣäbäl ṣadiq has to do with the usage of the holy water and what its purpose is. My observation is that ṣäbäl ṣadiq is ṣäbäl taken at a holy water site and blessed again by a priest in a specific ritual and then consumed along with bread resembling the Eucharist (see chapter 9). However, holy water is not always blessed by a priest (for further discussion about holy water see also chapter 7).

Even if 'ṣäbäl is one', sometimes I have heard people make other distinctions according to which illnesses it heals. Some informants say that they choose certain sites (and thus a certain source of holy water) because of its reputation for healing specific illnesses. For instance, the Entoto Maryam holy water site has a reputation of healing HIV/Aids, the Medhane Alem site near Kotebe is believed to be effective on heart patients, and there are other similar examples. Other sites have a reputation for being particularly effective. Although holy water is the most important remedy around which the sites are organised, there are several other remedies, things, beings and practices at the sites that contribute to the meaning of the space, which will be conveyed throughout the chapter.

There are no extant statistics covering holy water sites and their uses. According to Addis Ababa Diocese, there were 150 churches in Addis Ababa in 2015. The number of healing sites is probably similar, as it is common that churches and holy water sites appear in tandem. However, the number of holy water sites of the EOTC seems to be increasing and several new holy water places have been established in the last seven or eight years. I found that sites established decades ago were in popular use, but among the 30[87] sites I visited, at least six were established during the last seven or eight years.[88] Several informants held the opinion that there had been an increase. Among

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[87] As mentioned in chapter 3: six of these I visited repeatedly, twelve of these I have visited twice, and twelve I have visited once.

[88] Only in one place I visited, the holy water site was not in service. (Even though I was told that there was an expressed plan of the church under which the source was planned to be reopened, it did not happen during my field research.)

them was a man of around thirty years, Abera, a former deacon of the EOTC from Lalibela, who during the past years had lived in the capital, firstly for his studies at Addis Ababa University and subsequently working in an NGO.

> There are many new 'ṣäbäl' [holy water sites] these days, and many miracles. Many miracles because everything has become difficult. There are many changes. Now there are no elders who reconcile in the church yards, I have not seen in ten years. Now people are killing others to get a very small piece of land. Maybe God wants to reveal his miracles. It is said about the end of time that people want miracles during that time. People talk a lot about miracles these days.[89]

The suggested growing number of holy water sites some informants relate to eschatological views, just as the claimed increase in bäššəta, which was discussed in chapter 4. Some scholars argue that there has been a revival of exorcism in the EOTC (Ancel and Ficquet 2015; Dejene 2016) and also a growing number of holy water sites (Berhane-Selassie 2015, p.121).

In general, many church and monastic compounds and holy water sites typically have trees and are integrated with nature, where vegetation like trees and forests is viewed as sacred (Klepeis et al. 2016), in contrast with the urban environment which surrounds these ṣäbäl bota. Addis Ababa is growing and new trends in architecture are becoming part of the city, like skyscrapers and apartments buildings. Only 20 years ago, when I first visited, the city had more of a village profile, with just a few taller buildings and big green areas in between houses. Many of the church compounds and the holy water sites remain, as they have always been and are today among the few areas that are not being sacrificed for the growing population and the modernisation project[90].

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[89] Interview, Addis Ababa, 9.5.2016
[90] However, as my assistant Tirsit Sahle pointed out, there are giant new churches under construction, replacing the older, smaller churches, which is also part of the modernisation project and can also be understood as a result of the religious competition that has been seen in recent years.

Among the sites I studied, in most of the cases, the healing sites are outside of the church compounds and were even some distance from it, but there are some exceptions where the water source and healing site are located inside the church compound or where churches have been built near the holy water. The source of the holy water may be a natural spring or tap water. The holy water site has no *tabot*[91], but the tabot may be brought to the site from the church that it administers under, on feast days.

Even though the sites are mainly centred on holy water, as mentioned, there are often other things used for healing purposes. Holy oil, or *qəba qəddus,* is commonly used, and sometimes there are 'stations' inside holy water sites where a priest healer offers this service. The clergy serving at a holy water site may carry holy oil and offer it to visitors on request. Ashes burnt at the site or soil taken from the ground mixed with holy water and either consumed or applied to the skin is another common method, and in one place I visited they had holy honey, which is also documented from Lalibela (Anderson 2007, p.23). Most things at holy water sites are viewed as different from other things and may have a healing effect (see chapter 7). I have also come across a site where only holy oil healing is provided, in a church compound. That site was often used in combination with a holy water site which I visited many times, the Weibela Maryam holy water site. In the next paragraphs I will describe Weibela Maryam in detail and give more brief descriptions of a few more sites to give an impression of how these places look and are both similar and different in their appearance.

Weibela Mariam ṣäbäl bota

Weibela Maryam is situated a couple of kilometres from the city centre in an old residential area[92]. The area is inhabited by both rich and poor; there are some embassies in the area, but also houses where people live in the traditional compounds where they share a tap in the backyard and have fellowship through different kinds of

[91] *Tabot* is a replica of the Ark of the Covenant.
[92] Addis Ababa is growing, and new residential areas are popping up quickly.

work. In between, there are villas. The embassies have big compounds with tended gardens, so this part of town is characterised by trees and green areas. The little valley where Weibela Maryam is situated is itself green, with tall trees. Most of them are eucalyptus, which has taken over the habitat in this area. From one side one approaches down a steep hill, which becomes particularly muddy and slippery during the rains. From the other side one crosses a provisional bridge made of wood. This is where those who come for healing and protection cross to go to the *baḥtawi* (hermit), who carries out healing rituals with holy oil up by the church. The area has a brick fence surrounding it and a large iron gate with the Ethiopian colours on it, green, red and yellow. One must walk up a few stairs to get to the entrance, and then down again. There is also a ditch surrounding the fence.

Weibela Maryam is a holy water site mostly used by the people living in the nearby area, a 'neighbourhood site'[93]. It has no residential area, and thus, unlike more famous

[93] I visited this site regularly, periodically several times a week, and spent the morning hours from between 6-7.30 until the activity went down, between 9 and 11 am.

sites that people travel to and spend days, months and sometimes years on, Weibela Maryam is usually only open in the morning hours. Many of the sites people travel to, are placed more secluded, away from residential or business areas in the city. The site is dedicated to Mary, as are many other holy water sites. Mary has a special, important place in Ethiopian Orthodox veneration and salvation (Wright 2004; Kefyalew Merahi 1997). An important factor to the special role of Mary is based on the idea that she has a covenant with Ethiopia (Kefyalew Merahi 1997).

This is a popular site among people in the area, with up to several hundred visitors every morning and a reputation of healing. This reputation has many reasons, the holy water source, the sacredness of the space, which also relied on a highly respected *aṭmaki* who was serving there. Others who served there were a *mämhər* and a few helpers. The popularity of the priest who works there was clearly demonstrated when he one morning informed the congregation that the parish had decided to move him to another site. The visitors' spontaneous response was to march together to the Church administration and protest this decision. There was a lot of talk in the crowd about how he had a special gift. One upset elderly woman told me while walking out to protest that the administration had also removed another priest some years back, a priest described by the woman as gifted and much loved by the regulars. Her analysis was that it was an act caused by envy[94].

Normally, opening hours are from approximately 6 to 11 am, but the site would be kept open if there were still people coming. For example, during *Ṗagʷme*, the thirteenth month in the Ethiopian calendar, many people come to prepare for the Ethiopian New Year (which is in September in the European calendar). One important practice is called *tät'ämmäqä*, to immerse into water. The verb tät'ämmäqä has many meanings, among them to be squeezed, to be brewed and meanings related to immersing something or someone into water, including to

[94] Envy is often mentioned as a driving force when negative consequences occur, implying that someone has employed harmful methods of traditional healers to hurt someone else. See also (Aspen 1994, pp.301-303)

take holy water and to be baptised (Kane 1990). In this context I use 'be baptised' to reflect the religious meaning of the word used for a healing purpose in a spiritual context[95].

Part of the queue for the holy oil treatment in the compound of the Jesus Church. Photo: Marta Camilla Wright.

At this site, the holy water is a spring water. The holy water site itself is next to a river, but the holy water does not come from the river, which is the case in many other places, but rather from a source/spring some metres away. The water is taken from a reservoir through pipes into the house with the showers, and to a tap where jerry cans and bottles are filled with water for consumption.

Surrounding the healing site, outside the fence, there are a few benches in addition to a toilet, some tall trees, stones and grass. Some of the people coming to the site spend time in the area outside the fence drinking holy water. In the morning, there are usually some people sitting in the area, either alone or in groups. Some of them just

[95] The Amharic word tät'ämmäqä used for this immersion in water at holy water sites is different from the word used for ritual baptism of children, which is *krəstənna tänässa*. However, my native Amharic-speaking assistants have consistently translated this to English as 'to be baptised', and therefore I also use it.

drink holy water, some drink and then throw up, because often the illness is believed to be a poison in the stomach which must be forced out.

Next to the gate, there is an area where people can sit on both sides along the fence. To the left and in front there is an area where people leave their shoes. There are wooden shelves for shoes, but many also leave their shoes on the ground near the paved path that takes you towards the houses and the area for distribution of holy water. Visitors must walk barefoot inside the compound. Some people will take off their shoes before even entering the area, and some wait until they are inside. The exact spot where you should leave the shoes and go on barefoot is not clearly marked, but there is a point at which one is expected not to move on with shoes; approximately a couple of metres from the entrance gate.

Women and children waiting outside the house where there are showers and a prayer area. The bottles on the tree are filled with what has been ejected from bodies during healing processes and are 'proofs' of healing. Photo: Ethel Fjellbakk Wright

There are walking paths surrounded by trees and grass, some areas dedicated for growing vegetables. A path of cement takes you to the main prayer house/healing place about 25 meters from the entrance. Before reaching the main house, after a few meters on the left-hand side, there is a smaller house of approximately five square meters. The inside walls of the house are decorated with pictures of saints, angels, Mary, Christ and the Trinity. Most of the time there are people praying there, during my observations, between one and ten people. The atmosphere is sometimes quite intense with people praying and provoked spirits talking and shouting. The small prayer room is full of posters of saints, angels and Christ, and at the centre of the room, an image of Mary is placed in a glass box. Curtains cover the images, and there are some artificial flowers on the floor in front of Mary. A donations box is placed in front of the glass box. It is sealed with signed pieces of paper, stamped by the Church administration. To the right there is a candle stand. Sometimes candles burn there. The central icons make up a collection; of Christ, of Arsema[96], Mary and a depiction of the Trinity. All are covered with curtains that people sometimes use for healing purposes, rubbing their faces, their eyes, or other parts of the body, and it is kissed by many, as they kiss the icons underneath. Visiting the little prayer house is not an obligatory part of the procedure, and some simply pass it. Others bow and cross themselves when passing it, some enter for a minute or two, some stay a few minutes, and others still, stay longer.

Opposite the prayer house, to the right when walking towards the main house, is another one-storey building mainly used for storage. Next, after the prayer house, on the left-hand side, is the area where one volunteer distributes water. It is marked with a fence. People leave their jerry cans and bottles in a line and collect them full of holy water after their holy water shower. Behind the water distribution area is a small shelter made of wood. Those who are in a hurry for some reason and cannot wait in the queue can baptise quickly there. In front of the water distribution area, there are a few

[96] Arsema is a female, Armenian saint who died in 290 AD.

benches where people drink or rest. To the right, next to the main house, is the water reservoir. There is a spot on the tube where water is constantly leaking. I have observed the *aṭmaki* sitting there, filling his cup from the leakage, and having his drink of holy water next to it after his duties.

The main house with the showers and the main prayer area is larger. Ascending the stairs one sees the prayer place in front with a large image of Mary, colourful light bulbs and other posters with images of saints and Christ. To the right there is a wall, also with posters of saints and angels, and to the left there are benches where people sit in queue waiting to shower in the holy water. Further to the left, there is a wall with openings on each side. On the left-hand side, women enter the showers and on the right-hand men enter. There are four showers on the women's side and three on the men's side. This is a pattern, that there are more showers reserved for women than for men, because the majority coming to holy water sites to be baptised in the holy water are women[97]. Next to the prayer place, the *aṭmaki* normally offers cross healing in the morning. Sometimes incense is burned on a charcoal burner. People use it as a healing remedy, placing part of the body inside the smoke or lifting clothes to let the smoke come near the part of the body where the ailment is. There are two windows in the house. A microphone and loudspeakers are positioned next to the large icon of Mary, and are used for music and for preaching, teaching and giving testimonies.

Examples of other holy water sites

Weibela Mariam has only one water source, others have more water sources, with sacred, healing water. The number of different healing water sources in one place varies, and they are all named after certain saints, angels or Christ. At the holy water site *Yohannes*, in Piazza, the old city centre of Addis Ababa, there are as many as fourteen different holy water sources. Among them is a water source in the name of

[97] This is an interesting finding, which points to gender differences in holy water healing. In this work, however, I do not analyse the ethnography in light of gender theories.

Tekle Haimanot, George, Egziabher-Ab, John, Kidane Mehret, and Raphael. There were four different houses, and I was told that only Mary had a pump, the others were natural. I observed that some of them were pools, and some were water coming out of trees.

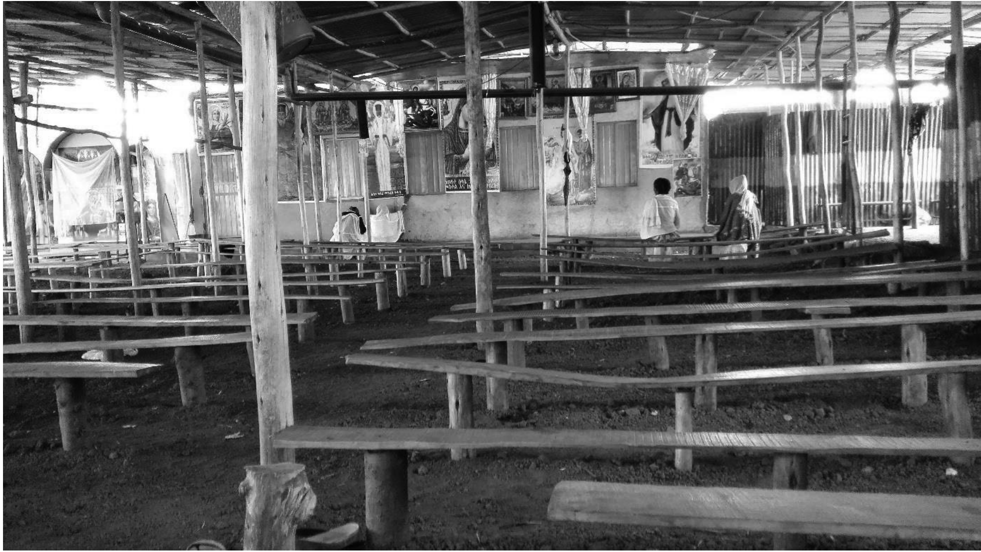
An example of the more urban is one site situated right in the centre of Addis Ababa. It is one of the older sites situated in the Mercato area, an area which is exactly what the Italian name says: a market and the commercial hub of Addis Ababa, to the northwest of the city centre. In this area there is an old church dedicated to the Ethiopian saint Tekle Haimanot (1215-1313). Here the holy water healing takes place inside the church compound, in a compound separated from the larger compound with a fence and a narrower entrance with a gate. The larger compound also has a monastic area, separate from the church. The healing area has a kiosk just near the entrance where one can buy a token to give to the monk performing holy oil healing, which takes place just inside to the right where there is a tiny room. The monk working there applies holy oil on the skin of the people coming there, accompanied by prayers[98]. Further on to the right is a large room with showers for baptism in the back and many benches to organise the queue. To the right inside the entrance, there is a wall with painted icons under a roof where people can pray, and in front there are toilets. Further to the left is where the holy water is distributed for drinking, with plastic cups and empty tin cans that people can use for drinking the holy water. People will typically stand facing the large wall full of icons and posters of angels, saints, Mary and Christ while they drink. Then, to the right of the water distribution areas, there is an area designated for vomiting, and between that and the toilets is a large room for users who want to stay longer or shorter periods of time. The room has mattresses in two rows along the walls, women, men and families in the same room.

[98] As far as I gathered from descriptions one user gave to me. The monk did not permit me to enter the room and observe the procedures.

The shelter at Merkato Tekle Haymanot. Photo: Marta Camilla Wright

A third holy water site, Yosef Mikaʾel, is located right next to a major road in Addis Ababa. Recently established, the site had been running approximately one year at the time I visited. The place had quickly become popular, and during my field visits several hundred people visited each time.

Going straight into the compound, one gets to the church and to some tents to the left where visitors can stay for a prolonged period. At the time of my visits, there were around fifty people staying there. Behind the church, there are roofed shelters with benches for people who pray or rest, similar to what one finds in most church compounds. It is a clearly demarcated area, with an entrance formed as a portal, with the possibility for cars to pass. The place was partly under construction, and to the right there were big tree trunks. To the left immediately after the entrance is a path to private showers and an area for group showering. Further on one gets to the huge, roofed area with benches where people sit listening to preaching and waiting in queue for the different kinds of healing they offer in this place. At this site, a weekly schedule has specific days dedicated to holy oil treatment.



The waiting area in front of the windows where the priests perform the healing rituals. The picture is taken after the morning program, and the windows are closed (blue). Women are standing in the rows reserved for men, because the healing program is finished for the day. Photo: Marta Camilla Wright

In the area where the preaching and organised healing service is given, there are many rows of benches in two separate groups, one for women and one for men. The area for women (to the left) is bigger and could serve more people than the area for men. In front, there is a wall with four 'windows' through which priests provide the treatment. On the wall to the left there are many posters with Mary, Christ, saints and angels, clearly an area for prayer.

The last site which will be described here is Bulbula Tekle Haymanot, a geographically wide site located just on the edge of the city. Rivers pass on two sides of the area and form the limits of the holy water site. The area covers several square kilometres. To reach the various healing sources one walks through a small forest. One holy water source is near the river in open air, another is a spring directed through pipes where people shower/get baptised in two small rooms. Yet another, further away from the centre of the site, is dedicated to the Armenian saint Arsema (third century), where there is also a cave with holy water. Further up, there are some nuns and monks

living, and even further, there are houses for those who have come for healing. Outside of the compound are fields and countryside, a small countryside church can be seen on the other side of the river and can be reached by passing a suspension bridge which can only be crossed on foot. The site is characterised by trees, birds, green fields, water and, during the rainy season, slippery mud paths and a humid climate.

Contrary to Yodith Hermann's descriptions of the twelve ṣäbäl bota she has visited, most of which are outside Addis Ababa, where she says that they are organised in a nearly perfect repetition of each other (Hermann 2012b, p.115), I found that even if there are some important similarities between the sites where I have made my observations, they were marked by differences. Starting with the similarities, the sites were organised around the holy water source(s). There were always one or more prayer areas. Moving on to the differences, the thirty sites I have studied are also unique in various aspects. Importantly, there are areas for distributing and drinking holy water, and showers, rivers or pools for baptism. In some sites there are toilets, and an area designated for vomiting, but sometimes these vomiting areas and toilets are situated outside the fence of the sacred area or have no designated area at all. Holy water sites are situated in different areas with varying surroundings. The nature and the geographical characteristics of the sites are important, both in how they give the site its character and how important the different elements in the site are to people. Some are in urban areas, in between busy streets, businesses, beggars and residential buildings. Others are in green lungs of the city or in the outskirts in the countryside. Some have a large area. Others are 'greyer', still with trees, but smaller and built from bricks and asphalt. The constructions on the sites seems rather arbitrary and relying on volunteers donating money or working for free.

Demarcation of sacred space

The areas of holy water sites are demarcated in different ways. Sometimes a construction marks the border between the different kinds of spaces. The area of Weibela Maryam is, as mentioned, defined by a constructed brick fence. In the city, a

fence of some kind is common, in line with the density of houses and a necessity of marking one's own property. The areas may also be locked most of the day and night, and people are only permitted to enter when there are clergy present. In other cases, the border is marked very loosely or not at all, particularly in the outskirts of town and in the countryside. Natural limitations are often substituting the constructed fence, such as a river on one side. Sometimes there is not a clear limit to the place, and even if there is a fence or a natural marker of the space of the holy water sites, these physical borders are not necessarily what define the sacred space or are not the only thing defining it. More importantly, a sacred space is marked by the way people use the spaces in everyday life.

One important marker is where visitors take off their shoes. Studying where people left their shoes indicated that the no-shoes zone is interpreted differently, as people in some sites placed their shoes in a quite widespread area. In the beginning, it was important for me to observe where people put their shoes, to be able to follow their example and at the same time avoid moving barefoot more than necessary, as it was both a freezing and sometimes a muddy experience. After some time, I realised that this analysis could contribute to understanding informants' perceptions of space as sacred. Shoes were also a marker of how spiritual one was, as suffering is a sign of advanced spirituality and walking barefoot is one way of suffering[99]. The space was interpreted and given different meaning according to individuals, and a full consensus was not the basis of it. The area where people left their shoes, and which was the beginning of the holy ground, was an area around the entrance of a site. Shoes were put where the sacred space began, and people moved barefoot in the holy areas. Interestingly, visitors did not necessarily take them off in the same spot according to a specific border. Sometimes people took off their shoes even outside the fence of a holy

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[99] An illustrative example of this is when the nuns I stayed with during previous research would move barefoot always on the premises of the monastery; it was all holy ground, and they aimed at suffering and tire the body to live a life in proximity to God.

water site, and I have observed people with shoes on inside the fence where people usually will be barefoot.

Another observation related to markers of the sacred concerns the organisation of getting rid of what people interpret as the poison (usually in the form of vomit). The areas for the dirt were for instance placed side by side with areas for drinking holy water. These activities often took place at the site, but some sites' rules (see Appendix 3) indicate directions on how to deal with saliva and waste, for instance. However, in practical life, these areas were literally next to each other, for instance if the area was small and did not allow for distance. At the Tekle Haymanot site in Mercato, the area for vomiting was right next to where the holy water was being distributed. In Weibela Maryam, one informant used a small container near a tree along the main path leading to the holy water distribution place, to spit out substances that she believed to be related to the poison. Interestingly, the results of the expulsion from the body were in some places at display as the effect of the water. The vomit and other things forced out by the holy water had been transformed into something powerless, placed in bottles and hung in trees.

Ethiopian Orthodox visitors to holy water sites observed in this study seem to have a certain degree of flexibility in their ways of handling the sacred space. As the example of shoes shows, the way people treat the space of holy water healing is not necessarily coherent or consistent. The example of where to deal with waste indicates that the holy and unholy are not strictly separated. Moreover, there is not a definite distinction between areas, but the demarcation of the sacred appears to be working in a more 'gradual' and perhaps more pragmatic way. The space of Ethiopian Orthodox churches and how it is understood and used resonates with how sacred space is treated and thus defined in a graded way, for instance in churches and church compounds.

Church compounds are somehow connected to holy water sites; there is a church in the compound, or the healing site is connected to a church in the area. Churches and church compounds have a sacred status, often explained by the presence of the tabot.

The tabot is a replica of the Arc of the Covenant, an item no one is allowed see. It is likened with seeing God, which is strictly forbidden. The churches are traditionally concentric, with the tabot and holiest in the middle, and with three circles. The *mäqdäs*, where the tabot is kept is the innermost part, then there is the *qeddəst*, which is the priest's domain, and then the outer aisle where hymns are sung and which is accessible to laity, the *qəne maḥlet.* Typical of Northern Ethiopia and Eritrea is a rectangular version of the circular plan, with an enclosed square sanctuary situated in the eastern half of the rectangular space (Heldman 2003). In the churches, the sacred is situated in specific areas, with limited access for lay people.

The sociological meaning in the Ethiopian interpretation of space is reflected in the pattern of a charged centre surrounded by concentric circles of significance (Persoon 2003, p. 25). Laity is only permitted to the third circle and the exterior of the church. It is as if the sacredness of the church transmits to the exterior of the church. This area is usually like a garden or a park, with large trees and plants, and people will be barefoot in all this area, a sign that the area is understood as sacred. Shoes are left at the entrance(s) to the church compound or taken off and carried by the owner. There are also other rules that regulate where people place themselves, which has to do with menstruation, fasting and being sexually active or not.

Churches and holy water sites are also different from each other, as there is no tabot at the holy water site. However, the sites contain different, more and less holy, areas, observable in people's behaviour, like in the example of how placement of shoes indicated sacred ground, also the way people treat plants, trees and other things in the sites, the ecology of the sites, indicates the sacredness.

Another aspect of the sacredness of the holy water sites is the pilgrimages people make to the sites, either for healing, for annual celebrations, for the preparations for new year during the liminal month Ṗag^{w}me, and other purposes, like 'the fulfilment of a vow and sometimes the performing of an imposed penance' (Wondmagegnehu and Motovu 1970, p.89). Pilgrimage for the purpose of curing illnesses, either one's own

or that of a relative, is described as one of the main reasons for pilgrimages in Ethiopia (Pankhurst 1994, p.948).

Travels may be envisaged as holy space stretched out. The space is influenced already before their arrival by the travellers making this journey towards the holy water site. Wondmagegnehu and Motuvu write that the Church 'recommends pilgrimages and looks upon them as an excellent means of devotion and penance and of consequent purification and spiritual benefit' (Wondmagegnehu and Motovu 1970, p.89). According to them, God grants graces, miracles and worldly blessings at certain places (ibid, p.89).

Pilgrims' act of travelling and praying due to illnesses, directing their prayer for health and protection towards the place they are aiming at, can be seen as part of the creation or 'production' of the sacred space. The behaviour of the pilgrims and the ideas that they have about the place they are going to contributes to establishing the holy water site as a sacred space. Visitors to the sites move in and out of the space, both contributing to maintaining the space as sacred and taking the sacred with them into less sacred or non-sacred spaces.

In addition, sacred things like bottles with holy water, holy books and crosses are moved around, into non-sacred spaces, without losing any of their holy status. One of the most holy things, the *tabot,* is taken out and carried in processions, although fully 'dressed' in textiles, not visible to anyone. The tabot is carried through the streets of Addis Ababa once a year, on the important, annual *ṭəmqät* (Epiphany, but literally baptism) celebration. On specific annual celebrations of particular saints, the tabot is also carried in processions in the non-sacred space outside the church compound. In the case of Weibela Maryam, it is carried a kilometre from the church to the holy water site and back again.

Sacred space stretches into spaces outside the holy water sites and churches with its users, with churchgoers or those who travel to the place on pilgrimage and healing journeys. Or with things carried out from the space. Such things do not change their

holy status but remain sacred. The sacred space of the holy water sites is in this way flexible and not strictly limited to the geographical area. It is influenced by the travellers' (and others') ideas about the place and the things carried in and out of the place. On a narrower base, the border or limit of the holy water site as a geographical area is flexible and porous. At some sites, as mentioned, nothing clearly marks a sharp border as the beginning of the sacred holy water space. The limit between areas with different meaning is rather implicit, and a border that people will interpret in various ways, understand differently, like in the example of shoes.

The knowledge of the difference between areas; which are more and which are less sacred and perhaps not sacred at all, is transferred and negotiated between visitors and not necessarily all that clearly pointed out. For example, in Weibela Maryam, people will also sit outside the fence in the surrounding area, drinking holy water, and activities of healing miracles may take place outside the fence.

The physical demarcation of the geographical area is also somehow a marker of a sacred space. However, as shown above, the distinction between sacred and not sacred is more complex. It may seem like a gradually diminishing of sacred power of the place as one moves away from a sacred area, but still the sacred stretches into less sacred and not sacred space, and vice versa, not only based on being near or close to the sacred. Even though the sacred item is brought into non-sacred space, it does not change. A sacred item, event or behaviour may change a geographical area; a sudden healing event by a so far presumed non-sacred water can change an area into a sacred space.

Establishing and re-establishing holy water sites

A holy water site and a church usually appear together. Often when a holy water site is established, a church is constructed in the vicinity. The discovery of a healing source may come first, rather than a church being constructed first, and if there is a church already nearby, the holy water site will be administered under this church. In this way

the discovery of a holy water site affects the religious development of an area and religious practices of people. So far, I have discussed sacred space based on what people do, detecting the signs of what could be sacred space. Another way sacred space is defined is in visions and dreams, also confirmed to happen in other areas, for instance in Tigray (Villanucci 2010, p.43). Often a spiritually advanced person like a monk has a dream or vision where Mary, Christ, angels or saints give them an idea about the site. Yet another way a space is defined as sacred is when it is experienced as such. A water source may also suddenly heal someone, and in this way change a person's life and an area, which is then subsequently turned into a sacred space.

At one of my observation sites, the story was that the spring had been identified because a woman was healed using some water in the area. This was in a countryside area in the outskirts of Addis Ababa. Gradually the place was changed into a defined area with a fence. Houses for prayer, showers, toilets and so on were constructed. Areas where people pray, shower, vomit, sit, drink holy water and more were defined. The area grew into a space with a different meaning, another content and another function. It was gradually transformed into a space that does something to people's health. This structuring of space, dividing spaces and defining places and relations of meaning between spaces creates a landscape which reflects and at the same time determines cultural concepts, social relations and how people encounter their environment. The space, like this area with the healing water, contributes somehow to, perhaps even makes, people develop and define a space, differing it from the surrounding space. And as this process goes on, the holy water site evolves by what people do. At the time of my many visits, the area had been used for several years and was still in the making. Members of religious associations volunteered to construct buildings. As people used the place it gained spiritual and social meaning. Miracles happening in this specific, defined area or with connection to the specific water of the site, is owed to the sacredness and the healing efficacy of the space.

Some holy water sites have specific mythologies that people talk much about. At Entoto Kidane Mehret, the deacon serving there explained that the year of

establishment was unknown. However, he said it was well known that the holy water was revealed when Abba Libanos arrived. Abba Libanos was one of the nine saints who, according to the legend, came to Ethiopia towards the end of the fifth century introducing Christianity to the Axum kingdom (approximately 80 BC to AD 825). According to the deacon, Abba Libanos hit the ground with his stick, and water came out. He then proclaimed that the holy water was Kidane Mehret. The interaction between the space and the Abba creates a sacred area. The account has relevance, as it transfers religious significance to the site. The way people then think about the area, how the myth establishes the space's importance as a religious and sacred space and how the divine acts through the materiality of the space, establishes it as a healing space.

The Shunkuru Mikaʾel site, a more recently established site, has a well-known formation story. According to the story, the site is without a permanent aṭmaki, after the cross was taken out of the hand of the serving priest and placed in a tree by a supernatural force. The contextualised interpretation is that the Archangel Michael removed the cross from the priest and is the only healer in the site. The sacred space hosts the Archangel who acts there and performs the healing.

Holy water sites are established in the name of a saint, angels or the divine, and mythologies are built around their creation and significance. Stories like the ones mentioned above provide historical legitimation and holiness with dedication to a superhuman being. This is linked to traditions in Ethiopia of connecting spaces to holy stories, for instance that the holy family travelled through Ethiopia. That which happened along the route they took has given special status to several places in the country. Another example is the river Jordan, which one can find in several places throughout the country.

An example of connecting spaces to holy stories is Lalibela, where names of places have been taken from Jerusalem, and used in Lalibela, a town thought of as Jerusalem among Ethiopians. The meaning of a space started dawning upon me when I travelled

to northern Ethiopia for the first time in 1998 and visited Lalibela. A guide, a local deacon, took me through the town's area of rock-hewn churches. He told me about how this town had the status as Jerusalem, showed me the river Jordan, and explained how it was an area where angels resided. Accordingly, when the churches were built, humans and angels worked together, the angels working during the night when the humans were resting. The historian Marilyn Heldman underlines that 'place names at Roha/Lalibala suggest that it is a copy of Jerusalem and other holy sites of Christian pilgrimage. The intermittent stream that flows past the town is named after the Jordan River, while a hill above is called the Mount of Olives [*Dabra Zayt*]. Although these names could have been imposed at a later time, the rock-hewn cross carved into the bank of the intermittent stream mimics the column and cross raised on the bank of the Jordan River to mark the site of Christ's Baptism' (Heldman 1992, p.230).

These examples show how mythologies are part of the spaces and give them content, meaning and even sacred power. The creation stories and myths about what has happened there, in addition to the transfer of sacred power from one place to another, tie them to something special, different and sacred. The mythology contributes to the sacred status and the healing agency of a space. The notion of a sacred space also derives from all it contains. It is there in the nature: its trees, plants, grass and water.

Tigist had long experience with visiting holy water sites. She told me that wild animals live in the compounds; such as anacondas and lions. The proof of this is, in her account, that once upon a time there was a disagreement between the priests in that church. Then the anaconda was making a horrible noise. In addition, she explained, when people commit sin in the compound like having sex, the animals shout, for instance during Ṗagʷme when there are many people in the compound, 'some kiss or make appointments, and then the animals are angered and make noise.'[100]

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[100] Interview, Addis Ababa, 29.10.2015

Moreover, this holy status of the space requires that people adhere to certain behaviour often laid out in rules, explicit or implicit. These, again, contribute to the special status, the meaning, and the agency of the space. The people who work there, the priests, the *aṭmaki*, preachers, administrators, the caretakers[101] and those who visit and their prepared status influence upon the efficacy of a place, because it is interconnected with a place's holiness. There are also accounts of people being so holy that they have become invisible, who visit or dwell in these places.

Impact of the 'outside': Preparations before entering the sacred space

As was discussed above in relation to pilgrimages, what people do when they are not at the holy water site as a preparation before going there contributes to the shaping of the space. What is and what happens outside the site influences upon what the space becomes. Much of this is a preparation of the person and the body. It has to do with preparing the body for the holy water site, the practices and the encounter with the holy.

People are expected to prepare themselves before going to the sites by abstaining from sex, and sometimes going to holy water sites is part of a penance program, which may entail such things as prostration, giving alms, reading certain prayers and fasting, in addition to visits to holy water sites. It is also necessary to dress in specific ways, for women this means wearing a skirt and a white, wide shawl (*näṭäla*), covering the head and most of the body, at least down to the thighs. Abstinence from food and sex, tiring the body and wearing clothes that are associated with religious ideals and 'correct' gender relations are a must.

Preparation is important. Informants express that the extent to which one prepares oneself has consequences both for the effect of the holy water healing and influences upon the healing space. The respect that one must show God and all that is holy,

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[101] A caretaker looks after one or more people if the site has a shelter where people may stay for longer periods.

becomes real in the way people behave before going to and while staying at the site. The way these prepared bodies, the people or visitors, treat the things in such places influences the things, and the holy status of the things influences the people, as does the holy water space.

Rules are part of establishing and keeping a holy water site. Rules about how to behave at the holy water site differ from place to place. Some of the sites have written, formal rules that must be followed. Some places have written rules that are displayed at the entrance (see appendix 3 for more examples of rules). The points on the list of rules vary, and the number of points on the list that I have collected vary from only one (about the prohibition of shoes at the site) to fourteen points, and those that I have collected have different characteristics.

The rules, which were displayed on a tree by the gate of Weibela Maryam, are an example of a more elaborated set of rules:

> In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.
> Welcome to the powerful and miraculous Weibela Maryam Ṣäbäl:
>
> The rules and regulations of this place:
>
> 1) Perform penance (nəssəḥa) before you come to this ṣäbäl.
> 2) For women: nail polish, hair polish and artificial hair (wig) is forbidden.
> 3) For women: wearing trousers or miniskirts is forbidden.
> 4) Women in their period must keep away for seven days.
> 5) Those who have had a wet dream should come only after taking a bath and after 24 hours.
> 6) People with tapeworm cannot drink or be baptised.
> 7) Put your shoes on the shoe shelf.
> 8) You should attend to your personal hygiene before coming to the holy water site.

9) Keep in line when waiting for baptism.
10) Cutting trees and herbs in the compound is forbidden.
11) Help the needy people, give them priority and support them in any way.
12) It is forbidden to drop human waste, including toilet paper, spit, or vomit inside the compound.
13) Protect the materials and equipment of the holy water site from damage.
14) If you want to drink a lot of holy water to vomit, you should go out of the compound.
15) Keep the rules and regulations; then you will be blessed by The Holy Virgin Mary.
16) You are at a holy place; take off your shoes. Exodus 3:4

As shown in the example above, some rules concern what one should and should not do before going to a holy water site, importantly to perform penance, dress and behave properly, abstain from sexual activity and maintain personal hygiene and not come with tape worm. Other rules target behaviour at the holy water site such as keeping the property tidy, vomit outside of the compound and help those who need it. It should be noted that point 10 most likely has to do with the holiness of the space, where trees and plants are an important part of the structure of the sacred spaces. Churches have trees surrounding them, and studies of sacred church forests have shown that it is important to keep the ecological landscape to maintain a sacred space (Klepeis et al. 2016; Heldman 1992). The list includes bible verses and prayers, which is also a quite common part of rules and underscores the importance and necessity of the rule.

Of the thirty sites I visited and observed, I collected displayed rules in eight sites which were all different. The fact that the rules vary points to a flexibility, contextualisation and independence in the selection of rules and that the holy water sites are not regulated and controlled in detail from the diocese or the Patriarchate. Many holy water sites do not have explicit and publicised rules. Nevertheless, as I observed or was told by informants, visitors observed rules, in general, like those

which also apply to churchgoers. They would take off shoes in the entrance area, they would come to the site fasting, women would have to wear a skirt and headscarf[102]. Other commonly observed rules people referred to were staying away during menstruation and after having had sex. However, there is no rule without exceptions. For instance, I observed women who during their period were baptised in holy water in the holy water site and church, but apart from the others.

The examples of how some have chosen to formalise rules into a written message posted in the site can be explained by new circumstances people and the Church live under, as described in the introduction to this thesis. In the changing society, people in the big city get familiar with a new lifestyle. For instance, it is much more common for women to wear trousers and wigs these days than it used to be.

Space as cause of illness

So far, the chapter has discussed how space becomes and is maintained as sacred and healing. However, different worldly spaces can have a negative effect and be dangerous and are best avoided. In informants' illness trajectories, places were often mentioned as they explained how they got *bäššəta* (illness, disease). Sometimes, being in a space may even be described as *the* cause for the bäššəta because this is where the evil spirit attacked, and the illness or the life crisis could have been avoided by not going to a specific place.

It is generally believed that people run a risk of falling ill if they go to landfills or places with garbage or human waste and places that have a bad smell. Dangerous places include graveyards, which are spaces for the dead; markets and where there are many people gathered. Spirits are believed to reside in trees and lakes (Berhane-Selassie 1994). In the Piassa area of Addis Ababa, certain trees and rivers are believed

[102] Twice, in two different sites, I coincidentally ran into a holy water site when I did not wear a skirt. It was demonstrated that the rule was observed, as the volunteers there told me to wait, and then spent time to find a skirt which I had to wear during my visits.

to be the ‘abode of malevolent spirits and are as such avoided by residents’ (Malara 2017, p. 70).

Thus, places have a reputation of hosting evil spirits, and spaces are experienced and perceived as dangerous. People claim that evil spirits reside in certain areas or in certain things when they do not possess a person, for instance that the spirit is attracted by water. The water is a physical entity which does not only have a potential to heal, but also a potential to cause illness. ‘Space for Satan is allocated, like the zar, in water. He is also believed to be in the air’ (Berhane-Selassie 1994, p.164). A *däbtära*[103] (lay cleric) I interviewed, who had set up a clinic in Addis Ababa, also worked in Bahir Dar, a city situated on the shore of Lake Tana in northern Ethiopia. He said: ‘We live in the dry land as human beings. In the water, like in Tana, are the living places/towns for the evil spirits.’[104]

Space proved to be an important part of the story of Tigist. Tigist had made a drastic choice of moving from her family and the neighbourhood where she grew up. She made her choice based on an interpretation of what made her ill, and how she connected this to the effect she attributed to different spaces, and what effect she thought they had on her, her lifelong suffering and her prognosis of getting well and healthy. She explained that she had been living with many different ailments since her childhood, and why she moved away from her family: ‘If one lives in the place where one is attacked by *yämәṭәl bäššәta* [illness that make you fall] one may not get rid of it, so you have to leave.’[105] She also called the bäššәta she had a spirit, which stayed with her for twelve years, starting when she was five or six years old. She experienced being tied by her family:

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[103] *Däbtära* is an unordained priest and formally the musician during church services in the EOTC. He has generally many years of traditional church education, for more details, see for instance (Otto 2002; Shelemay 1992; Young 1975b).
[104] Interview, Addis Ababa, 1.6.16
[105] Interview, Addis Ababa, 11.7.16

> Tigist: The spirit made me run away to the river, so then they tied me. Also, because I scratched people. I was tied from I was seven until twelve. I do not remember anything of this. But then, after a long time and I had gone much to ṣäbäl [i.e., one or more holy water sites] the spirit became weaker.[106]

Later, when she was older, she moved away from her neighbourhood. She explained that 'An old woman that saw me falling sometimes told me I had to leave my area. This is why people move from their areas.'[107]

Tigist spent most of her days in sacred spaces, such as holy water sites and churches. In addition, she had created a sacred space in a corner of her room, a practice I observed in a number of homes. She spent time at home reading holy books and praying. She did visit her family every now and then, but she did not move back to that specific area.

Her story indicates that space was important in structuring her life, both where she lived and how she lived her day-to-day life. In addition, how her domestic space was organised was important to her, distinguished into areas with different degrees of sacredness. It is worth noting that the issue of keeping both sacred space and other space in her one-room home did not represent a challenge.

Tigist moved between sacred spaces, evil or alämawi places, and more neutral places, between *kätäma* and desert. '*Kätäma*' means town or city and is to many Ethiopian Orthodox Christians a conceptualisation of somewhere far from God. It is both concrete, exemplified by Addis Ababa or any other town in Ethiopia, and conceptual, a space far from God, a space which represents things that are immoral, dirty, polluted and hence 'of the world'. Also, when illness is perceived as caused by mätät (see chapter 4), some informants found it necessary to move away from the area where one

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[106] Interview, Addis Ababa, 12.11.15
[107] Interview, Addis Ababa, 12.11.15

first became ill. There is a danger of repetition (*ʾəddəsat*) of the harm. The repetition of the mätät is less likely to harm you if you are not in the place where it originated or you are moving around.

Spatial dichotomies and ambiguities - alämawi and mänfäsawi space

Presenting some important background on how many Ethiopian Orthodox Christians distinguish into the categories worldy (*alämawi*) and spiritual (*mänfäsawi*) [108] is appropriate because they are central to how informants orient and place themselves in the world. Informants talk about a worldly and a spiritual lifestyle (with many variants in between), activities that are categorized accordingly, relating also to the physical distinction between the 'street' and the ṣäbäl bota. As mentioned, another term which is in frequent use is 'city' (*kätäma*), which refers to a sinful place and corresponds to the term alämawi, and the desert, which corresponds to mänfäsawi. Various alämawi activities go on in the streets, as opposed to mänfäsawi activities, which take place in sacred spaces, for instance in churches and ṣäbäl bota. Alämawi activities include actions that are reckoned directly sinful, like pickpocketing, prostitution and selling stolen goods. Mänfäsawi activities are, on the contrary, activities like respecting others, praying, prostrating, giving alms, taking holy water and more. These actions are perceived as appreciated by God (*ʾƎgziʾabəḥer*). The categories alämawi and mänfäsawi relate to sacred and profane, which is a well-known dichotomy in religious studies. However, these categories should not in the context of this study be seen as fixed entities in time and space. The way holy water sites are established or holy water is consecrated, carries with it notions of fluidity and changeability, where the fixed or static categories of sacred and profane are too rigid, as argued by Anita Hannig: 'Rather than a fixed, static category in time and space, the idea of sacredness is subject to ever-contingent processes and perceptions.' (Hannig 2017, p.90). The degree of

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[108] This distinction has also been described by both Malara (2017) and Boylston (2018), as a fundamental distinction in the world view of Ethiopian Orthodox followers.

relativity which I read in Hannig's work does, in my view, need a qualification, as there are things and substances that are not subject to defilement even though they are brought into profane areas, and areas which remain with their sacred status even if profane entities are brought into sacred spaces. However, the categories are porous, demonstrated by the obvious fact that sacred spaces like ṣäbäl bota are frequented by bodies with bäššəta breaking down borders of sacred and worldly domains, constantly challenging the sacred order of things. Tom Boylston points to how the sacred and worldly domains are temporarily broken down by calendrical fasting and feasting, and that annual saints days and other festivals share the characteristics of sacred performance in worldly space (Boylston 2012, p.49). During Epiphany (*ṭəmqät*) the church tabots are carried out into the streets as clergy and the congregations parade the neighbourhood, an otherwise worldly and (so far) non-sanctified space. Daily holy water is brought from sacred spaces, through the streets and into homes, simply to sit there or to be sprinkled, in both cases for protection or for consumption.

How these material spaces, spheres and concepts (holy, unholy, sacred and profane) relate to each other and how they relate to the concepts alämawi (worldly) and mänfäsawi (spiritual) can be investigated with the case of the ṣäbäl bota. As mentioned, the sacred ṣäbäl bota and mänfäsawi space is marked by difference and by separation. Or perhaps it is rather a process of separating and differing, which also includes intervening into and permeating the space outside.

Focusing mainly on examples other than exclusively an analysis of space, two other studies have looked at the categories. Firstly Boylston (Boylston 2018), who focuses on the organising of time and space, argues that to Ethiopian Orthodox Christians in Zege the sacred can be dangerous to human beings and therefore regulations of the borders between humans and divine are needed, which is done primarily by fasting, a practice which, according to Boylston, is '(…) associated with the division of space and time into spiritual and worldly' (Boylston 2012, p.55). Boylston's focus is thus on how the categories need to be separated because of a notion of contagion of the sacred into the worldly if a person who is not prepared approaches the divine. In the other

example, Diego Malara argues that work is an example of a category which ambiguously relates to the distinction mänfäsawi and alämawi, because work is both adherence to the obligations one has towards the family, but on the other hand may take away the focus one should have on spiritual matters (Malara 2017, p.16-17). Are they clearly opposites, as argued by for instance Hermann (Hermann 2012a)? Or are they permeable and linked with ambiguous areas, actions, or things. Malara argues that the alämawi and mänfäsawi are not always clearly separated and represent a blurry distinction in the daily life of people in Addis Ababa (Malara 2017)[109].

In this study, through an analysis of space, I do believe to find that the distinction between the different types of spheres is both fluid and ambiguous. Life at holy water sites reflect this distinction in how the ṣäbäl bota is treated and perceived as a space. The space seems to have, like the body, as argued by Anita Hannig (Hannig 2017), which I will discuss more in chapter 9, a blurred or ambiguous status in its permeability. Most concretely in its orifices, the body is vulnerable and like all other things, it is changeable and temporary. The preparation of the human being is linked to two main themes: food and sex. On the other hand, and more importantly, it is about making the body less vulnerable and more complete. The practices, the degree of preparation of the bodies, the holiness of the things brought to the space and so on are part of what makes the site different, more complete and holy. It is the completeness of bodies, of things of the space that differentiate them from other things and consequently their closeness to God. This closeness and completeness means to be less open, less porous, less permeable and thus less blurry and less unidentifiable. When the body is whole, it is prepared and less vulnerable to evil forces, evil spirits and illness, and more and more under the power of God.

Returning to the space, on the one hand, the difference between the space inside the ṣäbäl bota and the world outside is marked by sharp contrast. On the other hand, the

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[109] Malara also discusses how the terms relate to flesh and soul (Malara 2017, p.12).

spaces exist side by side with only a gate, a fence or an unmarked, implicit border to separate them, and the borders are permeated and not clearly defined in practical life. The alämawi and mänfäsawi categories seem clearly separated, and yet they also seem closely connected. Not only by being opposites, interlinked and dependent on each other in different ways, but also by not being such clear-cut categories, in their lack of containment and their permeability. Moreover, the separation is more of an ideal situation, and the way it is usually talked about and described, which is not really reflected as such in lived life in lived religion, but rather the way it should be and not the way it is.

The concepts also may somehow relate to the concepts profane and sacred, which were discussed by Mircea Eliade in his seminal work 'The sacred and the prophane' (Eliade 1961). The sacred and the profane situated in the Ethiopian context have been described as more nuanced entities or concepts than a clear-cut dichotomy. Discussions about these categories and similar points have been made for instance by scholars studying the medieval period, like Kieckhefer: 'how the difference between holy and unholy was understood in medieval culture – where that frontier was less clear-cut and more permeable than is conventionally imagined (…)' (Collins 2019, p.2). Interestingly, anthropologist Gebrehiwot Gebreslassie Zesu points out that an area can be more and less sacred. For instance in church compounds and church forests (Zesu 2014, p.44).

What separates the *alämawi* and the *mänfäsawi*, the city and the desert, also unites them, which can be demonstrated in the concept *fätäna* (test, temptation). Addis Ababa is a place 'where temptations are ubiquitous' (Malara 2017, p.86). Temptations and testing, or fätäna, is however not only 'of the world' and with a negative impact but can be used to obtain spiritual advancement. Temptations are part of the 'desert' life. The desert landscape is a prominent literary topic in the Bible (Goehring 1993).

The case of graveyards and grave houses represents an example of the ambiguous role of space. The striving for avoidance on the one hand and the active use on the other of

dangerous spaces such as graveyards may seem like a contradiction, but I interpret it more as two faces of the same coin. It is illustrative of how informants use space and how space is part of the reason for both misery and illness, on the one hand, and great fortunes and good things by contributing to enhancing your relationship with God, on the other. The danger of space that the graveyard represents can be to your advantage if you handle it in the right way. The right way implies practicing the religion in the way one should when living in a grave house, in particular strict fasting, prayer and reading holy books. If you do not carry out such practices, you had better stay away.

To elaborate further the point that graveyards are dangerous, a story told by an informant demonstrates how they may have a harmful impact upon people who have not carried out protective measures. Atsede, a young woman I interviewed had been ill for several years. She told me a story which sheds further light upon this. She was with her friends, a group of young women, and for some unsaid reason they went to the graveyard. She said: ‘My problem started one day when I went to the Kidane Mehret graveyard. We heard a voice calling the name of one of my friends. I turned and saw a black woman. After that I saw her everywhere, I was woken up during the night. Even after the spirit was exposed, the black woman tried to call me.’ She believed that the woman was a messenger of a spirit of a graveyard – a *mäqabər mänfäs*[110]. To her the visit to the specific place, the graveyard, was what she explained as the beginning of her troubles and illness.

Another dimension of spatial understanding and use is how Ethiopian Orthodox ascetics literally and with the use of ascetic practices move into the desert. Desert, in the Ethiopian Orthodox understanding is also like the term wilderness. Wilderness is a concept used in many religious traditions (Feldt 2012) and it was of great importance in late antiquity and Early Christianity, as documented (Feldt 2012). Ethiopian ascetics are known to go out into the desert or wilderness to pray and live in symbiosis with God (Persoon 2003; Wright 2001), similar to the hermits of the Early Church (Brock

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[110] She called the spirit ‘Kellelios’.

and Harvey 1998; Brown 1971; Ward 1975; Rubenson 1995). Ethiopian monastics do this literally, and even if it is not geographically defined as a desert, they create a 'desert' by secluding themselves from others. Monastics do this for example by closing themselves into small huts built on graves (*mäqabər bet*), in a graveyard in the middle of the town. A graveyard is perceived as one of the most threatening places, where there are spirits of many kinds and where one may easily be attacked, according to the beliefs of monastics, as well as to Ethiopian Orthodox in general. Graves can be seen as interstitial places, which have an ambiguity of in-between life and death. This ambiguity is possibly one of the reasons why people see those spaces as both very dangerous and at the same time giving the opportunity to gain spiritual power and advancement if one endures the attacks and challenges that monastics experience there. Lay people, on the contrary, are advised not to go to graveyards. However, the monastics move there to pray for the dead and advance spiritually with the experience of struggling and mastering the temptations and the encounters with the Devil. Monks in the well-known monastery Waldebba north of Gonder choose to live in an area of the monastery where ascetics eat only *kʷarf* (Kane 1990, p.748), a root found in the forest there, and spend days and nights suffering by being tied to a tree or in other ways imposing on themselves suffering. Or like the nuns I studied twenty years ago who lived in a double monastery near Lalibela, who wore chains underneath their clothes, slept with stones as pillows the few hours they slept, prostrated during the early morning hours and worked hard during the day (Wright 2001). They also considered themselves being in the wilderness or in the desert, where one is given the opportunity to get closer to God and far from 'the city' if one endures the temptations. The life of an Ethiopian Orthodox monastic should be life as an ascetic, wilderness, live secluded, involves moving from the profane to a sacred space.

The same idea of moving into sacred spatiality is also significant when people choose where to go for healing. A person who is afflicted by illnesses, spirits and misery often has an approach like that of monastics. In need of healing, s/he moves to areas around churches and holy water sites to be on holy ground far from the alämawi world.

Informants strongly believed that being at these spaces enhances the process towards recovery, and it is seen as an important part of the healing process. Where you are, where you are placed, makes a big difference in a person's life in that space has a different significance. Other points of concern here are found in the above-mentioned thesis by Gebrehiwot, although not from Addis Ababa, but from Tigray in northern Ethiopia (Zesu 2014). He says that prayer should be carried out with your body directed west-east, facing the east, and burial customs are the same. The head should face to the east, which, according to a priest quoted by Gebrehiwot, ensures that the deceased will face east as soon as s/he wakens from the dead (ibid, p.32). Gebrehiwot describes how the church is circled with coloured fences which demarcate areas. 'The degree of sacredness increases with decreasing the distance to the sanctuary' he says, and adds, 'Even within the sacred areas, some areas are more sacred than others' (Zesu 2014, p.44). What Gebrehiwot refers to is the areas where there is holy water inside the compounds (ibid, p.45).

These examples of dichotomies of city and desert, *alämawi* and *mänfäsawi*, exemplify that there is a big difference between spaces, and at the same time there can be a sense of ambiguity within one space. The monastics, as well as ill people, 'need' temptation and testing (fätäna) to live a righteous life and to heal. The combination of them, the fätäna and the increasing ability to endure suffering, and thus healing and spiritual growth, are both entangled with space and each other, because spaces are fätäna, as is illness, and therefore help in religious endeavours.

Thus, adding to Boylston's and Malara's analysis of worldly and spiritual categories, I have found that when it comes to space there is a stronger notion of ambiguity and porosity. Spaces contain an ambiguity, some more than others. The examples we have looked at so far, are representatives of what Ethiopian Orthodox informants in this study understand as sacred and evil. Importantly, spaces are not necessarily either/or but have a potential of being both evil and healing or holy. This may vary according to, for instance, the things that are present in the specific space, the status of the bodies that are there, different times of the day or the year, and so on.

Continuing the argument that some spaces fit both worldly and spiritual categories, in a more ambiguous way, homes are another example. Homes are where people live together, argue, have sex, drink, eat, fast, pray, meet in the *maḫbär* and much more. Holy water is often kept at home and is used for the protection of it. Evil spirits can attack homes, usually in the form of manipulated things placed somewhere near or in the home. Wandering the streets of Addis Ababa, one will find houses with bottles outside, hanging along the roof or placed along the walls of the house. These bottles are filled with ṣäbäl and protect the house. Blessing houses is a common practice, carried out by priests. Corners dedicated for prayer are, as mentioned above, common among Ethiopian Orthodox. As was described above, Tigist had created a corner in her house, with icons, prayer books, other scriptures and other sacred things, which constituted a holy space in her room. This also helped her create a life closer to God and improve the chances of healing. All these things and practices make the home different from other places, a safer environment. They create a holy space at home, see also (Malara 2017).

Healing space - Spaces as actors

Hitherto the chapter has been about how holy water spaces are created by its users, be it their ideas, history, mythology, dreams, visions, traditions or people's behaviour and practices. Importantly, the theme of space as acting in people's lives has also been lifted, as it was put forward by informants during field research. Different spaces play different roles in informants' understanding and usage of space; place as lived space.

The philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre, a prominent thinker about space, has made an important contribution to the understanding of space (Lefebvre 1991). He holds that humans construct or produce space and that space is not a passive background of human practices, but should be studied as a social construct. From this theoretical standpoint we are confronted by an indefinite '…multitude of spaces, each one piled upon or perhaps contained within the next geographical, economic, demographic, sociological, ecological, political, commercial, national, continental,

global’ (Lefebvre 1991, p.8). In our context we need to add religious space. Lefebvre suggests a theoretical interconnection or (re)unification between the physical, mental and social dimensions of our lived experiences, and I find this a fruitful analytical approach to understanding holy water sites as spaces for healing processes of informants. In the obvious and simple example of the practice of taking off shoes around the border between the sacred and the profane area, the way people carry through this practice certainly is influenced by history, myth, religion, culture, tradition and more. And the practice is constructed in the social as the space is lived, as the shoes are taken off and placed in different areas or worn inside on holy ground. This practice carries with it meaning to other contexts, for instance when a priest takes off his shoes upon entering the house of a zar leader. However, as scholar of religion Liv Ingeborg Lied points out, bringing a Western sociologist perspective into a clearly different context can represent some challenges (Lied 2008, p.15). Encountered with a different culture, like in this study Ethiopian Orthodox Christian informants at holy water sites in Addis Ababa, may impose potential fruitful challenges.

As I understand Lefebvre, the space is socially produced, and yet not active and influential back at the humans who produce the space. However, in the context of this study, I suggest that informants, through divine or spiritual charging of the space, see space as active and even as acting in their lives. Specific spaces contain divine power or evil spirits and act in their lives, which is done with and because of its materiality. I suggest a widening of the perspective in line with informants to this study, that humans produce space, but also that space, as an active thing, in certain ways produces or has an impact upon humans.

I would suggest an exploration of space as actor, and to investigate whether it is more than being active through those present, as argued by Kim Knott (Knott 2015). The holiness of the place as the dust, the mud, the water, the icons, the books, the music, the people, trees, rivers, ground, crosses and more things are charged with the divine, are placed in the geography, and enhanced or changed in the way people are there, how people use the place.

The holy water site is a space where informants believe that bäššəta can be healed. Recapitulating from chapter 4, some informants view all bäššəta as evil spirits. From this follows that healing bäššəta often includes an element of exorcism, and different spaces are better suited than others for this and a space can be more and less holy, and more and less inhabited with evil spirits. As the analysis shows, and which will be clearer in the chapters to come, the ṣäbäl bota is a space which can be densely populated with both and indeed be the space in which the battle between good and evil can happen. It is a space which plays a specific role also in mediating the divine, paving the way for *danä*, which entails both healing and salvation.

Analysis of space as more than its physical appearance can help us understand illness and healing among Ethiopian Orthodox. Where you go, where you are, where you locate your body, can make an immense impact on your life. Places, and not only the things present there, which will be discussed in chapter 7, like holy water sites can be said to play roles in the lives of the Ethiopian Orthodox. Such spaces can make you healthy; they can bring you closer to God. The spaces do something to a person, and they play a role in making life more or less holy. Where you go, where you are, where you locate your body, can make an immense impact on your life.

Informants choose among sites, they spend time there, because it is important to BE there, and they bring parts of it home, like soil, water, stones and other things. The materiality is not simply a product of them, as they see it, but a physical reality able to heal them, yet not without divine power. The very site itself is important, not the idea of it, not its symbolic meaning, not through how it mobilises agency in human beings, but in its materiality.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has aimed at exploring the role of different spaces in relation to illness causation and healing practices, exploring what Alem and others search for: 'a good and healing space'. The chapter suggests that spaces play important, sometimes

crucial, parts in informants' stories about how they become ill and how they become well. The materiality of the space itself is an important reason why informants remain loyal to the sites. However, space is not only sacred and healing. Spaces are also dangerous and threatening and directly blamed for people's illnesses. Tigist, along with others, explains that the area she lived in was partly the reason behind her bäššəta. Therefore, it seems necessary to build space into the discussion about illness causation which plays out among informants in the present study. The analysis of space which this chapter has provided gives ground for a perspective in which space can also be seen as not only media of contact with benevolent spirits, but as active in informants' lives.

What I have shown in this chapter is that space and its visitors relate in a two-ways dynamics. On the one hand, the users of holy water sites produce the space, in line with the theories of Lefebvre on social spaces. Starting from what takes place there: the interaction and the practices. Then the way the users think about the space, its miracle stories, its history, its creation, its mythology and its rules have an impact. Moreover, as demonstrated in the example of pilgrims, what is outside also influences and makes the space: the immediate surroundings, the landscape of the city, various dimensions of the culture, of the society, of the country, the country's history. Changing circumstances outside of the sacred sites influence upon the holy water space. On the other hand, spaces may be seen as active, and informants claim that the space itself has an impact. The holy space has a certain kind of quality and possibly a certain kind of agency that is important in the healing process. What informants see as healing efficacy of a space thus leads to a pondering about whether space may be seen as an actor in informants' views and in this way as causing illness.

Chapter 6: Evil spirits and experiences of spirits

The importance of spirits among Ethiopians has been discussed by many scholars, e.g. (Aspen 1994; Berhane-Selassie 1994; Malara 2017; Messing 1957; Young 1970; Dejene 2016; Boylston 2017a). Often discussions centre around social or socio-political themes, and the most documented spirit context is that of the zar[111] cult.

Spirits are highly important in the context of ṣäbäl bota. Just the number of terms and names of spirits is a witness that spirits are important in the life of informants. Spirits are accounted for in specific and sensed ways, and in informants' views, spirits talk, move and shout at holy water sites. For some informants, spirits are experienced in intense and absorbing ways. Spirits are described as emotional. They feel pain and desire. They feel guilty and grateful. Spirits are gendered and they are young or old. They feel empathy and they are sly. They trick people; they beg for food; they spare those they like. They eat the food the person eats. If there is a spirit in a boy or a girl who learns in school, it is the spirit that learns, not the child. They are born and they die. Spirits can even be physically impaired: 'Spirits (aganənt) can be deaf.', was exclaimed by Abba Samuel, a priest who worked in a church in the centre of Addis and served at a holy water site[112]. His opinion resonates with many other informants' descriptions of spirits; that they have similarities with human beings in a variety of ways.

In chapter 4 it was shown how informants talk about illness as spirits and that spirits are central in explanations of bäššəta. This chapter picks up the topics from chapter 4 which concern subquestion 1 and moves to investigate the role of spirits in illness and illness causation. In the first part of the chapter, mythical background of spirits, terms, types and taxonomy will be described and discussed. Furthermore, various aspects of spirits will be presented as they have been described by informants and as I have

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[111] Zar is a quite broadly researched topic in Ethiopian studies, see for instance (Aspen 1994; Young 1975b; Leiris 1934). For studies on zar beyond Ethiopia, see (Natvig 1987; Boddy 1989).
[112] Interview, Addis Ababa, 9.5.2016

observed at ṣäbäl bota. These descriptions and observations demonstrate how spirits are embodied and temporarily and spatially materialised, in some cases believed to have human form and live like human beings. The body is one of the places of the spirits, and I will present ethnography which describes how spirits are perceived to enter the body and be both illnesses and spirits.

This chapter also engages with a proposed interconnection between spirit belief and related practices to social changes which has been argued by scholars both in the context of Addis Ababa (Malara 2017; Wright 2017; Dejene 2016) and in the wider African context (Moore and Sanders 2001; Sanders 2008; Geschiere 1997; Larsen 2014). One important context to this study is of religious competition: the EOTC is under pressure as Pentecostal and Evangelical churches grow, and the EOTC decreases in number of followers. Another is the belief in the end of time during which informants believe that spirits are let loose and illness flourishes. One recent perspective among scholars is that there has been an increased interest in spirits in recent years. As shown in chapter 4, there are several recently established ṣäbäl bota which may indicate an enhanced interest in spirit beliefs and religious healing which places illness within a religious world view, in addition to what may be a recent focus upon spirits, at least in some groups (Dejene 2016; Berhane-Selassie 2015). However, research shows that spirits have also been important historically. As was mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, the association of health problems with spirits and searching for cures in spiritual terms has been widespread also historically (Pankhurst 1990; Mercier 1997).

The chapter will thus discuss spirits in illness and illness causation considering social change and if or how they are expressions of certain developments, challenges and changes in society. But as people engage with the changes, informants influence upon the developments in their engagement with spirits and innovations of new spirits, which represents a turn towards orthodoxy and traditional religious values and practices.

Creation of the spirits

In informants' perception about spirits, evil spirits were originally angels created by God. The myth was referred to mainly by clergy and informants well acquainted with the Church. It is about the origin of the multitude of spirits, which is related to the myth about the fall of the angels and about how one of the leaders of the angels, *Saṭnaʾel*, took the opportunity when God, the creator, went away for a while[113]. One version of this myth can be found in a book[114] written by a church teacher (mämhər Shitila Moges), who describes the myth of the creation of evil spirits (Moges 2006). After God had created the angels, he went away. At the time the questions 'Who created us?' and 'Where did we come from?' arose in the world of angels. *Säyṭan* was one of the leaders among the angels, and when these questions were put, he claimed he was the creator. For this, Säyṭan was dispelled from Heaven, according to Moges: 'Then God released a light from the eastern direction/revealed himself through the light (Isaiah 6:3). Saint Michael defeated the rebelled angel and his troop (Revelation12:7). The rebel angel was overturned by Michael and was sent down to earth (Revelation12:9).' Then the angels were cast out of Heaven to three different places. 'Those who believed him when he said I created you have been thrown down to earth and Hell. Those who doubted and were asking 'is he (*Saṭnaʾel*) really our creator?' were thrown out of Heaven and left hanging in the air. Those who said we might have created you because we are too many, also were sent to Hell because they have equally sinned with him claiming to be the creator. Those who fell into the air, earth and Hell; and rule the dark world, oppose the will of God and work against human are known as *aganənt*' (Moges 2006, p.4). The Archangel Michael casts

[113] Both the evil spirits and good spirits are said to be from only one source: God. The fall of the angels is an important narrative in Christianity, where Michael gets 'the necessary instructions to curb and destroy evil' (Auffarth and Stuckenbruck 2004). The fall of *Säyṭan* and the angels exist in several versions (Witakowski 2009). The narrative can be found in several Ethiopic texts, having their roots in two main texts: the anonymous Miracles of Jesus and Aksimaros by Pseudo-Epiphanius of Cyprus (Witakowski 2009).

[114] The book was, during the time of my field research, sold in stores often found near churches where religious books, candles and other religious paraphernalia are sold.

Säyṭan, and thus all evil, out of Heaven[115], and God lets Adam take the place of Säyṭan and be part of Heaven instead of the outcast angel. For this, Säyṭan is always in need of revenge, and the evil spirits work persistently against human beings.[116]

The myth was referred to first and foremost by clergy to explain that there are uncountable evil spirits. Lay informants did not so frequently mention the three groups of spirits in conversations about spirits. The everyday focus of the spirit talk was predominantly upon many different spirits and groups of spirits, and rigid classification or categorisation of the spirits did not seem to be of great importance.[117] Nevertheless, informants did talk a lot about evil spirits with different names. The naming and categorisation, no matter how incongruent, give information about how spirits participate in the life of human beings and about what is important to people. I will therefore in the next section look briefly into names and terms of spirits.

Names and terms of spirits at holy water sites

Several researchers have pointed to that Ethiopian Orthodox Christians relate to a broad range of spirits and that distinctions are not always congruent and clear, see for instance (Giel, Gezahegn, and van Luijk 1968; Aspen 1994). Still, there are examples of how specific spirits play important roles, for instance in the example that a certain

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[115] One of Diego Malara's informants, a däbtära, claimed that 'magic' (*ᵓasmat)* also stems from this time, according to one of his *däbtära* informants: 'asmat pre-date the creation of humanity, as such names were inscribed onto the wings of the righteous angels commanded by Michael in order to empower them in the battle against Satan's rebellious faction' (Malara 2017, p.8).

[116] There is also another myth, however it was never referred to by informants, and I have come across it only in the literature (Berhane-Selassie 1994). I have found the same conception in a senior essay written by a student at the Holy Trinity Theological College (Kefyalew 1999). The story, according to Berhane-Sellassie, is that Adam and Eve had been given thirty children by God. God visited them frequently, and 'Eve decided it was embarrassing to have God count the children all the time' (Berhane-Selassie 1994, p.159). Therefore, she hid fifteen of them. On his next visit, God asked if the children he saw were the only children Eve had, and she said yes. Then God said the other fifteen would remain invisible. These then, according to Berhane-Selassie, became the ancestors of the spirits who live alongside human beings, and is how the category of human spirits were created (ibid). According to this story, there are two categories of spirits, spirits, and human spirits, which, as far as this myth is part of the known tradition of Ethiopian Orthodox Christians, may partly explain why I was often told that there are spirits that are human beings.

[117] Similarly, Harald Aspen finds that distinctions between terms of different kinds of 'spiritual experts' in Northern Shewa, are unclear (Aspen 1994, p.172).

spirit is reckoned responsible for infertility in Gonder as described by Angela Müller (Müller 2014, p.190-192).

In the context of the holy water sites in Addis Ababa that are part of this study, all spirits are equally unwanted. Even though evil spirits have many names, a fact that underscores their importance in society, they are not strictly distinguished between, and which spirit is causing the trouble seems of less importance. Even when the alleged spirits talk about themselves the spirits do not distinguish clearly. For instance, when talking at ṣäbäl bota, a spirit may call itself by different names. In one transcription, the spirit(s) first says: ‘I am a *mätät* of the head’, then ‘We, the budas, the muartegna, we the selabis’, and then later in the talk: ‘I am buda, a selabi.[118]’ There is a possibility that there are different spirits talking in this transcription, or there are several names used by the same spirit, for instance ‘I am buda, a selabi’, which seems to be the same spirit using two names. Also, in exorcisms the spirits are not always clear on what type of spirit they are, and the priests I have observed do not focus on identifying them. However, spirits are understood as identifiable when they inhabit someone, and sometimes the priest will ask the spirit ‘Who are you?’ as part of an exorcism. This may be illustrated by an interview that I made with a priest at a holy water site. I talked to him after he had had an encounter with what they believed was a spirit inhabiting a young woman. I asked the priest which spirit it was.

> Abba: It is a mätät[119], ʿaynä ṭəla[120], zar, it has several varieties, but it is aganənt in general. It is like when a person is called a soldier, but he is still a human being. It varies in names, but it is an aganənt. It is like that. How many types of human beings are there?

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[118]Recording, participant observation, Addis Ababa, 24.5.2016

[119] Mätät is sometimes talked about and treated as a spirit but is first and foremost a method of causing harm. This example shows how slippery the term spirit is and underlines the argument that the taxonomy or name of spirits is not of importance to people who pursue holy water practices and has no consequence for the course of therapy. Evil spirit is evil spirit, no matter its name or which category it belongs to, and the treatment is holy water and associated practices.

[120] ‘Shadow of the eye’, evil eye.

Camilla and Tirsit[121]: There are many.

Abba: There is a soldier, a priest, a student…

Camilla: How many types of aganənt are there?

Abba: It is like human beings, there are many.

Tirsit: Is it only mätät or does it have other varieties?

Abba: He changes his name. He might say 'I am ʿaynä ṭəla'. If you ask me, I will tell you I am a priest, and another man might say he is a soldier and another one might say he is a farmer. But basically, we all are human beings. Likewise, he says he is an ʿaynä ṭəla, a buda, a zar and an aganənt. But basically, he is aganənt, a säyṭan.[122]

The dialogue raises the issue of types and characteristics of spirits. The priest is not primarily interested in distinguishing between the different kinds of spirits. In the collected research material of this study, informants focus less on distinguishing between them. The priest points out that all spirits belong to the overarching class aganənt.

So far, I have argued that the taxonomy of spirits, at least in the context of the holy water site, seems of less importance both to the clergy and to visitors. One important reason for this is that discerning between spirits has little impact on the treatment. What is important, however, is to get rid of the spirits. The treatments at holy water sites vary both internally at a site and between sites but are not carried out in specific ways according to type of spirit or type of illness.

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[121] Tirsit Sahle worked with me as assistant from February to July 2016.
[122] Interview, Addis Ababa, 23.5.2016

A panorama of spirits: Individual and collective

Many different spirits are mentioned at ṣäbäl bota. Judging from other studies, like Aspen, where zar and wukabi are the main, or Boylston, who does not come across zar in his field study in Zege, whereas Dejene and Malara describe a panorama of spirits similar to a finding in the present study, it may point in the direction of a finding that Addis Ababa is also a melting pot of different spirit traditions. In addition, as will be discussed further down, invention may be an aspect of spirit beliefs and practices in Addis Ababa.

Although, as mentioned above, there is little need to distinguish between spirits at ṣäbäl bota because the healing practices are the same, and there are many spirits with different names. They are associated with different kinds of practices and cults, and work in different ways. A clarification on terms for different types of spirits is nevertheless in place. Bogdan Burtea notes that the term demon denotes the evil spirits, however there are spirits that are 'neutral, familiar, benevolent or ambivalent to Ethiopians' (Burtea 2005, p. 130). Often the generic terms *mänfäs* or *ᵓərkus mänfäs*, *aganənt*, or *ganen* are more commonly used. Säyṭan has a core place in the mythology of the creation of evil spirits and was often mentioned. Säyṭan is often referred to as the counterpart of God. Säyṭan can be personalised as Säyṭan, or Saṭnaᵓel. Säyṭan can also be referred to as impersonal, as when people talk about an evil spirit as 'a säyṭan'. Other names that I have observed being used for säyṭan is *666* and *awrio mänfäs*, which can be translated as 'beast', and *diyabəlos.* Again other names for the devil are *mästema*, *belḥor*, and *ganen*[123] (Burtea 2003). Underscoring the centrality and the material dimension of Säyṭan is the fact that the book called *Mälkəᵓ Saṭnaᵓel*[124] exists and is in use. Mälkəᵓ means image or face, and it indicated that säyṭan has a face,

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[123] A specific evil spirit connected to Säyṭan that informants mentioned is *Azazael*, described as the immediate follower of *Saṭnaᵓel*. *Azazael*, according to one informant, forces people to cut eyebrows, wear trousers, paint nails, wear jewelry, make men wear female clothes and more.

[124] There are several *Mälkəᵓ*, which is a type of holy literature, for instance of the Archangel Michael and Jesus.

rather than being an invisible power. The portrayal of Saṭnaᵓ*el* is somehow contradictory, as he is called 'holy' or 'priest of Heaven', and he assists in practices of black magic (Burtea 2003). The other important book is *Dərsanä Saṭnaᵓel*[125]*,* homily of Satan. These two books are not accepted by the EOTC. However, their names are of the same category as accepted, holy books. Mälkəᵓ and Dərsan are forms of religious literature and exist in many versions, for instance *Mälkəᵓ Yesus* and *Dərsanä Mikaʾel*, books that are important to both clergy and lay people.

Spirit sins

There are several other categories of spirits. One of the categories are spirits responsible for causing sins[126]. Meseret, an unmarried woman in her thirties, who had been ill for several years, explained that one of the reasons she got into problems, was *yäzəmut mänfäs*: the spirit that makes a person commit adultery. In her view, adultery included to think about men wanting to get married. Others are *yäwuššät mänfäs* (spirit of lie), *yäsərqot mänfäs* (spirit of theft)*, yäśəśśət mänfäs* (greed), and *yäᵓamləko mänfäs* (spirit of worshipping other gods). Sins then are caused by an evil spirit. The responsibility for the sinful action is allocated externally, outside the person, in the mischiefs of evil spirits. As sins, these spirits influence upon relationships between people. Interestingly, according to Abba Samuel, there are many groups of evil spirits, whose work corresponds to the desires of people. He explained:

> Abba Samuel: There are many *säyṭan*. There are those who are born from people and reproduce with human, there are also invisible ones. There is one who can reproduce and mix with human in an invisible way. Like traders have different desires to collect money, the demons have branches according to our sins. The

[125] *Dərsanä Saṭnaᵓel* means Homily of Satan.
[126] Thomas Csordas describes a similar feature in Catholic Charismatic demonology (Csordas 1994, p.181).

> major temptations are three: love of money, arrogance and greed. These were also Jesus' temptations in the desert.[127]

Connecting spirits with sins and desires reflects the rationale behind how informants understand spirits, illness and illness causation, and how they practice to prevent evil spirits from attacking, which I will look closer into in chapter 9. Patience, endurance and adherence to religious practices are often described as the way not to be tempted and not to carry out sinful actions, and to be ways to stay under the radar of spirits.

Spirits are also named and categorised individually, and they may appear individually. That means in one person, or collectively, for instance in a whole family. Healing practices are, as far as this research goes, carried out individually, or in a *maḫbär*, and not by kin groups, but the individual can be representing a whole family.

Zar

Zar[128] is a group of spirits which is often represented at ṣäbäl bota. Gatherings for veneration of zar is usually categorised as adorcism (Heusch 1981) and often consist of people who have some kind of illness. The aim is to stay as healthy as possible by keeping the relationship with the zar at good terms (Young 1975b; Aspen 1994). At the holy water sites, the aim is the opposite: to be free of the zar spirit.

Zar is often talked about at holy water sites, and I have often observed the particular torso-bending and head-swinging movement (Young 1975b, p.571) associated with zar[129]. I have also observed people talking by themselves, for instance while in the shower of ṣäbäl, or in front of icons, a monologue usually interpreted as a spirit talking. Often the spirit told a story behind the person's challenges and illnesses, and it

[127] Interview, Addis Ababa, 20.5.2016
[128] Zar is a spirit and practice which is not limited to the Ethiopian context but is more widely spread. Its origin, however, is likely to be in Ethiopia (Natvig, 1987).
[129] These movements were quite common, and there are indications that such movements are carried out more broadly and not only by those afflicted by zar spirits.

would sometimes say explicitly which spirit it was, for instance zar, or more specifically a certain zar spirit.

Zar spirits have many names, and the names I have heard from informants are: *Wesen gala, Adal Moti, Chengele, Birr amber, Shi amber*[130]*,* all of which have been suggested to be male, and the female spirit *Rahel*. One informant said that the zar spirits have a leader: '(…) the "boss" of all zar spirits is Adal Moti. The way Adal Moti screams is so hard. There are even women screaming in a man's voice.' [131]

Zar spirits are, unlike most other spirits, inheritable or transferred between family members and sometimes operate collectively. Normally they stay in families, and children inherit them either before or after the death of their mother or father. There are multiple ways in which the zar passes on to the successor. The informants with whom I have discussed zar incorporation see themselves as victims of a spirit possession that they did not expect. Although some of the literature refers to zar as a predominantly female cult (Kaplan 2010), some also acknowledge the role of men although not analysing the practice in a gender perspective (Young 1975b; Aspen 1994). In this research I have observed both men and women with zar afflictions. A young man here called Tekle claimed that a zar spirit embodied him. He was an Orthodox Christian deacon originally from an area in the north of the country. Tekle explained that his mother had been healed and zar had left her at the specific *ṣäbäl bota*, and that he had also come there for the same purpose. He explained how he assumed he had got the zar, referring to a dream:

> Tekle: In a dream, I saw big goats leaving my mother and small ones entering me. That was the zar passing to me. Before coming here, we had a plan to go to ṭänqʷay, but then I saw in my dream a monk looking like Tekle Haymanot[132]

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[130] These are names I have only heard orally, and I have not transcribed them according to the transliteration system employed in this thesis.
[131] Interview, Addis Ababa, 24.3.2016
[132] Tekle Haimanot (c. 1215 – c. 1313) is an Ethiopian Saint famous for having prayed standing up for so long (seven years) that he lost one of his legs.

> saying ‘Why don’t you go to ṣäbäl?’ I came here with my mother. I shouted[133] here, but I did not continue to get baptised because my mother needed my help to get treated. My brother had the similar problem. He came, was baptised and the spirit said it was *ʿaynä ṭəla’*. He (the brother) was very sick. Now he is back at work and is cured. He is fine. I came back now by myself to be cured, my mänfäs (spirit) is already chained here and shouted here.[134]

He explained that his zar is male and called *Shi ambesu*. According to him, there are also female zar, and he explained that his mother had four female zar. She got sick as she shaved her head. Zar usually requires offerings in the adorcism rituals, and the zar wanted her to sacrifice perfume, jewellery and so on. So, when she shaved her head, she could not put jewellery on it as an offering according to Tekle. Coffee is offered at zar gatherings, a drink that has a special place within zar practices (Pankhurst 1997). One will often find coffeepots and other equipment used in coffee ceremonies deposited at holy water sites as a concrete proof that someone stopped their to zar practice enhancing the efficacy of healing.

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[133] Shouting is one of the main signs of spirit possession. To express that a person is possessed by an evil spirit, it is common to simply use the verb to shout.
[134] Interview, Addis Ababa, 11.6.2016

Coffee pots and other items left at a holy water site. Photo: Marta Camilla Wright

Evil Eye – Buda

Both evil eye and buda were mentioned as an illness by several respondents in the free-listing survey and were frequently talked about in conversations and interviews. They are interconnected; buda is believed to be both people and spirits, and to have the power of the evil eye. Like other spirits, evil eye is a physical, concrete threat. Eyes are common 'doors' for the spirits. On the one hand, the eye can be evil. On the other hand, it can be a particularly vulnerable part of the body. The eyes are where spirits can get through to you, and through which they may harm you. Eyes mark one of the open spots of the body, and a look can hurt someone, even fatally, and is an example of the problematic porosity of the body, which will be discussed more in detail in later chapters. Market places represent a potential threat because one may encounter people who are professionals of different handicrafts that are associated with buda. In such a

crowd[135] there is potentially evil eyes. About buda, one informant claimed: 'It is said he ate someone via his eye… when a person is possessed by that spirit (buda) it can make an individual sick just by staring at him.'[136] I was once warned by a guard in the compound I lived, an elderly Ethiopian Orthodox Christian man, not to take my children to the nearby market, because, as he said 'there are eyes there'. Other research confirms that the buda power is believed to transmit through the eyes (Mjaaland 2004, p.90). The buda is also associated with the hyena, or the hyena spirit (Salamon 1999), and people warn others that they risk being eaten by the buda, an association resting on the belief that buda people can transform into hyena. Buda is also a spirit associated with certain groups of people believed to be more susceptible to the transformation into buda and commonly thought of as inheritable rather than acquired (Boylston 2017a, p.387). The main group is the Falasha or the Beta Israel (Reminick 1974; Freeman and Pankhurst 2003; Salamon 1999). The Falasha are Ethiopian Jews; many of them used to live around Gonder, Tigray and North Wollo but were transported to Israel in 1984 and 1991.

Buda is an ambiguous phenomenon, as it can be both a spirit, thus also an illness, and a person, as in the people who work with various handicrafts. Exemplified by the guard in my compound, the fear of buda is prevalent among people and is yet another example of how spirit beliefs permeate informants' lives.

Materiality of spirits

So far, examples have shown that informants experience spirits as both tangible and invisible. One informant, a family father and active churchgoer, illustrated characteristics of evil spirits with a metaphor of the wind: 'Aganənt (evil spirits) are characterised by wind, because wind is not visible, and they are not visible too. But we

[135] Malara also refers to a similar point as a sign of the time, when one of his informants says 'And then I started thinking: "What was inside me? What was around me in the minibus packed with people? In these days there are many people who have demons inside them' (Malara 2017, p.159).
[136] Interview, Addis Ababa, March 2016

know that there is wind when it makes the trees move and the ocean to wave.'[137] This metaphorical expression ('the trees move and the ocean to wave.') shows how the spirits are not always seen as physical entities per se, but the spirits and the spirit's mischiefs are materialised through the consequences of the work they do, and when they embody things and bodies. In this case, it means that spirits are observable in how the spirits affect their surroundings. It becomes apparent in the way they cause trouble and make your life miserable. It is obvious that spirits are real in the emic perspective, and they are talked about as material entities which one can feel, hear and see. One informant, Desta, explained that she was taking care of her sister as they resided at a ṣäbäl bota. 'The evil spirit appears to her in person; it talks to her, grabs her body and even has sexual intercourse with her', Desta explained, and added that her sister screams and says that something is biting her from inside. They had been at another holy water site for about eight months and visited various other holy water sites as well, all to find remedy for her sister. The sisters originally came from a different area in Addis Ababa. However, Desta said that it was impossible for them to live there with the sister's condition. They believed that an evil spirit embodied her, which caused many problems. 'She is very scared; she is always in fear. When she drinks the ṣäbäl she often vomits. Something that looks like linen seeds comes out. Something with a flesh[138] also came out of her body with her faeces', Desta added. The chain tied to her one leg was just hanging there making a sound as she moved around. Desta explained that the chain is for protection from evil spirits. As monks and nuns in monasteries normally tie chains of this kind around their waists, the devil is afraid of the chain, she explained. In addition, priests have prayed on the chain. 'So, the evil won't dare to get close to her', Desta said.[139]

Spirits are described in several ways, by different informants, with qualities quite like those of human beings. Some informants also claim that spirits literally can be human

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[137] Interview, Addis Ababa, 12.6.2016
[138] This probably means an animal.
[139] Interview, Addis Ababa, 3.10.15

beings and live like them. One informant, an elderly monk, told a story about how he met people whom he believed were spirits. This happened when he was a little boy working as a shepherd, herding sheep and oxen. Significantly, he met them in what he labels a desert. 'Deserts', wild areas or wilderness are areas where people usually do not live, and which have spiritual significance (see chapter 5). People tend to believe that there are spirits in such areas. These spaces, the deserts, are not metaphors but physical places, as it is described in the following illustrating example of how Ethiopian Orthodox Christians may experience the spirits, told by the monk:

> When I was around six years old, I lived in Tigray near a big lake. I used to herd the sheep/oxen to graze. Since that place was a desert, I could not keep them there in the day, only during the night. I saw aganənt (evil spirits) there making a fire. I was cold and wanted to sit by the fire. When I approached them, they were discussing: 'Why does he come, we could kill him, but we know his mother so we will spare him'. They chased me away. They stopped the fire and went to another place. I followed them but they warned me to stop. They said that my mother was good: 'She used to give us food, we don't want to hurt him'. Then I returned. In my dream, I went back to the fireplace, but my uncle understood what was happening, he stopped me from going away again. After that, I saw them in different places, even at daytime, and near the lake.[140]

The monk explained that in his view, the people by the fire whom he met in the desert were spirits. These spirits, he said, used to come and beg for food and locally brewed beer from his mother without revealing that they were spirits, and he even said that '(…) after they got what they want they would bless you and go.'[141] The blessing is a surprising behaviour from an evil spirit. However, it is not unusual that people tell stories about spirits that behave in manners that are associated with Christian beliefs. There are for instance Christian zar spirits. Again, the story explicates that spirits act

[140] Interview, Addis Ababa, 29.6.2016
[141] Interview, Addis Ababa, 29.6.2016

like human beings, they need food, they drink beer. The spirits light a fire because they are cold. Spirits may also make moral choices, as in this example when they do not kill the boy because of the good deeds of his mother, which is an example of how the collective plays an important role in an individual's wellbeing. Spirits even bless people, as the monk said in the account above, which indicates that spirits also belong to religions (as mentioned above describing zar spirits) in the same way as human beings. I have come across descriptions of different religious aspirations of spirits in different settings, for instance in the narrative of a female informant in her fifties, who tells a story about how the spirit causing her trouble takes her to Muslim mosques, makes her listen to Muslim prayers and so on. She is unaware of what happens at the time, later she gains her consciousness near a mosque. In another narrative, a woman tells the story about how her mother was possessed by a Christian zar spirit, which made her go to church.

The materiality of spirits is a central topic in the story above, as well as in other informants' illness stories. Spirits are felt, heard and seen. Alem describes the spirit within her sister's body, a spirit that is felt physically and causes bodily reactions. It acts like a person, talks to her, bites her and has sex with her. The poison that made Alem's sister ill comes out in the vomit and the faeces in a concrete form.

Apart from the various benevolent qualities of some spirits, descriptions of the spirits are usually dominated by how dangerously and destructively they operate. Informants express fear of spirits and take measures to avoid it. One central feature in the characteristics of spirits that informants have given is that spirits are ambiguous and changeable; they are in things and spaces, tangible and concrete, and yet also invisible and hard to control. Spirits seek to inhabit things and they stay somewhere, some places more likely than other places. The places they like are dirty places like landfills (*qošaša bota),* they reside in water, deserts and dry areas, or in graveyards, as was explored in chapter 5. They can also live in things, in pieces of paper, in books or in clothes. Evil spirits can reside in people of any kind. According to a monk whom I met

in a monastery in Addis Ababa: 'Spirits go from person to water or the desert until they find another person to penetrate.'[142]

There are notions of collaboration between spirits. According to Abba Haile, who had served at holy water sites for decades, the three groups of evil spirits, featuring in the creation myth of spirits, collaborate. He explained that those who are on earth get knowledge from those who are in the air. The ones in the air have more knowledge. The evil spirits on earth will call upon the air spirits and get knowledge about how to distract humans and create *mädḫanit*, harmful medicine or poison.[143] The idea that the spirits in the air are the most knowledgeable goes hand in hand with the idea that air spirits are the most dangerous among the evil spirits, an opinion I have gathered in interviews with other priests, however, less with lay people. One priest and theologian centrally placed in the Church said that the spirits in the air are those that cause big catastrophes like natural disasters and war. Spirits that are 'domestic with humans' are less dangerous, according to him.

How spirits enter human bodies

The spirits, as has been described earlier, do not remain outside the human body, but frequently enter bodies, and in this section I will describe how this happens and discuss implications for the understanding of spirit and person. As William R. LaFleur has pointed out, the body 'has become a critical term for religious studies', a development which he argues rests on how ethnographers have shown that 'bodies speak loudly about mentalities' (Feher et al. 1989, p.36), and Janice Boddy suggests that we may uncover meaning and context through the body (Boddy 1989). In her study from Sudan on the zar cult there, she finds that body passages are crucial, and

[142] Interview, Addis Ababa, 29.6.2016
[143] Interview, Addis Ababa, 6.6.2016

that '(…) orifices of the body are necessary for sustaining life, yet dangerous' (Boddy 1989, p. 71-72).

The orifices of the body as necessary, yet dangerous, is observable in the context of this study as well. Evil spirits enter humans in various ways. One important and often mentioned way is through consumables which informants claim have been manipulated by the däbtära or ṭänqʷay. The food or drink is offered to a person as a gift. It can also be food that is prepared for commemoration of a saint, which has been poisoned using specific procedures like mätät. Often this involves adding substances. These substances are said to contain powder which can be made of certain animals, for instance, frogs, birds, and snakes. The animals come back to life in the stomach of the one who eats or drinks it and will cause illness. The food or drink has the power to harm a person and make a person ill and afflicted with a spirit.

Another way is by entering through certain places in the body, it could be orifices or areas of the body associated with attractiveness. Sennayt, explained that breast cancer came with an evil spirit. The spirit entered the body via the breast of a woman. Sennayt said that she had heard the spirit say this when it shouted in the holy water place: 'I entered by that (breast), because I was excited (*des belunj*) by her breast, and her navel.'[144] Some informants reckon it risky to wear clothes that do not cover the body, especially the breasts and stomach of a woman, a way of dressing often described by people as 'modern'. Changing dressing codes are visible signs of how Ethiopian society has changed during the last decades, and the previously dominant conservative dressing code is now to a large degree set aside in Addis Ababa. It is now acceptable for women to wear trousers, and to reveal more of the skin in public spaces. This, in some people's view, opens for evil spirits to enter the body.

Even if some areas and situations represent higher risk, informants underline that there is a risk of being attacked wherever you go. With the words of Sennayt: 'Because

[144]Interview, Addis Ababa, 2.6.2016

people in the street can be evil, we do not know who they are, that means they can enter by the eye. That means people in the street may be säyṭan. When the spirits talk in the holy water sites, they say "I took her in the street, I entered by the navel." Or "I entered through the eyes."'[145] Sennayt also told this story:

> Sennayt: This is a story from Arat Kilo. Two women were eating oranges in the street. One man was staring at them, they tried to give him a piece of fruit, but he refused. After that, one of them fell sick when she got home, she shouted: 'I saw her when she was eating orange'. She vomited and then she died.[146]

The spirits stay in the body, but not necessarily in one specific part or permanently in one part. In the showers at holy water sites one can observe people who purposely let the water hit their forehead. Often informants say they must do that because spirits reside in the head. However, this is not the only part of the body they can be. Spirits can be found in the part of the body where a person feels pain. Some informants argue that the reason why people do not get the right diagnosis in hospitals is that the spirit fools the doctor and hides in different parts of the body. Then the patient may be diagnosed with a problem in the back, and then the next time, it could be diabetes and a third time perhaps a kidney problem.

In the ways exemplified above, spirits become tangible and material and spirits are subjects that people relate to and spirits relate to people. Espírito Santo and Blanes emphasize that spirit 'has tended to be associated with a transcendent, nonmaterial sphere of existence (…)' (Blanes and Santo 2013, p. 14). They use the term spiritual entity to make a point about the tangibility of spirits, a tangibility which has been shown in other ethnographic studies from Africa, for example (Lambek 1978; Larsen 2014; Meyer 2010). From ethnographic research in Ethiopia Boylston explains how people in Zege experience and understand buda spirits as 'an environmental presence, one that causes pronounced fear and anxiety. This conditions daily experience,

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[145] Interview, Addis Ababa, 2.6.2016
[146] Interview, Addis Ababa, 2.6.2016

particularly the experience of being unwell' (Boylston 2018, pp.90-91). In the present study, this understanding of spirit as conditioning experience is one dimension of informants' dealings with spirits. In addition, the preceding examples show that spirits are understood and experienced as concrete, tangible entities, in bodies and as bodies, and they animate things, areas (see chapter 5) and sometimes dwell in human bodies. I believe that the spirit presence is related to what Boylston suggests as a main problem to Ethiopian Orthodox Christians. Opposite to seeing 'the problem of presence', as the driving problem (see chapter 1 to this thesis), Boylston argues that the EOTC followers begin from the opposite problem: 'the boundary between God and humans is insufficiently stable' (Boylston 2018, p. 4). This, he remarks, is also the case with the boundaries of human bodies in general, a claim which the ethnographic examples of how spirits enter shed more light on. The spirits enter the bodies, where orifices are 'weak' points which need to be handled religiously. Birgit Meyer, in her work among Pentecostals in Ghana, shows how spirits are not symbolically present (Meyer 2010). Although different positions towards Jesus pictures are available, things have a potential of being vested with power (Meyer 2010, p.313). Boylston points out that among his Orthodox informants in Zege the sacred is potentially in all matter, and that Orthodox Christianity has a mediatic nature, making things and substances 'divinely charged' (Boylston 2018, p.5). The ethnography discussed so far indicates that evil spirits are also potentially in most matter.

The time dimension: Spirits, tensions, changes and the end of time

Similarly intrusive in people's lives as spirits organising in space, which was discussed in chapter 5, time is also an influential organising factor. Overarching daily experiences is the view that, according to some informants, in 2016 the earth was 7508 years old[147]. This is first and foremost based on the description of the apocalypse in the

[147] The age of the earth is 5500 years before Christ, and the year 2016 (in the Gregorian Calendar) was the year 2008 in the Ethiopian calendar (similar to the Julian calendar), which gives 7508 years.

Revelations of John, but there are additional books used by Ethiopian Orthodox Christians that are not part of the Bible which further describe this last millennium[148]. Informants mention the symptoms of the end of time as the increase of war, fighting between individuals, lack of love, broken marriages, envy, violence, sexual abuse, natural disasters, and the like, and in general these are signs that the fight between good and evil is intensified. The perceptions that there are more evil spirits and more illnesses and 'modern' illnesses, are interconnected, because among the informants some believe that all illnesses are caused by evil spirits (allowed by God) and informants hold the view that most illnesses are caused by evil spirits (see chapter 4). Within this framework, people explain the fact that they become ill, and they search for healing at ṣäbäl bota. This is also a time that some informants claim that evil spirits will be released from their chain, explained by Abba Samuel:

> Abba Samuel: There is a prophecy in the revelation of John 12-13 about the eighth millennium. Aganənt will be released from their chain[149] and confuse human beings. They are released because this is the time of separation – those for God and those for Säyṭan – to take those who follow God. Because this is the time when people are not obedient to God, they forget God, they just want to enjoy. The ᵓaganənt (evil spirits) are unique commanders, military forces for God, they are released because we became sinful.[150]

Daily time, periods in life and time in history are loaded with spirits. Informants also experience spirits with reference to time, and in this section, I investigate how spirits are associated, regulated and more and less threatening according to time. That may be the time of the day, annual time, church time, fasting time, the end of time and more.

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[148] There are several books describing the end of time, among them are Mänəgädəᵓe Sämayə, and Fäḳarä Yäsusə. These books are published locally in Amharic.

[149] Chaining is also a method used at holy water sites to calm and control people who are acting aggressively. Usually, the idea is that these people are suffering from spirit embodiment, and it is the spirit, not the person, that acts in unacceptable ways.

[150] Interview, Addis Ababa, 1.7.2016

Spirits have different impact and spirits operate in different ways at different times. Usually, time combined with other factors is what gives the negative effect.

During the life span of a person, evil spirits are more and less threatening in certain periods. One repeated topic is spirit attacks during childhood, a particularly vulnerable phase in life. Small children often wear amulets tied to their neck for protection. In some areas there is a practice of adorning with protecting tattoos. [151] For a certain period of time during and after childbirth women are particularly vulnerable to attacks. They should not go outside for some time after delivery.

The time of the day and the night has different impact. The middle of the night is described by some informants as calmer, with fewer active spirits. This time is particularly good for prayer and for blessing the tap water if one does not have a chance to visit the holy water places or have a priest bless the water. Noon is another important, yet very dangerous, time, as spirits may attack more easily, which has also been described historically and in other areas (Worrell 1918). The time of day when the sun is in zenith is a particularly dangerous time if a woman wears clothes that allow her skin to be visible, she is an easy target of evil spirits. Eating during this time may also open for spirits.

In any month there are numerous saint days and days dedicated to angels, which are days of greater blessing than other days. On such days, people tend to visit churches and holy water sites. Spirits are present and threatening depending on time of year. During the month P̣agʷme, the thirteenth month that consists of five or six days, time is different. This can be described as a time of liminality when the evil spirits are unleashed. It is also a particularly blessed time and a time of cleansing and purification. Many people visit holy water sites on such days to prepare for a new year.

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[151] The tattoos do not only protect against evil spirits, but may also protect against specific diseases in grownups. Tattoos on the neck are supposed to be against goitre, and tattoos on the gums are against bleeding and against teeth falling out (Hannig, 2017, p. 177).

If it rains during on the day of Raphael, that rain is itself considered to be holy, and is supposed to be holy water with blessing and healing effect.

Fasting time is a time when the spiritual battle is intensified. There are around 250 fasting days through the year. Lay people observe many of these days, but clergy and monastics usually observe the fasting periods more strictly. People are conscious about the fasting, as it is part of religious practices. Wednesday and Friday are fasting days and every participation in religious practices and rituals will involve fasting. To participate in the liturgy on Saturday and Sunday, holy water practices and other religious practices in the Church, the faithful must fast. During fasting periods, people decide individually how many hours a day they fast, but usually until noon as a minimum. Fasting reminds a person that it is a time of God, and every religious practice acquires fasting bodies to participate.

Stories about power and suppression, abuse and conflicts at everyday level are also reflected in spirit belief, as are more overarching developments in society. At one level, it is common that spirits talk about conflicts between people. Spirits appear at holy water sites revealing information about events and misdeeds that have taken place. They represent what is challenging, unspeakable, conflict-ridden or even taboo. Spirits often appear to tell the truth about a conflict or an affliction. In one of my cases, what the spirit, in that case, sings, can be understood as an account of some sort of abuse, phrased as 'We made her lose her virginity.'[152] Spirits tell stories about conflicts between people and about abuse. Such micro-conflicts and the social life of humans and spirits will be looked further into in chapter 8. For now, I will show how recently appearing spirits seem to operate therefore, or at least as a way of dealing with and pondering the changes and challenges in society.

As I mentioned above, the area of spirit belief is also marked by innovation, and it seems that this happens in contested areas with potential conflicts. An example of this

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[152] Recording of spirit talk, Addis Ababa, 10.6.2016

which was mentioned every now and then is the *yämənfəqənna mänfäs*, a spirit of heresy. This is a spirit that informants say fools other people to convert to *P̣ente* (Protestant, P̣entecostal or Evangelical Churches), to listen to P̣ente music and to go to P̣ente churches. Some of the background for this, it has been argued, is that protestant churches, particularly the Mekane Yesus Church, have grown remarkably, and the religious landscape in Addis Ababa is changing (see chapter 2), both physically materialised in mosques and churches being built, and in the soundscape in Addis Ababa, which is often dominated by loudspeakers from churches and mosques competing for people's attention day and night.

Another example is a 'Buddhist' spirit that Diego Malara has come across in his field work in Addis Ababa (Malara 2017, p.219). The spirit is called *Osho-Rampa*. According to Malara, it reflects new forms of interest among the youth in philosophy and oriental religion and represents heretic tendencies by proclaiming that you do not need to go to church to find God (Malara 2017, p 221). Yet another example in Malara's research are spirits from abroad who are presented as westerners from parts of the world which are completely under the grip of the devil (Malara 2017). The spirits from abroad reflect the idea of Ethiopia as the chosen country and Ethiopians as the chosen people. This is a strong national myth underpinned by the EOTC, and there is a claim that the Ethiopian Orthodox Christians have taken over this special status from the Jews. Significantly, the spirits in Malara's accounts of foreign spirits utter things like 'We hate Ethiopia, there is holy water everywhere!' and '"Every time his [the host's] feet touch Ethiopian soil we burn already" (hinting at the sacredness of Ethiopia)' (Malara 2017, p.227).

Implicit in these examples is the threatening experience informants have of a changing world but also a creative way of dealing with the potential threats, reflected by several informants. Changes, tensions or conflicts that people deal with can be argued to go hand in hand with the life of spirits.

The way informants see these recent spirits is linked with the apocalyptic thoughts they have of this time. The moral of people, as well as clergy, is also described as affected by Tigist:

> Tigist: Nowadays priests are not as strong as in the past. Now they focus on money and want to know secrets, they do not want to fight with spirits as previously, they simply want to work with people with good money. The power of the *ʾaṭmaqi* [priest giving service at holy water sites] has therefore become limited, the *tabot* itself will baptise the people, not the priest, and the spirit says: 'I am burned by Tekle Haymanot', the tabot itself burns the spirit. Tabot itself has healing power, but first is faith.[153]

The diminishing strength of the faith of the people is also a sign of the time, as well as the reduced healing power of priests. The immorality affects all sides of people's behaviour, be it how they dress, live individual lives and do not care about others.

The separation between Church and state is seen in context with liberalisation and modernity, in the eyes of some informants a sign of the end of time. Such spirits as the *Ṗente* spirit can thus be seen as a representation of this time and of current developments at a macro level of society. More important, however, in this context, is how the repertoire of spirits grows with changing social conditions. It should be added that the conversion of family members to another church (in the eyes of many informants it is another religion) can create disturbances and be seen as a reason for the appearance of such a spirit.

Modernisation and globalisation are terms often engaged with in the discussions around spirit beliefs connected to changes in African cultures. Informants in this study use the terms to describe a world they experience as rapidly changing. About globalisation, Meseret said: 'I do not know much about globalisation since I am very

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[153] Interview, Addis Ababa, 11.7.2016

far away from information. My phone does not even have internet service. But as far as I understand from hearing about it in the radio, the main aim of it is making many people not to worship God anymore and venerate him [the Devil] instead. Even when he said he was God, some angels believed him and followed him, but it was Gabriel and Michael who opposed him and made some others stand their ground. That is what he is doing right now, making many people betray God.'[154] Meseret here echoes many others, linking the present with the fall of Satan.

Concerning spirits in general, anthropologist Bethlehem Dejene has recently argued that: 'Although their ability to possess has always been acknowledged through spirit possession cults, a systematic elaboration of how they enter and attach to human bodies, mind and soul never received such attention until the appearance of neo-traditional healers on the religious scenes of Addis Ababa' (Dejene 2016, p. 109). She refers to a period starting in the 1990s. It is interesting how the type of attention and emphasis put on spirits may be stronger in recent years in some movements which Dejene has studied, as it can be linked with some findings in this study. Conversations with ordinary priests, which means priests who are not neo-traditionalist as Dejene has carried out research on, and observations of the work they carry out at ṣäbäl bota (*aṭmaqi)*, show that there is an emphasis upon spirits and the threat they represent against human beings and that illness is often understood in this perspective. Both priests and lay informants link the presence of spirits back to the apostolic time and refer to the New Testament stories about spirits when they discuss the existence of spirits and how they operate. Selassie writes that 'illness [is] often attributed to supernatural beings' and that Ethiopians 'strongly believed in the greater effectiveness of a cure within magical prayers' (Selassie 1971, p. 95). The continued importance of magical prayers and magical methods for protection and healing of illness has been documented elsewhere (Kaplan 2005; Mercier 1997; Pankhurst 1990). In this chapter the focus is on spirits as illnesses, most strikingly expressed in exclamations spirits

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[154] Interview, Addis Ababa, 10.3.2016

make. In the context of ṣäbäl bota spirits may say ‘I am HIV’ or ‘I am cancer’, an observation also made by Dejene (Dejene 2016, p.14).

Based on the ethnography conveyed in this chapter I find it relevant to discuss spirit belief and practices related to changes in society in two perspectives. Firstly, from the angle of insecurity, as it has been claimed by several that in a variety of ways spirit beliefs and practices are enhanced and increased when people experience times of change and insecurity. Interestingly, for example, Kjersti Larsen argues, based on anthropological research in Zanzibar, that the world of humans ‘(…) is seen as unpredictable and chaotic while the world of spirits, in contrast, is seen as stable and predictable’ (Larsen 2014, p.6). Although informants in this present study relate their experiences to changes in the society, it is slightly differently. In this context, informants experience the world of saints, angels and the divine as stable and predictable, but the spirits are evil and represent a threat to the general order, similar to the threat illnesses represent.

Secondly, this and other studies have revealed that there are new spirits and new illnesses. For example, the category of fashion illness or modern illness was mentioned. A common yet novel illness during recent years in Addis Ababa is *čənqät,* which means stress and anxiety. Both Di Nunzio and Malara report that informants are preoccupied with čənqät (Di Nunzio 2019, p.199-201; Malara 2017) and Malara sees it ‘as another illness of modern worldliness’ (Malara 2017, p.85). As an illness čənqät is interpreted to appear due to changes in society, lifestyles and the end of time. Like spirits illnesses flourish, and new illnesses appear, as do new spirits, which points to a creativity in how to deal with spirits and bäššəta. How informants deal with spirits and bäššəta is not only a repetition of long traditions and rituals of the Church, but informants influence upon and produce reality as informants engage with spirits and bäššəta at holy water sites. As people engage with the changes and innovations of new spirits, they seem to do at least two things: Firstly, they are innovative and place the changes they experience into new illnesses and spirits, and secondly, they turn to the

holy water sites and traditional religious values and practices for resolution of their problems.

Concluding remarks

This chapter looked further into the understandings of illness by exploring the world of spirits. I have focused more closely on the creation of evil spirits and specifically at some important evil spirits: satan, zar, buda and evil eye, to investigate a linkage between evil spirits and illness. I have traced some ways in which evil spirits appear and enter the lives of human beings, make their lives miserable, through illnesses and different sorts of ailments. In some instances, spirits are humanlike, and informants claim that they can be human beings. Spirits can be people, body parts, they dwell in bodies or in social entities such as families, and spirits interact with humans. Spirits can move around, and their ability to change represents a profound enigma and a threat.

The chapter also discussed how spirits are markers of social disturbance, either at a micro-level or at a macro-level, and that people's lives are influenced by the ideas about a changing time. People describe themselves as taking part in a battle between God and Satan, in space, in time and in their bodies, which they deal with in their day-to-day issues.

Chapter 7: Listening vessels and the role of things

The role of things among African Christians has been the topic of various recent research, for instance in Birgit Meyer's work from Ghana on pictures among Protestant-Pentecostal Christians (Meyer 2010), discussions of drinking of *kombe* (drinking washed off Qur'anic verses) in East Africa (Nieber 2017; Wilkens 2019), and Engelke's work on the 'Friday apostolics' in Zimbabwe, who distance themselves from things (Engelke 2012a). Like in examples from Ghana and East Africa mentioned, and unlike the Friday apostolics, the Ethiopian Orthodox Christians I have worked with embrace things in their veneration and in their search for protection against misfortunes and healing, as much as they despise and fear things that make them ill, broken or miserable. This chapter addresses the role of things in illness causation and healing practices, starting with some initial examples:

'This book is medicine (*mädḫanit)*', Meseret said to me, holding the *Dawit*, a book that contains the Psalms of David. I frequently observed people at holy water sites using different things as well as substances in their spiritual healing practice, exemplified by this passage in my field diary: 'One young man first used the book for reading, then took it and touched his stomach, held it there for a while, then moved it to his chest, around his heart. Then he touched the floor with his hand and touched his forehead afterwards. A woman in front of me touched her back with the book she was reading.'[155]

How is a book mädḫanit, as a remedy or a medicine, as claimed by Meseret? Looking at the passage from the field diary of how books are used it seems like there is a concrete dimension to this claim. The use of things like crosses, rosaries, pictures, textiles, books, words, stones, candles, buildings, chains and more is striking at ṣäbäl bota. In addition, smoke from incense, oil and, perhaps the most important, the water, are used in different ways in religious practices and as healing remedies. Visitors to

[155] Fieldnotes, Addis Ababa, 30.3.2016

ṣäbäl bota use them in many ways, as in the short example presented in the second paragraph. In the quote from field observations, what sticks out is firstly that things like books and the floor are important, and secondly the way the books and the floor are included in the movements to touch the body. Other examples are mixing ashes or soil with holy water to apply it on the skin, touch flames and then touch the body, or encapsulate a part of the body where there are symptoms of illness with smoke from incense burnt at the ṣäbäl bota.

An investigation into the role of things points towards an important part, sometimes even crucial, which things play in the stories people tell and in their illness trajectories. Moreover, such investigation points to touching and being touched by sacred things as a central theme.

This chapter follows up the line of argument in chapter four about the role of spaces as sacred and as actors in people's lives. I argued in chapter four that informants understand space as possible causes of illness. Moreover, spaces may have efficacy in the healing process of those who seek healing there. Similarly, things take part in illness causation and in healing. I will argue that things, in this context, must be understood both as media and as active, as things with agency.

Mädḫanit*:* Things make ill and make well

Mädḫanit is the term Meseret uses in the example above; a term which has a polarised ambiguity to it. According to the Amharic dictionary, it means remedy, cure, medicine, medicament, drug, poison, as well as redeemer (Kane 1990, p.321). It has double or ambiguous meaning. It can mean medicine to heal or poison to cause *bäššəta*.

Already in examples mentioned in previous chapters of how people get ill from such things as food, drinks and more, the agency of things has been indicated. In illness narratives, material things play parts. For example, when a black rat is buried outside the family house of Bechelech (see chapter 4) and the rat is explained to be a reason

for the family breakdown, and when the informant Solomon finds a piece of paper in his drawer at home with inscriptions, which in his view is the reason for his problems. In healing processes, things also act upon bodies and things, like the holy water, which forces, as one informant described it, meat-like poison out of the body. These things are part of the explanation when good or bad things happen, when illness strikes and when people are healed. Things can make a body ill and are often blamed as the cause of the misfortunes a person experiences.

Another meaning of mädḫanit is 'redeemer'. Thus, mädḫanit has a meaning which relates to the meaning of the verb *danä*, which means both 'he was saved', and 'he was healed'. The term means both a healing remedy of illnesses and redeemer or saviour, i.e., Jesus Christ.

Powerful things are part of informants' interpretation of what happens in their life. The importance of things must be understood related to the tradition of sacramentals, which are 'certain prayers, actions and things which have been blessed by the church that we may obtain from God spiritual and temporal benefits by their devout use' (Wondmagegnehu and Motovu 1970, p. 69). The eleven sacramentals include holy water, cross and other material things. It seems that the role of active things is embedded in Orthodox theology. This research material indicates that informants extend the number of sacred things beyond those of the sacramentals, and that such things are not limited to those blessed by clergy.

Previously I have discussed the role of things in illnesses, misfortunes and ailments (*bäššəta*). Now I will turn to the role of things through an analysis of the usage of books and words in healing processes[156]. As mentioned, a common practice is to tie a miniature version of Dərsanä Mikaʾel around the neck of small children. These

[156] Words and books can also have a negative impact, e.g. the books used to invoke Satan. Diego Malara notes in an account from his field work in Addis Ababa: 'After years of practising as an exorcist, Mihimir Girma came to conclude that spirits like Osho and Rampa write their own books, and that books themselves can be possessed— The spirit is on the page and in the character' (Malara 2017, p.227).

amulets are not opened or read. The amulets that contain the book seem to have a power in and of themselves. People advise each other and are advised by clergy to keep the Dərsanä Mikaʾel at home, not so much for reading but for protection against evil spirits. When specifically asked about the content of the book, several informants responded that they did not know it and had not read the book; they emphasised the power books have. It is not just the book's content but also the book itself as a thing which has a healing effect and plays a role in the spiritual battle. It is sometimes expressed as less important and not necessary at all that lay people read it. Such books can also have a protective function, when they are placed in a home, under the pillow in the bed, for instance, which was one advice given.

Books are important in the veneration also in other ways, for instance are holy books always offered to people present at a reading or a liturgy in churches or holy water sites. To be touched by books, most often on the forehead, and to kiss books is part of everyday religious practice at holy water sites. The book is then often covered in beautiful textiles, protecting it, and perhaps making it whole and beautiful, emphasizing its importance and special status. The colourful textiles clothing the book, as if the book is dressed up, as if the Archangel is clothed and present in the book. The book as a spirited thing influences upon other things and human beings.

I will first present the case of the book Dərsanä Mikaʾel[157] with several examples, firstly with the experiences of some members of a family that I interviewed, and then discuss relevant information gathered about sacred books in general.

A young woman, Atsede, from Addis Ababa was part of a family where several family members reported of challenges with spirits[158]. Both her mother, who is called Gennet, Atsede herself and her sister had been haunted with many problems over the years. I

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[157] The book Dərsanä Mikaʾel is a collection of twelve homilies in honor of the Archangel Michael. For more information, see (Lusini 2005, pp. 139-140).
[158] For more about this case see also chapter 8.

met Gennet and the mother at a Michael holy water site in Addis Ababa. Atsede, who had many problems and illnesses over years, in her view due to a spirit in her, said:

> Atsede: My spirit prevented me from reading certain words, the names of the angels and some words in Geʿez, words with a lot of power. While I was at the holy water site, my father would read the Dərsanä Mikaʾel. Then the spirits said, 'Now we have to leave, now he is going to read the Dərsanä Mikaʾel.'[159]

The quote shows that the words and names in the book have such a power that the spirit tries to stop the teenage girl from reading them. The spirits also prefer to leave as the girl's father reads the book, while father and daughter are at the holy water site, rather than experience the reading, information suggesting that they fear the power of the book and its content. In this case the words have a healing function.

Are words material? In the introduction to this thesis, the view of Matthew Engelke was presented. He argues: 'All religion is material religion. All religion has to be understood in relation to the media of its materiality. This necessarily includes a consideration of religious things, and of actions and words, which are material no matter how quickly they pass from sight or sound or dissipate into the air.' (Engelke 2012). Words may be seen as material, as they are available for the senses, both as sounds for the hearing and sometimes as noise which may even be felt in the body. An instance in this study is in how words are seen as healing and how words are media of relationships between abstract entities and human beings.

To illustrate the point, readings from the Holy Scriptures take place regularly and are a widely used part of religious healing as well as religious practices in general. During a field visit in Tigray, I observed jerry cans placed in front of a pulpit without lids, as a servant of the holy water site read from Dərsanä Mikaʾel. It was as if the jerry cans sitting there were listening to the words that were read. Words and readings are also

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[159] Interview, Addis Ababa, 2.10.2018

important in other contexts, importantly because of restricted access to the Eucharist, reading from the Miracle of Mary is reckoned a substitute for the Eucharist. The book is read aloud after mass, and simply listening to it is reckoned to have a redeeming effect.

Jerry cans with holy water in front of a pulpit. Photo: Marta Camilla Wright

The words are important and reading the words in the book affects spirits, like in the example conveyed above, and thus influences the healing process, which often is about expelling spirits. The words, reading them as well as being touched by the book are believed to burn or hurt evil spirits and force them to leave the possessed body more quickly than without reading the words from the book. Using books as an example shows how things broadly understood take part in my informants' lives in several ways. The search for healing and redemption from misery is a result of what things have 'done' to make them ill. Things are also part of the healing process and help people to be cured. It is as if things are battling in a fight between good and evil that takes place in people's lives.

Ambiguous things

I will use the example of blood to frame another point: the ambiguity and contextuality of things. Blood has different meanings and functions according to context, and in relation to other things, substances and spaces. As pointed out by Angela Müller, blood has an ambiguous status, shown clearly in the example of fertility (Müller 2014). 'Blood is identified as an indicator of fertility and the possibility of pregnancy. "Malign" blood, however, either polluted, overflowing, irregular, absent or painful is recognised as a symptom of infertility' (Müller 2014, p.188).

Blood as part of the Holy Communion is viewed as very potent and as the blood of Christ; blood is sometimes purifying and healing, like in the Holy Communion, which is a fundamentally different kind of blood. It is the blood of Christ. Under several other circumstances, blood is impure and an obstacle for people, for instance for women during their period or people with bleeding wounds, who are not allowed inside the church buildings.

As mentioned, several religious activities are regulated according to blood, and women are particularly affected by them. Nobody can enter a church with a bleeding wound, and not women during their menstrual period. While in her period a woman must remain at a certain distance from the church, meaning that one will commonly see women standing in the yard around the churches during the liturgy on Saturday and Sunday.[160]

The same rules go for holy water sites. However, the mixing of water and blood is not consistently prohibited, and sometimes seem to be more pragmatically organised. In principle, women are prohibited from going to holy water during their period, but some women enter in any case, as practicalities of life and health trump the flow of their period. I was told while conducting field research at Entoto Maryam healing site

[160] People are also prohibited from entering if they have had sex during the last 24 hours, and so one may find men standing in the compound.

that women could go through the rituals also during their period[161]. A specific area was designated for them, at a distance from the holy water site, where the holy water was poured over them from jerry cans. These women were allowed to be in direct contact with holy water. Nevertheless, menstruation is by many women considered a major obstacle, and a common concern among young nuns that I studied during earlier research was how to stop it entirely. They prayed to Mary in order to stop their menstrual cycle (Wright 2001). A young woman I met at a holy water site told me that her spirit had proclaimed it would leave on the day of Kidane Mehret (16th of every month). Her problem was that on the 16th every month she always had her period, so she was not able to go to the holy water site on those days to get the treatment to force the spirit out.

Blood prevents women and men from entering the church building for the *qəddase* (the liturgy) and is an attractive drink to evil spirits. Blood is often associated with the threatening evil spirits and harmful practices. Blood is also sometimes demanded by evil spirits, and there are accounts of *ṭänqʷay* (sorcerers) and *däbtära* (unordained priest) that require human blood for their activities. Informants express that the evil spirits need human blood to assist humans. An example of this is the story of a teenage girl who was resisting the treatment of the aṭmaki and his three male helpers, which was discussed in detail in chapter 3. One female informant, a young nun living in a monastery in Addis Ababa, explained the following:

> Emahoy: (…) people start to worship zar*, qalläčča*[162]*, bunna* (coffee)[163]*,* ṭänqʷay and have the spirit of the Devil. And people go and worship him, they talk about people's destiny and by the help of the evil spirit… (she lowers her voice) …for instance, people want to become wealthy and go to ṭänqʷay, then he asks for the blood of a human being, then they go and kill.[164]

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[161] This was during a previous stint of fieldwork in 1999.
[162] *Qalləčča* is a diviner or 'shaman' (Abbink 2010), also described as a 'spirit expert' (Aspen 2001).
[163] Coffee is a central feature of zar practices. For more on coffee, see (Pankhurst 1997).
[164] Participant observation, Addis Ababa, 15.05.2016

At holy water sites I heard ‘spirits’ saying that they need blood. One of the priests, with whom I spent a substantial amount of time, Qes Tesfa, also claimed that evil spirits need blood:

> Qes Tesfa: Däbtära has knowledge to invoke evil spirits. There is a book, *Mälkəʾ Saṭnaʾel*, which they use. The däbtära summons the evil spirits and gives them ‘what they like most’, blood, ashes, and then order the evil spirits to go to a specific person and harm him/her.[165]

There are also other stories about blood that depict blood as problematic, as it is the food of evil spirits. A story which was part of a sermon given by Abba Abraham may illustrate this point. Abba Abraham was the regular preacher in ‘my’ maḫbär[166] at a holy water site in dedication of ʾAbunä Gäbrä Mänfäs Qəddus. Usually, the hagiography of the Egyptian saint was the starting point, so also this day. The story goes that there is an evil spirit, in the form of a snake, which drinks a woman’s blood while living in her uterus. Abba Abraham said:

> Abba Abraham: Because of that [that she did not practice her religion] God got angry and made a python live in her uterus. God’s children, his work is beyond unbelievable. What was surprising was the fact that she was alive with a python living inside her, eating what she ate. And whenever she did not eat, the python used to eat her meat and drink her blood.[167]

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[165] Interview, Addis Ababa, 9.9.2015

[166] I participated regularly, attending monthly meetings in a healing maḫbär (see chapter 9).

[167] Participant observation, Addis Ababa, 13.4.2016

Holy water

Holy water, ṣäbäl, is the most important material with healing agency in our context[168]. 'Holy water reveals God's mercy and healing. It will destroy any devil spirits' bad works bestowed on people. Since this holy water holds God's spirit and promise, any web of evil works will be cut off forever. Nothing will exceed the power of holy water if one is baptised with a strong and perfect faith in it' (Moges 2006, p.55). Holy water can be carried home, taken abroad, kept in a purse and still be holy. It is placed in various areas of the home, a common place is outside the house, bottles can be tied along the edge of the roof or placed on the ground surrounding the house and still be as holy. In these cases, the holy water protects against evil spirits and is not primarily meant for consumption. In their home, people may keep a range of water from different sites. Holy water seems to never stop being holy, protective or healing.

It is not necessary to take the holy water on or into the body to be protected by it. Simply keeping it close can also serve a purpose of protection. Jerry cans with holy water are sometimes kept near the prayer place in a home. The home is thus protected by the water, and therefore also the bodies in the house, the things in the house and the entire home.

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[168] Water is not the only healing remedy that people keep at home. People also collect different sorts of *ʾəmnät*, which is ashes from burnt incense, soil or sand or similar substances from the ground, which people either mix with holy water and drink or apply on their skin.

Two women carrying holy water, one in a bottle and the other in a can for drinking on the spot. Photo: Marta Camilla Wright

Interestingly, the holy water can also be polluted and infectious, like in a documented cholera outbreak, without losing its sacred power. There have been accounts of this in the media, for instance in Tigray in 2018, where ten people were reported dead (News24 2018). During visits to various holy water sites in Addis Ababa, I was sometimes told that Addis Ababa Water and Sewerage Authority regularly tested the water to ensure that it did not contain any infectious illnesses.

Holy water sites have rules that regulate the usage, as we saw in chapter 5. Rules, written or oral, formal or informal, prohibit the usage of holy water in certain conditions. Examples of this are when a person has had sexual intercourse and during menstruation. Many of the regulations of holy water sites treat body fluids, like sweat, semen and blood. The separation of bodily fluids and, importantly, blood from holy water is important, even though it is not absolute as shown.

Expressions of divine power have, according to informants, to do with how they experience the water and its felt effect as it touches the body. The water can be hard to drink because it may have an unpleasant taste. Sometimes I have heard informants

describing the water of a site as bitter and difficult to drink. This experience is often interpreted as an expression or proof of the divine power. Other indications of power are difficulties that a person gets while or after drinking holy water. If the holy water causes a person to vomit or go to the toilet it is a clear sign of its efficacy. It is evidence of the efficacy and the healing agency of the holy water. These effects are mentioned when informants explain how the sacred power works.

Let me return to the example mentioned above of the 'listening' jerry cans, which I observed at a holy water site just outside Axum[169]: It was also an example of a way in which the holy water can become more holy, namely by the words of God. The holy water was a river. People fetched the water in jerry cans for consumption. At the time of my arrival, around three hundred open jerry cans were sitting on the ground near the place where the priest was going to read from holy books. They were full of holy water. During hours of prayer and reading of holy books, the cans were kept there. In addition, the lids were kept off the cans, leaving the water accessible. It seemed people expected something to enter the cans. Then the priest started to read from Dərsanä Mikaʾel. The jerry cans were there, in front of the pulpit, looking as if they were listening to the reading with one ear, the opening on the top. The holiness or sacred power seems to be transmitted through the reading, the words travelling through the air, perhaps, to enter in a literal sense. I interpret this practice as an expression of the concreteness of the understanding of the holy (*qədus*), in line with how informants explain and use holy things in the veneration that the qədus has an ability to inhabit material things, to move around in matter. Still, it seems that a thing, in this case the water, can be made more qədus, similarly to space (see chapter 5).

Mämhər Shitila Moges summarises the ways in which the water gets God's spirit in his book about evil spirits and holy water healing. 'By the words of God, by authority of Priesthood, by works of Holy Spirit, by His name, by the belief of the person being

[169] Axum is located in northern Ethiopia and is the only site I visited outside Addis Ababa and surroundings during this field research.

baptised the water turns from ordinary water to water that possesses the Holy Spirit' (Moges 2006, p.72). Informants normally mirror this view when explaining how the water gets its power. There is, however, some controversy surrounding the question of whether a lay person can bless water. At one incident when I was sitting in a church compound talking with an informant, Tigist, other people joined, standing nearby or sitting down near us[170]. In a short while, our conversation was shared with four more people, and a group discussion developed as I asked: 'Is there not a difference between the water in the tap and the ṣäbäl?' Tigist's answer was: 'If there is ᵓəmnät… no, there is no difference.' Two of the men who had joined us disagreed in that a layperson could make tap water into healing, sacred water. After some discussion, nevertheless, the men agreed with Tigist and the other woman. The issue of time and when the best time to bless water to make it holy water was then discussed. Around three a.m. was one of the women's opinion. Others suggested two a.m. Others again emphasised that it had to be before the birds even can take a sip of water.

There is a flexibility and a practicality in the making of holy water. Holy water does not need the blessing, as it may appear as miraculous and ṣäbäl without blessing. Some informants hold that lay people may also bless it to transform normal water to healing water. It does not have to be discovered in mysterious and spectacular ways to be powerful. The clergy do not exclusively control it. Still, it is a sacred substance that, once it has become ṣäbäl, cannot stop being ṣäbäl. As sacred water it needs to be treated in particular ways. On the other hand, it is accessible, producible and widely distributed without any of its specificities diminishing, without losing its sacred power, its healing potential, and its protective effect. The notion of the divine is always there and accessible to all. The only prerequisite is faith.[171]

Another point worth mentioning is that there seem to be degrees of the intensity or amount of sacred. An example is the water used during the maḫbär ritual of *ṣəwwa*[172].

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[170] Participant observation/group interview, Addis Ababa, 3.10.2015
[171] For a discussion on faith and its meaning in the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian context, see chapter 9.
[172] See chapter 9 for an in-depth analysis of the maḫbär.

Firstly, it is ṣäbäl, taken from the holy water site. Secondly, it is blessed by a priest before its distribution. After the ritual of drinking water and eating a piece of bread, the remaining water needs to be drunk by someone who participated in the ritual. This means that the *ṣəwwa* water is different from the ṣäbäl. It has been transformed to something like the liquid used during the Eucharist.

The ṣəwwa (chalice) and the bread dressed up while waiting to be consumed in the ritual of the maḫbär. Photo: Marta Camilla Wright

The power of the water, as we have seen, is not dependent upon human beings. The sacred is sacred, it has the power to heal and it destroys or defeats other substances or things such as poison, blood or pieces of paper with harming spells. The holy water works on human beings in concrete ways. It also works on things, like in the mixing of soil or ashes with holy water when the two things work together on the body. Other things such as words or crosses, work on the water and seem to increase its effect. Holy water also heals things, as will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

Healing soil mixed with holy water. Photo: Marta Camilla Wright

Healing of Cars

Another dimension of the material side of the understandings of illness and of healing practices of informants is when things work on things to protect them and to heal them. When moving into a new house, some informants have reported that it is a practice to sprinkle new homes with holy water. At one instance, I observed passports that were brought to the holy water site to be sprinkled with holy water. I will explore this relationship between sacred things and substances working on things further through the example of cars.

A miracle story found in a pamphlet published by an association connected with the Gorgorios holy water site has the title: ‘A car which was pulled to Gorgorios ṣäbäl by crane is now driven and returned back to where it came from.’ The pamphlet contains 34 miracles, two of them are about the healing of cars, and the rest are miraculous healings of human beings. The miracle story goes as follows:

> A car which came to Saint Gorgorios ṣäbäl by a towing car has now been fixed. The car was sprinkled with ṣäbäl by the priests for seven days. After the seventh day, the mechanic was called and came to test it. The car was working. The mechanic was very surprised since he had made a great effort to fix it without succeeding. For another seven days, the car was sprinkled with ṣäbäl. Finally, the malfunction in the automobile had been repaired. The Devil does not refrain from tying up not only human beings but also objects made by humans. So, we witnessed that this manmade object could also be freed from the Devil's imprisonment. Thanks be to the God of Saint Gorgorios, who did this for us.[173]

The author of this miracle text says that the Devil ties up human beings and manmade objects. Thus, what happens to the 'sick' car is the same kind of process which happens with sick human beings. The story does not tell how the car was damaged or if there was any specific reason why it was taken to the holy water site. However, at this site there were several vehicles parked nearby, perhaps linked with the garage located in the vicinity. The seven days period is chosen because seven is a holy number and it is the period of the *subaʾe*[174], which is a common practice of prayer and introvert activity lasting seven days.

The practice is not surprising, considering the role of cars and car accidents in Ethiopia. The risk of getting involved in car accidents is among the highest in the world. The African continent has by far the highest traffic-related death rate in the world. The fact that cars are very expensive in Ethiopia and decrease to a limited degree in value when they are used, sometimes the opposite, is most likely another reason why people with good reason want to protect and heal their cars. Cars are more an item of investment than a commodity. Moreover, to some the car is their means of

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[173] Pamphlet Miracles of Abune Gorgorios Holy Water Site.

[174] A *subaʾe* is a retreat or a vigil. Oftentimes they coincide with a vow (*qal kidan)* and a particular religious holiday.

income. Because of its high value, it may also be a source of envy, often described as the motivation of harming other people, primarily using methods often described as mätät. So, it is no mystery that car owners and drivers take care of their vehicles, which can be seen as an extended part of themselves. If something happens to the car, something negative is likely to happen to the driver also.

This healing of cars by the use of holy water and prayer (words), or things working on things, has similarities with how the water works on bodies, on spaces and on other things, and with how the water battles with poison in bodies, for example. Holy water was also used on things for protective measures in several contexts. Some of them have already been mentioned, for example when people place bottles of holy water in or outside the house for protection. In another incident, I met a man who was sprinkling his car prophylactically with holy water.

The man who sprinkled his car, Mewael, was in his thirties and used to live abroad until business got slower and the political climate changed to the better in Ethiopia. He was one of the diaspora Ethiopians who, after many years abroad, had moved back to Ethiopia. He brought his savings, enough to invest in a business in Addis Ababa and to, according to himself, 'live like a king'[175]. Thus, he explained, sometimes he goes to the holy water site to help as a volunteer and to participate in the practices taking place. On the day that I met him, he had bought ənǧära and other food for the *ṣäbältänyočč* (those who participate in the healing practices at holy water sites). My assistant and I met him as he had gone out to the parking lot. He explained that he had bought the car recently, and when he had not been able to finish his cup, he went out and sprinkled the rest on his car. He explained further:

> Mewael: I do this to keep the car from accidents. I also have the cross, which is blessed by the priest, and the picture of Mary (he shows me the picture which is of

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[175] Interview, Addis Ababa, 3.5.2016

> Jesus and Mary), and they are all there to protect the car. (These items were placed inside the car, hanging from the windscreen mirror).[176]

There is also another example from the pamphlet with miracle stories, published by an association connected to the Gorgorios holy water site. In one of the miracles, the author gives an account of how he or she experienced the site. The title of the miracle is ‘The car started after it was sprinkled with the Gorgorios holy water site after it had stopped totally’. The author says:

> Before going directly to the witness, let me express what I saw in the Gorgorios compound. It astonishes me. There are many vehicles (taxi, automobile, lorries, etc), which had stopped. I thought the vehicles were to bring patients to the monastery. However, the reason is that the owners brought the cars (which were broken) to the holy water site and the cars started working after they were sprinkled with holy water.[177]

Discussion of the role of things

An investigation into the role of things points towards important, sometimes even crucial, roles, which things play in the stories informants tell and in observations made during field research. It has been established so far that certain things and substances may be seen as treated differently from other things and that they are not inanimate things and substances. Rather, as demonstrated in the example of books, they are viewed and used as *mädḫanit*. The *mädḫanit* can be things and substances that are spirited or ‘divinely charged’, to use Tom Boylston’s term (Boylston 2018, p.5). In the

[176] Interview, Addis Ababa, 3.5.2016
[177] Pamphlet Miracles of Abune Gorgorios Holy Water Site.

next section I will discuss in what way things and substances may achieve this special status and what this status may entail.

Concerning the constellation things and spirit, again recalling the example of books which are used in various ways in healing processes, it does not seem that things are dichotomised from spirit in the life of informants to this study, but rather that things are used as support in veneration and as remedies against illnesses. As I have discussed in chapter 5 concerning the role of space, to informants the world is presented in dichotomies. Boylston mentions *ʿaläm* (world) and *mänfäs* (spirit), and *zəga* (flesh) and mänfäs, and suggests that there are different types of matter, and that flesh should not be understood as the dichotomy of matter and spirit, but as different sorts of matter. 'When an Ethiopian Orthodox Christian talks about the flesh and the spirit, we cannot assume that s/he uses flesh as a synecdoche for all matter. Flesh is a very specific kind of matter, around whose very specific properties – its desires, its needs and its tendency to putrescence – much of Orthodox practice revolves' (Boylston 2017b, p.78). In Ethiopian Orthodox theology as well as in how informants explain and practice, the understanding of matter is both paradoxical and ambiguous. The Eucharist is enveloped in notions of protection, as it is believed that 'Christ is truly and actually present' (Wondmagegnehu and Motovu 1970, p.36). As such, it represents a particular example of matter, and of separation between human beings and things. Human bodies cannot approach it until their bodies reach a strictly prepared state or condition (see chapter 9). This kind of separation between different matter brings to mind Mary Douglas' work Purity and Danger (Douglas 1966). One of her arguments is that people are guided by the principles of pure things and polluted things. The pure gets a purer status when separated from the impure.

The discussion about purity, how it connects to the divine and sacred and how the pure and the polluted are antagonised as a structuring of human experience according to Douglas (Douglas 1966) is relevant in this case as different things have different roles. In the Ethiopian Orthodox case, however, the pure and the polluted, or what is sacred and what is not, are also interconnected in a very concrete way, in a battle within the

body. I have also suggested that the strict separation is not as absolutely required, for instance between blood and holy water. As we can see from the example when women were treated with holy water during their period, the status of the sacred does not seem to be changed. There seems to be both a need for separation between things and that this need is not consistently applied. On the contrary, things and substances are qualified and distinguished between in line with the type of spirit which is on them or if there is not any spirit at all on them and whether they are placed near or far from a sacred thing. The separation between sacred and what is not sacred is at times necessary, but at other times and in other situations not. In some cases it seems to be due to vicinity or being near and/or being far, the relationship with other things and bodies, that things gain different meaning and different functions, and are related to and used in different ways. The way it is related to and used in turn influences the status of a thing. Other research has attached the concept of relationality to things. Peter Pels argues that things have a 'relational character' (Meyer and Houtman 2012, p.5). The thing, or what Pels calls an object, is in his view part of a 'a relationship in which subject and object mutually constitute each other' (Pels 2012, p.29). Amy Whitehead argues that things get a different status according to where they are positioned relative to other things (Whitehead 2013, p.150). Placed near a sacred thing, things get a sacred status as well and their potential status as persons changes. In her study of Marian statues she points out; 'Many of the objects in the Goddess Temple, for example, are moved around, and therefore their position, status and potentiality of personhood constantly change with the creative ebb of the temple' (Whitehead 2013, p.150).

Concerning the contextuality of the status of a thing, the example of blood may be used. Blood is an ambiguous substance and demonstrates the importance of contextuality and pragmatism in the way informants relate to it. Moreover, there seems to be different categories of things with different statuses. Firstly, things do not seem to have a permanent status as causes of bäššəta or as miraculous things, 'healers' of bäššəta, but what things mean seems to depend on the context and what it relates to.

Secondly, some things are more constantly reckoned to be sacred, like crosses, books, holy water, pictures of saint and angels, the tabot and the Eucharist and some things, like crosses or holy water in bottles, are carried to other places maintaining their holy status. Thirdly, some things may suddenly appear as miraculous, as efficacious against bäššəta.

Things are used, they are touched and touch human bodies. Books are kissed and made to touch the body during healing practices. The interaction may be seen as a concrete interaction with the superhuman being, and in this way the books and other things are means of getting in touch with the supernatural beings. In a study of Zoroastrian fires, Håkon Tandberg explores '(…) when and by what means people extend aspects of social relationships beyond the human to the non-human sphere, focusing on gods and sacred objects' (Naasen Tandberg 2019, p.19). He discusses the relationship people have with fires within the Zoroastrian religion, where informants in his study have relationships with objects. Informants in the present study express love and affection towards, for instance, Mary. However, the findings of this study rather underline mediation in these relational processes, with media like icons and with spaces like Mary churches or Mary holy water sites, like the Weibela Mariam site discussed in chapter 5. Things as mädḫanit make relationships with supernatural beings possible, and in this respect, things are media for relationships and also regulating boundaries between human beings and the divine.

Things influence upon people's lives, make people ill or well, function as structuring elements in interaction between people and are driving forces in the relational processes between people and between people and superhuman beings. Things and substances are touched by and touch informants, participate in their lives and change their lives.

Some things are used as and described as making ill and making well. The concept agency may be useful for the purpose. Agency is often viewed as human-centred, for instance by Alfred Gell, (Gell 1998). However, others have argued that agency can

also be attributed to things (Latour 2005). In the ethnographic examples under scrutiny here, it seems that agency may also be attached to things, as well as to (materialised) spirits and human beings. Things seem to be animated, like the water which is always in the name of a saint, angel, Christ, Mary or God, and has their power in it. The Eucharist is an example of a divine thing, in which informants may relate to the divine. Things like cars are also treated as something that can be ill, thus somehow loaded with evil spirits, and healed miraculously. There seems to be no limit to how the divine may intervene, and as pointed out above, things do not seem to be dichotomised from human beings, but matter is where the divine intervenes. Divine powers are perceived to be in entities: humans, water, places, stories, words, cars or other things. In the ethnographic examples discussed in this chapter, it seems that informants see things as having the possibility to act like the Christians studied by Bynum in Late Medieval Christianity.

Concluding remarks

In this chapter, I have discussed how there are different categories of things and how some have a spirited and active role contrary to other things in illness causation and healing. The investigation into water, blood of the Eucharist and books suggests that these things and substances are actors in illness causation and healing. To informants in this study, some ('spirited') things are active and they are seen as causing illness, and some things are active in healing. The water, blood, books, words and many other things may make sick and make well. Such things are perhaps even necessary for healing.

The example of cars shows that objects can be impaired because of evil spirits, and they can be healed. It takes us even further in our considerations of what things are and how they interact with humans, spirits and the divine. It is as if the difference between things and other entities or beings is not so defined and absolute; more like the contrary, there are fluid delineations and less clear demarcations between them.

Chapter 8: Healing interaction at ṣäbäl bota

The previous chapters, in particular chapter 6, discussed the roles of evil spirits and showed how they materialise and influence upon people's lives and bodies as illnesses. It was made clear that the existence of spirits, both as abstract entities and as corporeal entities, is experienced by informants both in their bodies, in other humans and in the material environment, spaces and things. This was further elaborated in chapter 7, where I discussed how, in that chapter mainly benevolent, spirits are believed to be present in things and it was argued that it is useful to see things, in this context, both as active and as media.

In order to investigate further the research questions concerning the roles of things and spirits as illnesses and their roles in illness causation and healing practices, further exploration of how spirits are made material is in order. Previous chapters have made clear that spirits are seen as being in spaces and things and viewed as actors to informants.

Studying spirit incorporation in Candomblé, Paul C. Johnson emphasises the materiality perspective in what he calls spirit incorporation, and says that 'spirits appear in human experience in and through bodies and things' (Johnson 2020, p.30). He argues '(…) the materials mediating spirits' appearance themselves wield agency and act.' I will build the analysis of spirit embodiment upon an argument about how space, things and bodies are agents and actors in mediating or materialising spirits, not only as '(…) a means of facilitating the materiality of the spirit' (Larsen 2014, p.8). In this chapter the role of things and spaces is discussed further. However, bodies are brought more to the fore in how spirits are shaped by bodies and the material preconditions in which they appear. The role of things will also be further investigated this time focused on their role in interaction and practices at holy water sites. In the first section I will present and discuss spirit embodiment in the context of the ṣäbäl

bota. The second section contains analysis of a unique[178] material: recordings made of talking spirits, mainly in monologues, either talking or singing, directed towards a benevolent supernatural being, like Mary, angels or God. These two sections will be followed by a discussion concerning healing interaction in a changing society.

Concerning the material in the second section; these recordings were made at ṣäbäl bota, and together with an analysis of observed sequences of interaction, the analysis of the recordings allows us to go deeper into what has already been mentioned in several other chapters: the importance and function of relationships in illness causation and healing processes. Healing processes taking place at holy water sites often involve interaction between people and non-human beings. One important dimension is how the interaction aims at exorcizing evil spirits. Another dimension is that spirits talk to, beg and shout at benevolent spirits. In this chapter, I will focus on the interaction in which evil spirits participate at holy water sites, made possible and formed by human bodies, spaces and other materials. I will explore if and how the sequences of interactions contribute to the formation of healing relationships, involving two agents (at least), the spirit and the human being.

Spirit embodiment and spirit possession

Spirit possession has been the topic of many studies (Boddy 1994), and it has been interpreted in many ways; psychological, medical and social, among others. Its prevalence in Ethiopia had been documented in many studies, for instance (Lewis 1984; Hamer and Hamer 1966; Vecchiato 1993; Messing 1958; Leiris 1934; Young 1975b). As mentioned in chapter 6, spirit possession was categorised into adorcism and exorcism by Luc de Heusch (1981), the first referring to when the spirit is welcome and cultivated as ecstatic states, in the other it is an undesired illness or

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[178] To my knowledge, recordings of spirits have only been treated academically by Bethlehem Dejene and Diego Malara. However, these works discuss mainly exorcisms, meaning interaction between priests and embodied spirits. In my material, there are recordings of spirit monologues, singing spirits, discussions between spirits and other people and interesting examples of how people distinguish between a person and an embodied spirit.

intrusion. De Heusch distinguished them into different types of cults. I.M. Lewis raised the question of whether or not these are totally opposed experiences (Lewis 2003, p.49), and Lewis prefers the terms controlled and uncontrolled possessions. Discussing specifically the Ethiopian case of spirit possession, Herbert S. Lewis, in a publication from 1984, argues that spirits and spirit possession have increased, while discussing different types of possession, he objects to: ‘attempts to reduce the phenomenon to a few “types” or a few “causes” because I think it can be misleading and unnecessarily restricting’ (Lewis 1984, p.425). He sees the phenomena as ‘not mere reflexes or reflections but – (…) the products of the mind, involving creativity and imagination as well as action’ (Lewis 1984, p.425). This point is taken further by Paul C. Johnsen who emphasises that the material, such as the body and the movements it makes, both mediate spirits’ presence and have agency and act (Johnson 2020). In addition, the embodiment and the interaction happen in certain spaces and other material. ‘Materials, spaces and bodily regimes act on spirit incorporation. They shape it and help to determine its nature in particular sites’ (Johnson 2020, p.13).

The active, sometimes innovative, way in which people engage with spirits and spirit embodiment, a point made in chapter 6, is broadened in this section of the chapter. The way informants experience and engage with spirits is not as if they are passive victims. This is shown in the three categories of spirit embodiment that informants relate to which this study has identified. Secondly, the active way in which informants engage with spirits, simply by enhancing religious practices, making the chances for mercy and *ʾəddəl* (luck, destiny) stronger, taking a certain control over uncertainty (Di Nunzio 2019, p.199). It is not fatalistic but active and creative. Thus, the term spirit possession may not be appropriate, and I will return to this point.

As Diego Malara points out, in Ethiopian Studies adorcism is the more studied type of possession, particularly zar practices, and exorcism has been marginally discussed by researchers (Malara 2017, p.42). The frequent and ordinary spirit participation at ṣäbäl bota that this present study shows, is not only as exorcisms performed by priests and other exorcists in the context of the EOTC. In this study I have encountered spirits

talking with Mary, the Archangel Michael and others, ‘conversations’ which lead to the departure of the spirit. These benevolent supernatural beings also prepare the departures by tying the evil spirits when they are at ṣäbäl bota. Such ‘conversations’, and I put conversation in inverted commas because I have never encountered a case where Mary or others respond verbally, call for a thorough scrutiny. In this chapter, the role of such exorcism conversations in healing is one point of focus.

I intend to discuss the issues starting from the emic perspective that informants and visitors to ṣäbäl bota recognize spirits as a fact of life. I look at ‘the “work” spirits do’ (Blanes and Santo 2013, p.6), and I find the perspective drawn up by Blanes and Espirito Santo based on Douglas Hollan, who say ‘For most villagers the question is not “which of these spiritual beings actually exist and which not?”, but rather, which of these beings - at any given moment in one’s life - has the power to influence the course of one’s fate and fortune, and so should be acknowledged and perhaps propitiated?’ (Blanes and Santo 2013, p.6), and analyse spirit embodiment as part of healing processes at ṣäbäl bota.

In Amerindian society, Florencia C. Tola shows how non-human entities coexist with human beings, a coexistence which ‘is perceived through the effects that they produce in space, in human bodies and in human subjectivity’ (Tola 2013, p.71). Such effects are observable at ṣäbäl bota. In the present study such coexistence is also vividly present in human intersubjectivity, in the interaction that takes place at ṣäbäl bota. Interestingly, there is also a form of spirit experience which does not show any effect in space where the person is not yet aware of the spirit. Moreover, effect produced in space is only one side of the coin. The other is how spirits are shaped by human beings and the material preconditions, as ‘spirit presences are contingent on material sites of appearance’ (Johnson 2020, p.152).

Such effects are, according to the interpretations of informants, observable at ṣäbäl bota, and the spiritual beings are both outside bodies (and other material things), and in bodies. During field research I often observed at close range that people approaching

ṣäbäl bota started shouting, if accompanied by others tried to escape, stayed outside the fence talking loudly, protested or in other ways hesitated to enter. Inside the sites, visitors could react with hostility towards priests, towards holy images, and try to avoid things which were perceived as sacred. This type of behaviour was explained as manifestations of spirits. Other observations entailed that when visitors approached prayer areas or holy images, they sometimes started monologues, which will be discussed further down. The shouting, the showing of emotions and the protests against the cross and the priest's attempt to give a blessing, one very common and important practice of the Church, were all actions out of normal conduct, but are quite common at ṣäbäl bota and interpreted in spiritual terms: these are actions of the spirit.

Being unable to move your body properly is another aspect usually interpreted as spirits at work. Disproportionate strength is yet another characteristic given by informants. Yet another, which is more rarely talked about, is that the person can know when the spirit is about to take over. In the following case, the man takes measures to control the spirit by asking people to tie him up as soon as he knows that the spirit is starting to appear. My informant Kassahun[179] explained: 'Whenever the prayer *ṣəlot məḥəlla*[180] gets undertaken, one man loses his mind. Every time this is about to happen, he gets anxious. He will go and tell people to tie him up. After we tie him, he will start wandering around the church shouting at people and insulting them. Whenever he does that, his voice gets so incredible. He says things like "I, *Wesen galla*". This means that Wesen galla is the spirit that he used to serve and make sacrifices to.'[181] It is clear that human bodies embody spirits and that their effects are experienced at holy water sites.

Informants express that they experience the spirits as material and concrete actors in their body. The embodiment of spirits is accounted for in ways that express how

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[179] See Appendix 2 for more about Kassahun.
[180] *Məḥəlla* is both a service in the EOTC, and *Ṣəlot məḥəlla* popularly a prayer undertaken when epidemics, wars, drought, famine or similar disasters strike (Kidane 2007).
[181] Interview, Addis Ababa, March 2016

people live with spirits as real actors in their lives. They differ in to what extent people are aware of the spirit assumed to be in someone's body. Commonly they are not based on a voluntary incorporation. It is perceived as happening against a person's will, during the holy water healing discourse. One important reason for coming there is to get rid of evil spirits in order to be freed from what corrupts life, and live in the proximity of God. In the context of the holy water sites, the aim is in general to get rid of the spirits no matter how they affect the person or what kind of spirit it is.

The three types of embodiment

I have in this field research identified three different types of spirit embodiment. They relate to the way the spirits are experienced and to what degree they are experienced as taking control. In other research, similar features are documented.[182]

The first type is when a person does not know about a spirit and also does not behave in ways associated with spirits. A person may have a spirit without symptoms, which is for some a reason for visiting ṣäbäl bota, because the spirit may be revealed there. Spirits are not necessarily felt and noticed in a tangible way. However, they are thought about, feared and in this way sensed. The absence of experiencing spirits does not always take away the worry about evil spirits. Some claim that there is always a potential possession, a risk that a spirit is within a person, even though s/he does not know it. A young, female university student explained why when I asked her if she frequented holy water sites: 'It is a good thing just to go and check'.[183] What she meant was to go to the holy water site to see if she had spirits in her, even though she did not have any signs of spirits. It is believed that the spirits will react when a person goes to

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[182] In research among Muslims in Zanzibar, Kjersti Larsen shows how the person with a spirit either knows what s/he is doing but without being able to control it, or "you are not present" (Larsen 2014, p.18). Thomas Csordas refers to a classification in the Renaissance which somehow resonates with my informants' context (Csordas 1997, pp.193-194). The distinctions are between oppression, when the spirit remains outside the person, obsession, when the spirit has entered the person but does not have complete control, which is the case in the last form: possession. There is also another aspect of this, according to Csordas, which is demonic harassment, a form where spirits do not intend to gain control but interfere with people's attempt to live a Christian life (ibid).
[183] Interview, Addis Ababa, 25.1. 2016

a holy water site and they are confronted with the sacred space. Some informants tell stories of years and years with trouble and suffering, sometimes from childhood, not knowing what it is. Only many years later, as they explain it in hindsight, typically at a holy water site, the spirit is revealed, and they interpret the challenges, physical symptoms and miseries in a spiritual framework, as caused by evil spirits.

In the second type, the spirit is felt and the person is aware of it and feels and knows the spirit. There are informants who explain that they are conscious about what is going on, yet they cannot do anything about it. They cannot move their body themselves, they cannot express themselves in a way they control or they cannot get rid of the spirit, so it is present with their body. A female informant had been ill for several years and had now chosen to rent a room near a ṣäbäl bota to be able to concentrate on the spiritual healing process. She had different somatic and psychological symptoms, and she explained how it felt to have a spirit and how it acted while in her. She complained that the spirit took her attention while she was praying by making her feel that she had to go to the toilet constantly, when she did not need to. She also said that she felt the spirit literally moving around in her body. She demonstrated how she slapped herself with a wooden rosary by throwing it backwards over her shoulder so that she hits her back. 'I beat the spirit when it is not calm with the wooden rosary. I feel shaking inside my body; he goes around in the body. I talk to the spirit.'[184]. Tekle explained how he experienced the spirit; it made it impossible to concentrate while reading prayer books, he felt anxious or stressed (*čənqät*) and when he read *Wədasse Maryam*[185] or *Dawit*[186] the spirit forced him to close the books. He had a problem with his eye which he also interpreted as a zar spirit. The former deacon expressed that at times he was conscious but not able to move his body: 'I cannot see, my heart beats very fast, it is difficult to exhale and inhale, I stop breathing properly'. The physical effect is interpreted as a spirit. He explains that is like something

[184] Interview, Addis Ababa, 13.11.2015
[185] Praise of Mary.
[186] The Book of Psalms in the Bible.

happening in a dream. He goes on to explain how the spirit makes him do things he would not normally do: ‘I do not know myself (*rasen alawqəm*). When the spirit shouts in the shower it makes the holy water hit me in the forehead. If I was myself, I would not put it on the forehead.’ His spirit is under control at this stage. ‘Now that the spirit is chained, it will leave. When the spirit is in control, I do not have control of my body, my hands are like tied on my back, I cannot move them forward.’[187] The issue of distraction is repeated in many examples. Moreover, in the second type, there are also experiences of being aware of what is happening, but without being able to control it.

Yet another aspect of the second type of embodiment is that spirits behave in ways that are out of normal code of conduct. People assume that the spirit is acting when the person behaves in ways that break normal code of conduct, often by moving in particular ways, typically torso-bending or falling to the floor, and talking or shouting to no one apparent. The spirit-like conduct also takes certain forms, but has its own ‘normality’, a different code of conduct.[188] In the second type of embodiment the spirits/the person is still in contact with others, as described in the following account from Weibela Maryam healing site:

> In the loud music, two women were shouting in front of the icons. One was an elderly lady who shouted and threw her head forward and backwards repeatedly. After a while, she finished and left. The other one was talking a lot. She was first talking about being burned, then a lot of ‘Oh, my’ and ‘Weibela Maryam’, lastly ‘ok, ok’ many times. She was lying on the floor, looking as if she was being strangled, rolling over. She was making the normal moves (torso bending) while standing, and she was on her knees with her head to the ground. She had her *näṭäla* (white shawl) in front of her face most of the time. When one woman near her started talking on the phone, she turned to her and told her to go outside if she

[187] Interview, Addis Ababa, 11.6.2016

[188] Sometimes I experienced that others would react and talk to a person as if s/he was a spirit, but it was not immediately recognisable for me. At one instance I was talking to a young woman, when her friend came and told me that she was ‘not herself’.

were to talk on the phone. Obviously, she was conscious about things going on around her.[189]

Quite often spirits[190] do not seem to interact with anyone. They appear to simply talk, seemingly in their own world. It may seem like a sort of 'isolated' behaviour. Nonetheless, as is described in the field notes above, even if the spirit or spirit-embodied person may seem as if s/he is in his/her own world, someone who is shouting may suddenly participate a little in what goes on around him or her. The interaction takes place in a social space, and it is observable that they notice other people present, and informants say that they are aware but unable to control their bodies.

In the third type of spirit embodiment, the spirit is believed to take over completely for a shorter or longer period and the person only knows afterwards from the account of witnesses to the incident what happened. It is described as an experience of losing control and being unaware of oneself, like Tigist, who suddenly found herself in a mosque despite her trying to practice strictly as an Orthodox Christian. She described it as not being aware of what happened to her. Afterwards, however, she was told what had happened.

This means that even if the informants describe how someone who has a spirit is affected and how s/he behaves and interacts, there is at the same time a considerable uncertainty linked to this, as a spirit can inhabit a person without the person's knowledge and without the signs of the spirit being apparent. One of the ways the embodiment of spirits become known is in the interaction between people at holy water sites, an important feature of the healing process.

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[189] Field notes, Weibela Maryam, 17.5.2016
[190] The spirit can be of any kind of those listed in chapter 5; it can be zar, one of the kinds of aggressive magic spirits, they can be called evil spirit and so on.

The term ‘possession’

These experiences are similar to what is often conceptualised as spirit possession in anthropology of religion and the study of religion. Many of these accounts seem to be about what is often termed trance, which is the type of possession that we find in zar possession, and it is similar to the third type I have outlined above. An element of trance is also present in how informants describe their spirit-experiences, as much as the element of being totally out of control is there. There is also an element of liminality (Turner 1979), of being out of normal context or in a transition, as pointed out by Herman in her work on holy water sites (Hermann 2010).

Informants often express the situation of spirits as ‘s/he has a spirit in her/him’ (*mänfäs ᵓalläbbat allebat/ᵓalläbbät*). Another way of expressing this is to say ‘*mänfäs yazat’*, which means that she was caught by a spirit. (This expression is similar to ‘*gunfan yazat’*, which literally means she was caught by a cold.) This means that the person is under the influence of an external agent, but in practical life not necessarily taken over.

The term possession has a connotation of taking control over someone and it also hints at more psychological processes[191]. Kjersti Larsen points out that in her field of research in Zanzibar, the term embodiment fits better ‘to emphasize the link Zanzibaris make between spirits and the human body, while at the same time trying to escape an immediate assumption of a melding of the spirit and the human mind’ (Larsen 2014, p.9). Likewise, I do not find the term possession adequate for describing the findings of this study. Firstly, spirits can be in bodies in a variety of ways, as I have explicated above. Secondly, in Larsens words ‘the link between spirits and the human body’ implies an agent in the human body. The body, i.e. the human being, does something,

[191] For a discussion and critique of the term spirit possession, see (Johnson 2014).

which needs to be acknowledged, like Paul C. Johnson's point that the materials themselves wield agency and act (Johnson 2020, p.30).

I therefore use spirit embodiment as a term which can encompass a wider range of experiences which do not to the same degree entail the notion of taking control. Embodiment in this context denotes the perceptions and/or the experiences informants have of the spirits being in the bodies.

Informants see evil spirits as potentially present and materialised all the time, and a constant threat. More specifically they experience spirits in their bodies, and I have above distinguished the experiences into three types of embodiments.

Note that the three categories of spirit embodiment that I have identified in this study are not treated differently through the healing process; they are just different ways of experiencing the spirits, which are seen as an 'undesired intrusion', which needs to go through shorter or longer periods of healing practices. These practices do not take one form and are not ritually standardised but take many forms. In the following part of the chapter, examples of healing interaction and healing practices will be presented and discussed.

Healing monologues – the role of words

According to how spirits talk about their situation they are either free or chained (or tied) by a benevolent spirit while at holy water sites. This has been explained to me to be understood literally. Their behaviour under chained circumstances is described as milder, that they have less control and are under the control of a benevolent spirit.

Often spirits talk, and there is no intervention from a priest or others. The talk can go on for a short while or for a longer period. In one instance, a woman is sitting on the floor in front of an icon of Mary in the prayer house of the Marian holy water site, and she is crying loudly and talking. The woman wears a scarf over her head, covering her

face as well as her hair. She moves her body while talking, sometimes in a loud voice, sometimes in a low voice:

> Please, I am burned, Maryam, let me go. I will leave her alone. Now I know that she is your child. I cannot stand her anymore, she burned me with her prayers. There is never a day without her calling you. She is beyond my power. She has used you against me.[192]

Quite politely, the spirit asks to be freed from the person it is now tied to. Then the spirit starts talking about the woman referred to as 'she'. She is the child of Mary, the spirit says, and now it has had enough of the praying. The woman in whom the spirit is tied seems to be a devout Christian in her praying, which is an essential part of the healing process, as we shall see in chapter 9. It even says that she is beyond the spirit's power, and she is using Mary to fight the spirit by calling her name. The words and the prayer are the materialisations of the participation of Mary in the interaction, as well as the icon in front of the woman. This is exchange in a triangle, the woman, the spirit and Maryam. The name of Mary is powerful, which is shown in the often-recited Miracles of Mary and in the stories which people tell about her miraculous deeds.

The spirits tell their stories with many repetitions, and often the stories are quite messy. In between all the messy words, however, the spirit may suddenly explain how the person whom the spirit inhabits became ill. Another telling aspect of these events is that spirits often say what is claimed to be the truth about something that has happened in the life of the sick person, or they reveal what the spirit has done in the case. As opposed to what they tend to do in the communication with the exorcists (that I will discuss below). This is normally about how the person's relationship with a spirit (or sometimes several spirits) started. It may reveal who was intending to harm him or her, and they may explain in detail what had been done, to what kind of skilled

[192] Recording, participant observation, Addis Ababa, 15.11.2015

professional the person went for the services, by what method he or she was tricked and also why.

> I got her sick, but she is not an easy person. She does not take medicine. Her medicine is the Holy Communion, your son's blood and flesh. I got her stomach sick. Her stomach was my cave. But it is enough…. I am burned, just send me away. I will not get near her.[193]

Here, the spirit admits to having made her sick with stomach problems. Usually, people say that they get ill because of food or drinks that they have been offered by others. I have come across several examples of this having been done with food or drinks that are consumed as part of religious gatherings such as *zikr*[194] or *arba*[195] of a deceased family member and the like. I find that it is often caused by someone in a person's network or family, in relationships of trust. Sometimes they are siblings who are not full blood, which is also described in other African contexts of aggressive magic (Westerlund 2006). In other cases, spirits are interpreted as subjects causing harm when God wants to teach a person a lesson.

Another point to be made from this monologue concerns the sentence 'She does not take medicine'. A plausible interpretation of this is that the spirit talks about biomedical medicine, which, although accepted by the Church as a treatment that can be followed parallel to religious treatment, many perceive as lack of faith (see chapter 9). Faith, as was discussed in previous chapters, is the most important asset a person must possess to obtain healing and a prosperous life. It seems to be in the interest of the spirit that the person takes biomedicine, to diminish her faith.

The case underneath is an example of how the form such monologues may take. Repetitions are preeminent in some of these monologues.

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[193] Recording, participant observation, Addis Ababa, 15.11.2015
[194] Zikr is a gathering for commemoration.
[195] Arba is the commemoration gathering on the fortieth day after a funeral.

How could I, Kidane Mehret (one name of Mary)? How could I, Weladite Amlak? (another name of Mary meaning 'the one who gave birth to the Lord') No, no, do not ask me such a question. No, Weladite Amlak. No, the invisible queen. Oh, it is always, day to day, day to day, I did not leave it for you, I didn't! I did not leave, yes i didn't, because I can't. I will not quit, Kidane Mehret, I will not, Weladite Amlak. How can I quit, tell me, Kidane Mehret. Your daughter caught me/she did not allow me to do anything/she tied me, she knows me. I will not leave it, I will not stop, I cannot, I will kill, I will kill her (inaudible). Oh my, oh my, oh my, uffff, I am burning, yes, I am burning. Please forgive us, please forgive us the invisible queen, forgive me, forgive me. I can't quit , I can't stop, I will not leave, I will not leave, because I already started. I will not stop. What can I do. Yes, I will stay. No, don't come, no I don't want you to come. Do not come here, do not come here, because I don't want you to come here, never come to this place. Yes, *like melaku* (Michael), yes *like melaku*, yes it is me, I am the one who made her not come near your church. Oh my, what a shame I am going through, what a shame I am going through, what a shame I am going through, Oh my, my secret. You (Michael) have degraded us. You are revealing all the things we have done so as to make us shameful. The Archangel, the Archangel. Yes, Queen of Tsadkane **(**a reference to the Tsadkane Maryam Church**)** I feel shameful, yes the invisible saint (Tsadkane), I am shameful. Yes, I am shameful, yes, I am. I feel shameful, I feel shameful, I feel shameful, I feel shameful, I feel shameful, I am leaving, yes, I am leaving, I am leaving. I am the one who made her immerse herself in bad things. Yes, the invisible queen, I am the one who made her fall. Yes, the Archangel, I am the one who made her do such things. Yes, I should be punished, punish me as you wish, yes, I should be punished. Yes, she should pass her judgment on us and punish us. Ok. I will go towards him (the *däbtära*), I will go to him. I am done with her. I am

> fed up with her. I will proceed to her grandparent (the one who went to the *däbtära*). I am the one who renews it day to day.[196]

The spirit talk develops as the spirit in the beginning argues against leaving, saying that it is the person the spirit inhabits that has tied the spirit to herself, and it is impossible for the spirit to leave. Then the spirit starts to say it is burning, often an expression interpreted by informants as meaning that the spirits, confronted with the ṣäbäl bota and the religious practices, are burnt. Gradually the spirit changes his/her mind and is then confronted with both Mary and the Archangel and decides to leave and go back to a *däbtära*, the one who initiated the spirit embodiment.

In several cases, the spirits tell stories about what happened when it entered a person. Several informants give accounts of what happened and who caused the situation from spirits that inhabit other people, normally strangers that they meet coincidentally at holy water sites. Here is one example:

> Yes, yes, I am a mätät of 26 years sent to dismantle a family. Yes, I, the disgraceful stayed for long for this, a disgrace. Now you killed me, the mätät, a family mätät. I will resist it even though you challenged me so much. Oh, I, the brave one, ohhh. I stood up to beg for wealth, but I let *ʾƎmmäbərhan* (mother of light, Mary) down. I never thought she would ever pass me to you, Lord. I thought she would just punish me by herself. But now you took all my work of many years, my plans, my dream and bad intentions and locked them up.[197]

The following case is similar to the one above:

> Yes. I was fooled. I got tricked by money. Oh, my miseries, oh, my miseries, oh, my miseries. Oh, I got tricked by money, fooled by daily bread, oh, I am done with it, I am fed up with it. I was trying up until now, but I could not do it anymore I

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[196] Recording, participant observation, Addis Ababa, 21.07.2016
[197] Recording, participant observation, Addis Ababa, 18.5.2016

> cannot resist you, Lord. I was told to make her unable to talk by receiving 3000 birr a month. *Mädḫane ʿaläm*[198] of the cave, judge of the cave, king of the cave, I will not make them spit again, oh, my miseries, oh my miseries (says that while screaming).[199]

In the example above, the spirit explains how it created problems for the woman, by making her dumb and for that receiving money.

In the example underneath, while acknowledging that what the spirit does is terrible, the spirit is still defending itself, saying that no one prevented it from inhabiting the girl. The spirit gives human beings the blame for its behaviour, because the human beings 'call us from Hell':

> Yes, I know it is a very terrible thing to possess an eleven-year-old kid, but what can I do when even the humans do not get sympathetic with her. It is her father who has sent me, wanting me to make her stupid since he denied his paternity and she is a very clever student. It's the humans who call us from Hell and make us do terrible things on their fellow human beings.[200]

The spirit goes on explaining what it did and what the purpose was. The plan was to kill the young woman:

> I am a mänfäs sent on the whole family. I am on all of them.[201] Please leave me alone, *ʾƎmmäbete,*[202] and show mercy as you show to her. I made her go out on a balcony at two after midnight when she was in the Middle East so that she would jump and kill herself, but the martyr prohibited me from doing it. He saved her from death. I was sent to kill her in her sixth month. Yes, you know the secret, mother of Jesus. I was sent to bring her dead body back here, but the martyr saw

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[198] Saviour of the world.
[199] Recording, participant observation, Addis Ababa, 3.6.2016
[200] Recording, participant observation, Addis Ababa,10.06.2016
[201] One and the same spirit can be in several people.
[202] Mary

> me, and he was with her. I was also planning to kill her by suffocating her on her bed while she was sleeping.[203]

Then finally the spirit regrets what it has done, says that it will leave.

Even if the spirit feels bad and somehow forced to leave, it may not leave immediately. Sometimes it claims that the spirit decides the day. The spirit may say exactly when it will leave, and then also promises that it will not possess this person again. However, the afflicted is able to influence upon this through the way one lives and participates in religious practices, which is understood as a demonstration of his or her faith. In nine of the fifteen cases I have collected, however, the spirit begs for mercy, and begs Maryam, Christ or others to be allowed to leave. In the following example, the spirit even asks forgiveness:

> Oh, what a fire, what a fire. I cannot resist it no more oh what a bad day today. Your daughter got locked up for the thing I have done. I am suffering for what I have done but she is innocent. Please, Lord, set me free. I know I have let your mother down and disappointed her. I am begging for your forgiveness. I know I offended her. I will never reach them anymore.[204]

Now the spirit asks to be set free and admitting that the person suffered and was ’locked up’ for the things the spirit had done. The spirit promises not to pester ‘them’, referring to her family. The afflicted woman is healed through the interaction between the spirit that is inhabiting a person and other spirits that are present in different ways in the space that consists of various sacred objects, things that mediate the holy and the divine. In one of the above-mentioned examples, the person/spirits sit in front of a Marian icon and directs the talk towards Mary. The icon makes Mary present, it ‘is’ Mary.

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[203] Recording, participant observation, Addis Ababa, 10.6.2016
[204] Recording, participant observation, Addis Ababa, 18.5.2016

Sometimes there can be many spirits agitated, talking and shouting at the same time. This agitation takes place especially during prayers, when incense is burnt or while approaching a holy water site, or when getting close or in touch with the holy water or other holy things. At times it sounds like a messy choir of voices shouting, talking or even sometimes singing – in one case a singing that, according to my assistant, sounded like keening that is done in some parts of the country during funerals.

These monologues have a similar form and focus discussions on why the spirit chose the specific human being, when it was, how it was done, and it is normally a discussion about when to leave, complaining about the suffering the spirit endures in the human being. They also take a similar material form in choice of words, repetitions, use of voice, body movements clapping, torso-bending, covering the body with textiles and more. Spirit embodiment of this kind usually happens at holy water sites, spaces which are particularly sacred areas, as was treated in depth in chapter 5. People who come to these places come with an expectation that there may be spirit embodiment, like the young female student referred to above who said: 'It is a good thing to go and check'.[205] When it occurs it is shaped by the space, the things and those present. These monologues and embodiments of spirits are not only spirits acting, but human beings acting and shaping spirits. It seems that certain movements, certain way of talking, certain topics and words are recognizable as embodiments of spirits. Johnson has pointed out that, in Candomblé: 'Audience members cluster these sensory cues together and evaluate them. In conversation with each other, they arrive at a discursive consensus on if, and when, an orixá has in fact arrived in a given dancer's body.' (Johnson 2020, p.164). In this way it can be argued that it is not only the spirit which has effect in its environment (Tola 2013), but spirits are formed and shaped.

The behaviour of the person with a spirit shows how s/he is not so often isolated and unaware of what goes on around him/her but interact and relate to others. The person (along with the spirit) goes through a process of healing, fighting and arguing, usually

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[205] Interview, Addis Ababa, 25.1.2016

over time, until the evil spirit leaves. The person's problems are resolved over time, and the spirit(s) leave(s), but may return, if manipulated by other people or if the person who contained the spirit does not maintain his/her relationship with the divine.

In another incident, I observed two women greeting each other in a holy water site. The greeting started in a normal way, but then one of them switched to ante, the masculine form of you. When her friend departed, she reflected that 'I thought she was herself'.[206] The examples demonstrate how subtle the distinction between a spirit and a person is. What made the woman interpret her friend to be 'not herself', was not made explicit in the situation. However, she immediately switched to using *ante*. One of the main markers of this is the practice of talking to women as masculine, using the word *ante* (masculine personal pronoun) and not *anchi* (feminine) to say 'you' when addressing her.

The way others relate to people at holy water sites makes it evident who is understood as a spirit and who is not. People may defend those who act outside acceptable conduct[207], based on the logic that it is not the person's behaviour but the spirit's behaviour. In one incident, I observed a woman talked agitatedly in a prayer house. The guard intervened and told her to stop shouting because people are praying. But the woman/spirit replied:

> Leave me alone. Do you think I like it when I shout? I had no choice. Leave me alone, otherwise I will break your nose. If you are a 'man' (meaning 'brave') come, do pray like her. You think I do not know your secrets. I will expose you. I know about your spirit that you have under your *ǧäbäna*[208].[209]

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[206] Participant observation, Addis Ababa, 10.6.2016

[207] Even if spirits break the regular code of conduct, they also often defend rules and traditions, even the more conservative traditions. Several informants have explained that there are spirits that explicitly protect the rules of the holy water sites. For instance, that females should wear skirts, no makeup, no wigs and no jewellery at holy water sites.

[208] Traditional coffee pot, also used in zar cults, but then sometimes with two spouts.

[209] Participant observation, Addis Ababa, 15.11.2015

People around her were commenting or telling him that: ‘she is not doing that by her choice. It is the spirit that shouts, it is because she is sick.’

In the dialogue, the spirit threatens the guard that it will break his nose. It acts somehow offended, saying: “Do you think I like it when I shout”. The spirit is treating the guard in an impolite way. It opposes him, something that people do not normally do. In general, people respect his authority and right to keep things in order. The spirit insults him, indicating that he is not brave. It becomes apparent that people around the woman do not accuse her of the bad behaviour but blame the spirit.

In these two last cases, the spirit is ‘made’ in the environment: in the body it inhabits, in conversations, for example is it gendered in the conversation the two women have, it is also formed by the behaviour, and people around it have seen the signs of what they think is a spirit and not the woman, to take some examples. Again, this happens in a certain space, at a certain time, in and through bodies and things.

Exorcism carried out by clergy – the role of things again

Some of the healing practices take place in more or less formal ways between clergy and spirits. This interaction is usually at ‘friendly’ terms, which will be discussed in the first part of this section of the chapter. However, when spirits are involved, the interaction with priests can be more forceful and sometimes even violent, which is the topic of the second part of this section. Commonly, various things are used, things that have an effect upon the spirit.

In Weibela Maryam holy water site, the ᵓaṭmaqi regularly carries out cross healing, using two different crosses, one wooden hand cross and one longer made of metal. The ᵓaṭmaqi sits in a specific place in the main house in the compound, next to the prayer area, and he treats one after the other. He puts the cross to their forehead and lets them kiss the cross, and he often touches the person with his hand on their shoulder. In addition to this he often touches the back of the person with the cross, rubbing it or hitting softly a few times. Most people participate calmly and leave afterwards. Every

now and then agitated behaviour follows the procedure. Sometimes people fall to the ground and stay there for a while. When a person reacts and falls to the ground or tries to escape the cross, the priest sometimes picks up the metal cross and pokes the person with the sharp end. The ᵓaṭmaqi sometimes grabs the person and continues touching his or her head or other parts of the body with the cross.

In one specific situation, as I am talking to the priest outside in the compound of the holy water site, a man comes towards the priest. The priest lifts his hand to give him the cross on his forehead and to kiss. However, the man moves backwards and tries to avoid the cross. Then the priest forces him by holding him and he rubs the cross on his forehead. Consequently, the man falls to the ground, and the priest puts his foot and the cross on him. After a short while, the man is released, and he continues into the house where there are holy water showers and a prayer place. This situation illustrates the function of the cross. The man retreats, the priest interprets the mans action as a spirit reacting to the cross, and he touches the man's body with the cross. The cross has an impact on the situation and is active, as was discussed in chapter 7.

In another example at a different holy water site, a priest uses the cross in a dialogue with a spirit to force the spirit out. The priest (*Abba*) gives the woman/spirit instructions in what to do, and places the cross in the mouth of the woman who is believed to have a spirit:

> Woman (who has a spirit): But Abba, you do not know me.
> Abba: Kneel down
> Woman: Abba I am not a däbtära.
> Abba: You are an ᵓaganənt.
> Woman: Oh my, oh my, oh my, the däbtära is long gone.
> Abba: Bela bel leb[210]
> Woman: Oh Abba, please what is it?

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[210] I do not know this expression, and I have not been able to transcribe it according to the system of transcription employed in this thesis.

> The priest then puts a cross in her mouth and tells the spirit to get up. Then the woman starts shouting.
> Woman: Ok, ok
> Abba: Hold it. Say that you will never approach them again.
> Woman: Ok. I promise in the name of Saint Michael. Efffff … oh my, the cross is eating me.
> Abba: If you break your promise, what shall it be on you?
> Woman: Fire[211]

After the encounter, the priest explained that he did not have a specific ritual, procedure or a textual formula that he followed. Rather he improvised according to the individual case. However, as we have seen in the examples, words, crosses and other things are often part of the practices. Priests always carry a cross, mostly used for blessing, but in holy water sites for healing and exorcisms. The cross, believed to have spiritual power in it, has a strong effect upon the young woman, who says that the cross is eating her, and the cross makes the spirit promise to leave the young woman. In another instance, the priest used the bible, telling the person/spirit to hold it and obey. These sacred things are used on the spirits inhabiting the person. The sacred thing has a key role in the exorcism.

Once an evil spirit is in the body, many are of the opinion that evil spirits need corporeal treatment to be forced to leave a person. There is a belief that evil spirits dwell primarily in the head and thus touching or hitting the head, usually the forehead, will make them leave. One mild way of doing this is throwing holy water towards a person with some force, in his or her face. Another practice is to touch or even hit a person's forehead, or to pour holy water into a person's mouth, if s/he resists it. Such resistance is interpreted as a sign of a spirit being in the body, and thus this kind of treatment is implemented.

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[211] Participant observation, Addis Ababa, June 2016

Forceful treatment/exorcism

Treatment at holy water sites has been described as forceful, and in an anthropological study from Addis Ababa, Müller and Berhane-Sellassie argue that the healers in their cases exploit their power and carry out the healing rituals in abusive ways, and point to a risk that unauthorised healers practice healing (Berhane-Selassie 2015). In the material collected in this research there are also instances of behaviour of the clergy which seems more forceful. This kind of treatment is carried out to a varying degree. In some sites they are rather the exceptions. In a couple of other places, such treatment was carried out with most visitors at the times when I carried out participant observation.

These observations indicate that priests had diverging opinions about the healing practices, which was also confirmed in interviews. Some priests said that beating should not be part of the treatment. Others said it was necessary. Similar views were also found among lay people. Some said that it is unacceptable; others argued that it is an effective way of forcing the spirit out and they were happy that the priests did it, because it enforced the healing. It was generally seen as something done to the spirit and not to the individual in search of healing. 'It is not the person who is beaten, but the spirit' was a statement made by an informant as we were encountering the treatment of a teenage girl at one of the holy water sites. Judging from observations, beating was rare in several sites, whereas in others it was common. Some reported that they would avoid the priests who acted with force, and thus not go to certain holy water sites. At one or two of the sites[212] in this research, rough treatment seemed to be part of the regular treatment.

At one of the sites, there was a weekly program of holy oil healing. This site was popular and had many visitors. During the holy oil healing that I observed twice, there

[212] I carried out field research at the site at five instances.

was a large crowd of several hundred people[213]. Three ʾaṭmaqi would provide the oil, applying it to the skin, particularly where the ailment was. The ʾaṭmaqi used cotton buds to squeeze oil into the ears and cover it with cotton. They also applied oil to the eyes, which the priests subsequently covered with textile and bandage to keep the oil on the eyes for some time. In addition, the ʾaṭmaqi put oil on people's forehead, and during the treatment he would hit most visitors with his flat hand several times in the forehead. Whether they were hit on their stomach, back or legs would vary. The healer did not seem reluctant to use force or physical power during the healing procedures, which I have also described in chapter three, and which have been described by Müller and Berhane-Sellassie (Berhane-Selassie 2015). The rationale as explained in interviews both with lay people and clergy, is that violence, abuse and force are used against evil spirits, and the human being will not feel the treatment. As I have discussed elsewhere, some informants find this treatment necessary. However, others express that the use of force is unnecessary.

In another example at another site, I observed a teenager standing somewhat passively but refusing whatever was offered. The priest was throwing holy water at her. Every now and then, she moved a little bit around. One of the helpers threatened her with some branches with leaves. A woman prepared a mix of holy oil, soil and holy water, but she refused to take it. Then eventually they moved her to a mat on the grass, and four people held her while the helper poured the drink into her mouth. One was literally lying on top of her. After that they smeared her with ʾəmnət (in this case, a mix of holy water and soil).[214]

Yet another quite common practice is chaining of 'patients', usually men, at holy water sites. Sometimes two individuals are chained together, either their hands or feet, or a person's ankles can be chained together, or he may be chained to something, for instance a tree. This is often done when a person shows a tendency to act in aggressive

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[213] Knowing exactly how many would be difficult to count, because of a high degree of mobility in the group.
[214] Participant observation, Addis Ababa, 19.3.16

ways, and observations show that this most often happens with men said to have an unpredictable behaviour and/or be drug addicts. This was sometimes also explained by the idea that men are more aggressive than women.

Residents at holy water sites unable to take care of themselves have caretakers, often former patients still living at the sites having found a way to earn a living, paid by the family members. I have observed such caretakers walk around with sticks in case someone becomes violent, chaining people whenever they deem it necessary. One informant explicitly said that the behaviour of the caretakers was abusive.

Gender is relevant in many aspects of the interaction at the holy water sites and is interrelated to the power theme mentioned above. The interpretation that a person is inhabited by a spirit is not the only aspect which is decisive of the way people are treated at holy water sites, gender is also a factor. I find it important to note that the forceful practices like beating and holding I have observed to be carried out more often with female visitors to holy water sites than male. However, the practice of chaining and tying is according to my observations more commonly done with men.[215] The beating has been discussed in Müller and Berhane-Sellassie, who argue that the screaming itself is a proof of the spiritual power of the healer (Müller and Berhane-Sellassie 2015). They also argue that women are more susceptible to violence and abuse. However, as I explain above, this study shows that also men are treated in forceful ways. Sometimes, informants express that force is necessary. The reason is a perception that spirits need to be beaten to be chased away, as the priest claimed in the interview referred to above. This perception points to spirits as material.

The analysis shows that informants seem to look at the relationship that develops with repeated interaction between human beings and spirits as concrete and material. These two topics are interconnected; it is a general idea in type 3 embodiment that a spirit takes over the control of a body, and then the person is no longer there – it is not the

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[215] There is a quite common perception that as men are physically stronger than women, they need to be controlled, often chained or tied, if they demonstrate aggressive behaviour.

person who is beaten but the spirit. Afterwards, when the individual sees and feels the bruises and pain in the body, others tell them what happened. Some of my informants experiencing this whom I asked their opinion about the practices, argue that it is good, because it pushes the healing process forward.

Healing interaction

Another dimension of the healing process which this interaction is part of, is the possibility of bringing out topics that are difficult to approach otherwise or to reveal the cause of the illness. As has been mentioned, spirits often reveal what happened to a person, which spirit it is and who did it. In 2016, different several told me that the EOTC had officially announced that the Church does not allow clergy working at holy water sites to ask spirits about the story behind the possession, such as who is the person behind it, and whether it is a mätät type of practice or other. The reason for the new rule was, again according to the priests, that this may create disturbance among the people and influence relationships and neighbourhoods negatively. The announcement of the Church that binds priests not to ask spirits about the initiator of the misfortunes, demonstrates how important the spirits and their behaviour are and how this interaction described in the chapter certainly has impact beyond the holy water site. It is also an example of how spirits are formed by its community.

As was discussed in chapter 6, interaction with spirits of various kinds also is engagement with small scale and large-scale conflict, and it influences upon discourses about transgressions, like in the case of gender norms, or experiences of misery and suffering or having caused harm in some way, which the spirits play out. In this way such taboo topics can be treated when they are materialised in the spirits who, although seen as real actors, are not human beings nor benevolent spiritual beings. Chapter 6 showed how spirits are seen as illnesses, and that illness is a sign of the times of insecurity. The monologues and dialogues presented in this chapter show that several of the spirits' talks are about micro-conflicts between family members, where

one serves the zar and the other rejects it, as well as reflecting large-scale developments and breaking of norms.

The analysis in this chapter shows that the interactions make sense interpreted as types of healing practices. The informants, the ṣäbälṭänyoč, come to the ṣäbäl bota to relate to the divine, to each other and to spirits to get well. Now, why do people and spirits behave in such ways in this environment? Part of the answer has to do with the space, the spirits and the things in which the interaction takes place. The ṣäbäl bota is a space where God intervenes in a more potent way, as was shown with ethnography from talking spirits and interaction at the sites. The divine is in the water, in the space and in the things that are there, in the vestment of the atmaki, in the incense, crosses, the holy oil and more, and thus in the bodies of the ṣäbälṭänyoč.

Keeping these points in mind, what I label 'healing interaction' takes place in different forms. These are not stereotyped forms which are repeated in the same ways, like formulated rituals. On the contrary, the interaction takes many forms, the variety is wide.

Healing is then, in addition to being a corporeal and a religious process, also a social process, not restricted to processes between people, but between human beings and supernatural beings mediated by sacred things. I emphasise how the processes that take place at ṣäbäl bota are more about relationships between humans and the divine, the sacred and the sick, and, as Malara emphasises, restoration of kinship relations (Malara 2017), I find that informants do not always focus upon reconciling or restoring broken ties with other humans. Looking at it from the perspective of illness and illness causation has extrapolated that much of the focus of informants is to exorcise the evil spirits and reconnect with God. Keeping in mind what was argued previously about illness as spirits and vice versa, spirit talk and interaction at ṣäbäl bota is about exorcising evil spirits and illnesses most concretely. Users of holy water sites express that they experience spirits in a material form, in their bodies, as illnesses, which, in

varying degrees, take control of their bodies. Informants 'reply' with various practices which both model spirits and exorcise spirits.

Concluding remarks

Focusing upon things, bodies and spirits and their roles in healing practices, the ethnography presented in this chapter has carved out how interaction between the different actors may be seen as healing practices. It was discussed how spirits are not only possessors who take over bodies, but bodies, spaces and things shape spirits.

The interaction does not take place in a vacuum. It is not just a spiritual discourse happening 'out there', far from real life. Quite the contrary, these conversations and actions are part of a social context which is of such a format that what the spirits do and say engages with discourses in society, issues people are preoccupied with, such as how and why they got ill. The spirits count and influence upon this context, which is in turn a prerequisite for its existence. The interaction is part of various discourses in a changing society, of power relations and gender, in addition to that of well-being and healing. These discourses are necessarily also embodied and formed by the spaces, things and bodies. Hence are also the spirits formed accordingly.

Healing does not usually take place at a specific moment, but is longitudinal, gradual and embedded in the relationships with the divine and others. Things, words (importantly in the spirit monologues), bodies and spaces play roles in making and shaping spirits and in making such relationships available.

Chapter 9: Doing religion

> Contrasting the chilly early morning hours, the tall eucalyptus trees were not able to protect us, and the sun had started burning as we sat in the holy water site, listening to the reading from the hagiography of the Egyptian saint ᵓAbunä Gäbrä Mänfäs Qəddus. Like so often before, Abba Abraham was the performing priest at the monthly *maḫbär*[216] gathering. On that specific day, around ten members had turned up, and the group were concentrated and silent, except for one woman who talked, tilted her head back and forth and made sudden moves, but no one seemed to be bothered. Abba Abraham preached: 'There was a woman who was a prostitute and slept with countless men. She did not practice fasting and praying and she did not go to church on Sundays. This simply means she did not have *ᵓəmənət* (faith, belief).'[217]

In the quote, Abba Abraham emphasises the importance of actions and practices. He says that without fasting, praying and going to church, the woman has no ᵓəmənət (faith, belief). In interviews and conversations with many different informants, actions and ᵓəmənət were mentioned in tandem. Firstly, informants often blame the lack of ᵓəmənət for bäššəta (illness, disease). Secondly, lack of ᵓəmənət was a standard explanation as to why someone's condition did not improve albeit having participated in healing practices at holy water sites. Thirdly, ᵓəmənət was usually emphasised in explaining how a person could recover from illness or endure illnesses. In many informants' views, ᵓəmənət as *practice* is a prerequisite for healing. It is doing religion rather than believing.

The doing religion dimension is found most specifically in how the body is modelled and treated in the practices and made inaccessible for evil spirits and open to God.

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[216] Religious association.
[217] Part of a sermon held by Abba Abraham, based on a passage read from the hagiography of the saint ᵓAbunä Gäbrä Mänfäs Qəddus, participant observation, Addis Ababa, 13.4. 2016

This chapter, which focuses upon the roles of things and interaction in healing practices, contains an analysis of the body and how the doing religion is manifested in corporeal, tangible aspects, for example intimately in touching. The chapter will look into how encountering and, even more so, touching sacred things invoke emotions, which in turn possibly contribute to establishing, re-establishing and enhancing profound relational feelings towards superhuman beings who in turn bless and provide for the faithful. Thus the aim of the chapter is also to further explore the role of relationships in illness causation and the healing process. Relationships with saints, angels, Mary and Christ are emotional, embodied experiences and the attachment that is established between individual informants, as well as between groups (in the maḫbär) and the supernatural beings, are maintained in the practices; in and through ᵓəmənət. These relationships replace the malevolent spirits.

Abba Tesfa Sellassie, who served at a popular holy water site, emphasized how actions and bäššəta are linked. He said: '(…) when they disappoint God by committing sins, when people live their life without God, the more people separate from the Holy Spirit, the more the ᵓaganənt (evil spirits) get closer to them and bring bäššəta along with it.'[218] Clearly, according to Abba Tesfa Sellassie, what a person does either gives way to a life with God, per definition a healthy life, or a person's actions gives way to evil spirits and thus bäššəta. What Abba Tesfa Sellassie says underlines the healing dimension and function of religious practices. He expresses that a person can be closer or farther from God and evil spirits, and bäššəta is a symptom of being nearer malevolent spirits than benevolent spirits.

In the work of Anita Hannig, whose field research is from fistula hospitals in Bahir Dahr and Addis Ababa, it is shown how women with fistula injuries continue religious practices, even though they constantly leak urine, and may not, in principle, enter churches due to the leakage from the body. Hannig explores how the women she has

[218] Interview, Addis Ababa, 4.5.2016

studied ‘adhere to modes of self-regulation aimed at becoming a particular kind of ethical person – a good pious Christian’ (Hannig 2017, p 65). The body and how it is manipulated in various ways is clearly important. However, rather than focusing on self-regulation and ethics, in this current study the material theory perspective is chosen when analysing the body and the ways the body is done to and done with. Informants explain that through the doing to and with bodies they are changed into saved and redeemed human beings (and bodies) due to the changed relationships they establish and re-establish with the supernatural beings.

A historical and wider context of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity may frame the context of this study more, as informants often express that illness experiences are blessing. As mentioned in chapter 2, illness has had a religious place in the history of Christianity, for example among the early Christians. According to historian Andrew Crislip, illness was a way to God (Crislip 2012). Crislip writes about saints and ascetics among the early Christians who, founded upon the view that all humans are ‘defected’, obtained proximity with God through ascetic practices that made them ill (Crislip 2012). This, and the high ideal of asceticism which lies at the heart of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, is an important background for understanding some informants in this study, who conceive băššəta as their blessing because it transforms their lives. In their view, the suffering motivates them to seek God and enhance their faith, and they underline that their life has been altered.

The chapter is divided into four parts. In the first part I discuss the concept ’ᵓəmənət’ as a practice, present religious practices, the nəssəḥa[219], which consists of many different practices, and which is carried out individually as part of healing processes. In the second part, the communal practices of the maḫbär will be presented and discussed. Maḫbär are associations which have important functions in healing and preserving healed conditions. In the third part, emotional processes and the permeable

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[219] Nəssəḥa is one of the seven sacraments of the EOTC.

body are in focus. In the fourth part, a discussion on mediation and the relational dimension concludes the chapter.

ᵓƎmənət: Faith

When asked how a person could be healed, informants would usually respond by saying*'be* ᵓəmənət', which means something like 'by faith'. Whether or not someone will be healed is according to a person's ᵓəmənət, and this reply often came without hesitation and seemed automatic and was apparently in accordance with the teaching of the Church. The meaning of this expression 'be ᵓəmənət' and the concept of ᵓəmənət to informants needs an exploration, as it cannot be translated directly into faith or belief. The exploration of this is the topic of this section of the chapter.

According to the Amharic dictionary the word ᵓəmənət means 'faith, belief, creed, conviction, confidence, fidelity, trust, reliance, assurance, confession' (Kane 1990, p.50). The meaning which I have observed during field research, however, stands in contrast to the translation in the dictionary. Rightly, it seems to be linked with trust. Like Boylston says: 'When a priest tells me that faith is necessary to cure illness, this does not mean that you must assign certain interpretations to the holy water or hold certain thoughts, but that you must trust entirely in a cure' (Boylston 2012, p.102). Trust is certainly an aspect underlined by informants to this present study, expressed for instance by Ato Aklilu. He is a man holding a high position in the EOTC and is also an academic whom I got to know through an acquaintance. Some years back he had heart problems. He explained:

> Ato Aklilu: I got medication and it helped tremendously, but when I asked the doctor, he said I would need the medicine forever. I lived in Lalibela at that time, so I took the medicine to a church, and I asked Saint Lalibela[220] to heal me and

[220] King Gebre Meskel Lalibela ruled during the Zagwe dynasty from 1181 to 1221.

> keep me well and I threw away the medication in the church. I have not had any problem since. How do you explain this?[221]

Accordingly, ᵓəmənət also contains a notion of trust. However, and unlike Boylston's findings, if I asked informants 'what is ᵓəmənət', as indeed I did ask many, they would often start by replying that there is always ᵓəmənət, indicating that they cannot imagine human life without it, and then they would often say that ᵓəmənət is to pray, give alms, go to holy water sites, prostrate, go to church and so on. ᵓƎmənət is what one does, and the healing efficacy lies in someone's ᵓəmənət. I investigated this point with many informants, and one of those I had several discussions with about faith and healing was Tigist. She said:

> Ṣäbäl can cure all kinds of illnesses, but the main thing is ᵓəmənət. If you have a strong ᵓəmənət and do not hesitate, you will be healed. When I came here, I used to drink five litres of ṣäbäl. Then it [the poison] comes out through vomiting, urine and you can get diarrhoea. Through that, the bäššəta inside you comes out.[222]

Tigist links ᵓəmənət to drinking holy water at the holy water site. In another context, Tigist said that having ᵓəmənət also means that one does not need medication from the pharmacy, but one trusts only holy water and that the healing is more effective if biomedicine is not taken parallel with holy water. The woman in the passage from the sermon did not pray, fast or go to church. On the contrary, she committed sinful actions, according to Abba Abraham, and had no ᵓəmənət. ᵓƎmnät does not seem to mean belief in an abstract understanding of the word but is embedded in a person's actions.

[221] Interview, Addis Ababa, 18.7.2016
[222] Interview, Addis Ababa, 11.7.2016

Ato Aklilu emphasises another dimension of faith healing; its ability to heal definitely[223]. Even if this is often not the case, there is a prevailing idea that miracles happen, which informants base on a broad range of stories from the New Testament, from hagiographies and from stories and testimonies told at holy water sites and documented in pious publications. The combination of biomedicine and holy water is by many informants presented as weaker than choosing the holy water healing exclusively. According to the *mämhər* Gebre Maryam, who served at a holy water site, choosing holy water exclusively as remedy must be done in accordance with your level of spirituality or ability to practice the religion. The one who is spiritually immature should stick to both medicine and faith healing, whereas the one who is stronger in his or her religion, may opt for religious healing alone. Therefore, as he underlined, the Church does not discourage people from taking biomedicine. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church's official stand on the combination of biomedical drugs and holy water was announced by the late Abuna Paulos (1936-2012). According to Reuters, Abuna Paulos told 5000 people at the Maryam Church at Entoto near Addis Ababa in 2007: 'What we are saying is that taking the drugs is neither a sin nor a crime,' he said. 'Both the Holy Water and the medicine are gifts of God. They neither contradict nor resist each other' (Tadesse 2007).

Some lay informants go along with that view, others underpin that there is an interconnection between strong ᵓəmənət and achieving healing. The power of the water may not be as strong with poor ᵓəmənət. The power is weakened by the lack of ᵓəmənət, demonstrated by using biomedicine and holy water, together. Tigist was very clear on this point (and echoed by many others). She argued:

> Tigist: The doctor said that people can use both the medical system and ṣäbäl side by side. He confirmed that people get cured by ṣäbäl. In my opinion, it is not good, because there is no healer above God. I believe that if there is faith and trust in

[223] One related issue, which has been raised, is that patients with chronic illnesses often stop coming to clinic appointments, and one theory is that they turn to holy water healing, or perhaps other traditional treatment regimes, because they want to be healed once and for all, see (Levene, Phillips, and Alemu 2016).

God, we must abandon the medical system and use ṣäbäl, because there is no healer beyond Jesus Christ.[224]

Nevertheless, in practical life, informants would combine different treatments. On one occasion, when my assistant and I were supposed to meet Tigist, she did not show up. Some weeks later, she called and excused herself. She had had an accident when she was going to a yearly celebration in a popular Kidane Mehret church and was hit by a car. She had been in hospital for two months due to a bone fracture, apparently because she had to 'lie in a stretched way', a reminder of what was explicated in chapter 4, that informants do mix therapeutic methods, even though arguing against it. Other informants have reported of taking drugs, like painkillers, and going to medical clinics. Her friend had brought holy water for her while she was hospitalised. Tigist reflected upon the accident and her hospitalisation. 'It is the testing of Satan', she concluded, adding different illnesses that she had previously to the list of temptations or tests. The ᵓəmənət is a means of resisting the temptations, which again means to carry out religious actions and not commit sin. The logic is then that if you can endure the testing, you might live a life closer to God and do not risk having to be haunted by evil, a point which I will return to in a later section of the chapter. On the other hand, if you cannot resist temptations, it may have serious consequences upon your life and your vulnerability to evil spirits and bäššəta. Some practices are underlined as particularly important to informants both in religious life in general, and in healing. In the next sections the most important practices will be presented.

Nəssəḥa – the process of penance

Both lay informants and clergy kept mentioning nəssəḥa as a practice necessary for the healing process. Abba Abraham likened the human being to a glass while explaining about the practice of nəssəḥa: 'A broken glass is useless. If we are not clean, we are

[224] Interview, Addis Ababa, 11.7.2016

like a broken glass, and become useless.'[225]. Because of this brokenness, which is one characteristic of human beings, nəssəḥa is necessary. The nəssəḥa is linked with illness and health theologically. The second part of the nəssəḥa, which comes after the confession, is the penitence and has been 'likened to a medicine chosen to assist the penitent in his/her problem and be healed' (Fritsch 2010, p.132). In a senior essay submitted for a bachelor's degree in theology at Trinity Theological College, Akalewold Tessema accounts for four different 'benefits of confession' (Tessema 2004, p.10)[226]. These are psychological, spiritual, social, and lastly physical, when he says: 'According to the teachings of the Holy Bible there are several illnesses which come because of sin. The story of the sick man at Bethesaida can be an example of this (John 5.4). Therefore, our Church teaches that the sick person to whom the priest will perform the sacrament of unction has to confess his sins first before he is cured of his illness. So that confession is absolutely necessary to lead a healthy life, which one does not, affected by illness, which is a result of sin' (Tessema 2004, p.12).

'Nəssəḥa' is translated as penance or confession in the dictionary (Kane 1990, p.1023). As it was explained to me by several informants, rather than a formalised ritual it consists of several steps or a process which encompasses several practices. Usually, it starts with a confession. The confession is given to one's confession father, *yenäfs abbat,* which literally means 'soul father'. Usually, Ethiopian Orthodox Christians have a confession father. At the Josef Mikaʾel holy water site I observed a formalised place, a little shelter, with a priest ready for people's confessions, but that was an anomaly. Normally, people will confess to a confession father with whom they have a longstanding relationship.

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[225] Interview, Addis Ababa, 14.6.2016

[226] The reference must be viewed as a local view, and not as a reference per se.

Praying in front of a wall covered in posters displaying saints, angels, Mary and so on, covered by curtains at a holy water site. Prayer is an essential everyday practice and often part of nəssəḥa. Photo: Marta Camilla Wright.

After the confession, the father confessor will give instructions about what the individual must do to carry out the nəssəḥa. Normally this constitutes a range of practices, like prostration, prayer, fasting, giving alms and going to holy water sites. These practices are performed over a period, normally one or more periods of seven days, the *subaʾe*.

Qes Tesfa gave me an example of what he would 'prescribe' as nəssəḥa to one of his between 40 and 60 'children':

> Qes Tesfa: I decide what they are to do, including giving alms to the church.
> Camilla: How do you decide what they are to do?
> Qes Tesfa: It depends on what they have done. For instance, if the person has had an abortion, I can tell the woman to donate the same amount of money that she paid to the hospital for the abortion, half of the amount to the church and half to

> beggars. In addition, she must endure one month of fasting, and 64 prostrations per day, except holidays.[227]

Nəssəḥa is, as shown in the example, usually quite elaborate, time-consuming and sometimes costly. What a person does as part of the nəssəḥa is essential to the process of healing and salvation. Using holy water without being in the process of nəssəḥa has by some informants been given as the reason why a person is not healed while participating in holy water practices. As said by Biniam, a visitor to holy water site whom I spoke with only once. He is a young man from Addis Ababa:

> The reason people are not cured easily is that they simply enter the holy water without nəssəḥa, without preparing themselves. In the hagiography of ᵓAbbo (short form of ᵓAbunä Gäbrä Mänfäs Qəddus), there is a story about 550 people who took part in Holy Communion, but they were not accepted, because they were not under nəssəḥa, only the ones who undertook nəssəḥa got mercy. Unless we are under nəssəḥa, the Devil will attack because we are not under the shelter of God.[228]

Starting and carrying out the penance practices is by Biniam described as a protecting at holy water sites and elsewhere. Generally, people describe themselves as 'I entered nəssəḥa' *(nəssəḥa gäbbahu).* As the informant states above, it is a protection from spirit attacks. If you have entered nəssəḥa, you are 'under shelter of God'. It is part of the important process of freeing yourself of sin. Sin, as was described earlier in this chapter and in chapter 4 and 6, makes the body vulnerable to evil spirits. Just like committing sin makes the body vulnerable to evil spirits and bäššəta together with nəssəḥa, giving vows (*səlät*) may influence a person's destiny, protect against evil spirits and bäššəta and have a healing effect.

[227] Interview, Addis Ababa, 9.9.2015
[228] Interview, Addis Ababa, 10.6.2016

Vows and covenants as protecting and healing

'Səlät' means vow and entails a promise to a superhuman being. At holy water sites, there are sometimes sessions where people give testimonies about how their prayer and their wow was answered when they publicly present and give what they had promised. People may have promised to commit to a saint and commemorate every monthly and annual celebration, provide church candles, church umbrellas, an amount of money and participate in church rituals or in associations dedicated to the saint.

Once when I arrived at the compound of the Jesus Church in Ferensay, a big ox was in the compound, and as I was going to interview mämhər Gebre Maryam, I asked him why there was an ox in the compound. It was *səlät*. For instance, he explained, someone wanting to have a child could promise to give an ox to the Church in the name of a saint if their wish was fulfilled. The ox would be eaten during a holiday, or the Church may sell it and distribute the money among the poor. Importantly, Gebre Maryam warned: 'Those who did not fulfil their promise will be haunted in their dreams, for example by a snake, or somebody will come in their dream and ask them to give what they stole. Then they remember what they promised.'[229]

To be part of covenants does also enhance one's chance of healing and protection against harm. Such covenants are called *qal ḳidan* and is a promise God has given to a saint, Mary or angels. These covenants are understood as powerful. Even if a person has committed many sins, what the person does in the name of a saint with a certain covenant will still have a great chance of healing and saving him or her. The commitment may also help others. An illustration of how much being part of a covenant can effect someones life is a story from The Miracles of Mary. The Miracles of Mary is a collection of miracles that she is believed to have accomplished when people performed good deeds in her name. One of the miracles is about Belay Seb[230],

[229] Interview, Addis Ababa, 19.5.2016
[230] In Budge's translation it is called 'The virgin Mary and the cannibal of the city Kemer'. (Budge 1923)

who ate his own son after having been tricked by Satan. He became addicted to eating human beings and ate 78 people. However, one time when he was walking on a road, a sick person asked him for a drop of water. Belay Seb refused, but then the man asked in the name of Mary, Belay Seb thought he could get mercy and gave him water. Then, when Belay Seb died, and was judged by his deeds, he went to Hell, but then Mary came she said that he had given water in her name, therefore Mikaʾel came with his scale. He put the 78 people and the drop of water, but the 78 people were more. Then Maryam added her shadow to his drop of water. That part then became heavier, and Belay Seb could enter into Heaven.[231]

The man Belay Seb had committed terrible acts. His empathy towards the beggar was limited, until he begged in the name of Mary. Mary has a special promise, qal kidan, from God, and Belay Seb, knowing this, gave the beggar water. This one action saved him at the end of time. This is a story about how the promises and special pacts with spiritual entities have a concrete effect upon people's lives and afterlives.

There are qal ḳidan given in the name of saints, for instance that the one who commemorates in the name of a certain saint, like the maḫbär, will be part of the covenant. Abba Abraham explained:

> Abba Abraham: Our maḫbär is gathered in the name of ʾAbbo, who has the qal ḳidan with Christ to give mercy for those who celebrate his *zikr*, their soul be healed. To obtain this blessing, we celebrate every month.[232]

Waga, literally meaning cost, price and reward, is what informants explain that one obtains from having done good deeds. The səlät and doing in the name of a saint because of a given qal kidan gives waga, a value, and one may expect to gather with Christ on judgement day. However, importantly, informants often mention a concrete tangible result as waga, like the barren woman who promised to give a display shelf

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[231] Based on an account given by Qes Tesfa in an interview, Addis Ababa, 29.6.2016
[232] Interview, Addis Ababa, 14.6.2016

for the icons and the books in the prayer house if she was blessed with a child. According to the story, she got three children as waga. The səlät and doing good deeds to honour the qal kidan of a saint may result in you getting what you wished for in a concrete way. It is a mutual relationship of giving, although hierarchical. Reciprocal giving and receiving remind us of anthropological theories of the complex social and relational significance of gifts, which according to Marcel Mauss carry symbolic meaning of obligations between people (Mauss 1954). One could argue that the promise and the gift, the giving and receiving, binds human and superhuman beings together in hierarchical and profound relationships. These actions and the gifts also have implications for social ties between family, kin and friends, who are also then under protection and may be blessed as part of your waga and blessing, both results of what you do when for instance you make a səlät. Malara brings an interesting example of səlät, 'offering' of one's children to Mary (Malara 2017, p.100). It may be pointed out that the informants to this study, several of whom endure much suffering of various sorts, are much in dependence and not necessarily empowered by the system of səlät. However, good deeds pave the way for a chance to influence upon one's destiny, also underlined by Di Nunzio (Di Nunzio 2019, pp.204-207). Importantly, as pointed out by Malara and Boylston, even though there is a hierarchical, asymmetric relationship between human beings and supernatural beings (as in other relationships of power in Ethiopian society), relations of love and care are hard to separate from them because, they argue, 'the forms of love and care that are emphasized in Orthodox Ethiopia are themselves largely asymmetrical' (Malara and Boylston 2016, p.43). At holy water sites informants express deeply felt gratitude and love towards saints, angels, Christ and God in a variety of ways, along with expressing how they depend upon them to solve their problems and be healed from bäššəta. In the context of this current study, the concrete keeping of a promise, for instance promising an ox, and the tangible result, for instance a marriage, a baby or healing, underline the importance of materiality in the practices of healing and does also generate attachment to certain superhuman beings. Also carrying with it a material notion, blessing is another important practice which plays a relational role in healing processes.

As has been shown, living in the proximity of God is made possible through practices, and another way of doing this is by being part of a maḫbär, organised, social fellowships or associations dedicated to a specific saint. Often such associations gather in members' homes alternately. At times they gather at holy water sites. That relationships with saints are important for the relationship with God has been demonstrated by Diego Malara (2017). He shows how the 'doing for' is essential in living a life in closer proximity with God, because of the saints. These, according to Malara, are relationships people have with saints that create this proximity.

The next section of this chapter will present one such association and explore its role as a healing entity by the members practices. It is healing as the members become part of the *kidan* of the saint who is the patron of the maḫbär, and because of the practices that the group perform together. The doing together adds, as will be shown, an extra dimension to the healing and redeeming role of practices, as the participation in the tsuwa is likened to the Eucharist. The Eucharist is viewed as the most important practice. However, many are excluded from the practice.

The Maḫbär and their practices

In the maḫbär[233] there were formally 24 members at first but after some months, the number increased to 28 members.[234] Normally, 10 to 14 people regularly showed up on the monthly meetings. In this most active group, the gender distribution was normally a fifty-fifty mix of women and men. On the annual celebration of their patron saint a larger group participated. Also, on the biannual occasions when they prepared

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[233] I was part of the Abune Gebre Menfes Kedus maḫbär from September 2015 to July 2016, and I participated in the monthly meetings. The meeting place of this group of people was a holy water site in Addis Ababa, where they met once a month on the patron saint's day, and I was welcomed to participate on a regular basis. In addition, they met every two weeks to discuss practical and other matters. I never took part in those meetings and have no first-hand information about them. I neither took part in the *tsuwa*, which was strictly reserved for the members.

[234] Mulumebet and Flemmen argue that the number of people participating in religious maḫbär in cities in Ethiopia today has decreased. From the information I have gathered on this during field research, informants participated in such groups and did not talk about a decrease, and the number in "my" maḫbär was on the increase during my year in the field..

food for the poor and beggars a larger proportion of the members took part. Giving alms and contributing to the poor in the community is an important obligation for Orthodox and a practice that is understood to help obtaining healing and salvation.

On one occasion, one of the leading figures explained to a new member about the meetings they had. He said: 'We gather once every 15 days. We discuss about the strengths and weaknesses of our maḫbär and to make peace if there are people who disagree. The most important aspect of what we do is that we gather in the name of (the saint) and pray for the sick so they can be healed and for people to not waste time in bad places but rather join us in our religious endeavours. The most important thing we work for is to become good examples for others.'[235]

All the members of the maḫbär explained that in their opinion they had been healed by the saint, the patron of the holy water site, so therefore they joined the group. It was a way both to give thanks and to try to remain healthy, because as part of the maḫbär they are also part of the pact the saint has with God.

The members of the group had experienced miracles of healing, and this was an important motivation for being part of the group along with the belief in the continued healing and protection embedded in the practicing. The constant participation in the group provided a continuation of the miracle and mediation of the holy that they need to be part of to maintain the new status in life, the health and the health of close kin. In the maḫbär that I took part in, the members I had the opportunity to interview all explained that they were members because they had been healed by the patron saint of that holy water site. Here are some examples:

> 'There is a promise given to (the saint) that if someone dies even without nesseha he or she will be saved. I drank 20 litres of holy water during a period of 15 days and then a stone came out with the urine.'

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[235] Meeting in the maḫbär, Addis Ababa, 15.6.2016

> 'I had an illness called 'kintarot'. Then I went to a holy water site. There the water is so bitter that you cannot even drink one glass, I drank five litres, and an animal came out with eyes and something pointing at the other end.'

> 'My breast grew and became large, and, in the hospital, they looked at it but did not find anything. I felt pain. At the holy water site, it was healed.'

These are short versions of the miracle stories that these three members have experienced. I talked in depth with several of the members, and they all explained that they had joined after similar experiences, in addition to the religious motivation.

In an ethnographic work from Menz in North Shewa in today's Oromia, Helen Pankhurst discusses the maḫbär and its functions, mainly in a gender perspective (Pankhurst 1992). It is a maḫbär dedicated to Mariam and celebrates on the 21st every month[236]. Some of her informants explain why they became a member of a maḫbär, giving important pieces of information upon which Pankhurst does not put emphasis (Pankhurst 1992, pp.150-154), perhaps because her perspective is different. However, for this study the case stories are striking and share some themes with the collection of stories that I have from the maḫbär I was part of. All three of the informants Pankhurst mentions in her book state that the reason they joined the maḫbär was someone's illness (ibid, p.153). One of them says: 'she [Mary] makes me happy, when I ask her to heal me, she does so.' Another member explains that she was part of a maḫbär, but stopped. Then she lost her baby. When another child of hers became ill she joined the one she was currently part of. In the last example the woman says: 'I joined because Alemu (her son) was ill.' All these three women talk about how Mariam helps them in their lives, strikingly all of them in times of illness in their family (ibid, p.153).

In another anthropological work on the maḫbär by Flemmen and Zenebe, references are also made to illness and healing in interviews with members (Flemmen and Zenebe

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[236] Mariam is celebrated on three days per month, the 2nd (Baata) 16th (Kidanemariam), and the 21st (Mariam).

2016). One of their informants says ‘For example, my father was unable to attend his mahbär for financial reasons and hence he was in a crisis. However, I noticed that once he rejoined the mahbär he was all right’ (Flemmen and Zenebe 2016, p.13). This man seems to have seen how his father’s condition improved because he rejoined the maḫbär. It is also mentioned that people believe that the participation in a maḫbär will ‘help them in the future’ and several have joined in gratitude for miraculous cures of illnesses, either their own or that of individuals in their families.

These studies provide information that supports the findings in this study. The maḫbär has a very important role to play for the members’ health and well-being in addition to their socio-religious importance, as the participation incorporates the members in the promise of the saint and establishes and re-establishes the relationship with the saint and thus the divine. I believe that with the focus of this study upon illness and healing, another important dimension of the maḫbär has been carved out. Moreover, the information underscores that religion and health are entwined.

The members’ view the participation in the maḫbär as healing, as expressed also by one of the regular priests, Abba Abraham, when I asked if the maḫbär has a healing effect: ‘Yes, power of healing both flesh and spirit, the *tsuwa* blessed by priest gets holy and gets power of healing both spirit and flesh.’[237]

Tsuwa denotes both the container used for the holy water[238], in this case a ceramic bowl, and the practice carried out. It is a ritual where all the members stand in front of the others asking them and God for forgiveness and then drinking a cup of holy water and eating a piece of bread. It has strong resemblance with the Holy Communion, and in the maḫbär I participated it was usually carried out in the following way:

> A member leading the ritual says: May God have his mercy on you. Again, may God have mercy on you.

[237] Interview, Addis Ababa, 14.6.2016
[238] In other maḫbär a homebrewed beer, *tella,* is often used.

Another member: Take it. Take it well. Peace will be upon us if this is taken well. Those who want to taste it, come closer.
A third member: Those who have not eaten or drunk holy water[239], come forward.

A fourth member, (who eats and drinks the tsuwa): My brothers and sisters.
A member leading the ritual: For the things I committed purposely and what I have done unintentionally.
The fourth member: Please forgive me for the sins I committed purposely and what I have done unintentionally. (3 times)
All of them together: May God have mercy on you.
(Repeated with each member)[240]

Each of those who participated in the ritual and asked forgiveness ate a small piece of bread and drank some water. One of the members said that it is like the Holy Communion (*qurban*), but it is called tsuwa or *saelnake*.

According to Abba Abraham, who usually participated and carried out the ritual, the ones who should really count as members of the maḫbär are those who take the tsuwa. He said: 'The promise is in the tsuwa, it has its own meaning, that the members will not ever be separated, this is the promise they make, people may be invited and participate, but those are not the members.'[241] The quote indicates that the members are together in a special way as they participate in the ritual. They are tied together in a way that they cannot 'ever be separated'. The ritual has this effect on the group. Moreover, he underlined that being a member should not be treated superficially but taken seriously. He continued: 'If we are truly under one heart, to keep rules and regulations of the maḫbär is just like joining the kingdom of Heaven (*mengiste semayat*). But it is difficult. When God comes again it will continue if God will. To get

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[239] This indicates that fasting ahead of *Tsuwa* includes not drinking holy water.
[240] Participant observation, translation of recording, Addis Ababa, 15.7.2016
[241] Interview, Addis Ababa, 14.6.2016

this, people must understand, and people do not often do that, they do what they want rather than follow the rules. People may come without sincerity, simply attracted by others. Because there are implications for a member, for instance to experience miracles like the human with anaconda and the woman who was raped, written in the miracles of (the saint).[242]

The tsuwa ritual can thus be seen as the essence of the maḫbär. It includes the reception of holy water and blessed bread, in a fashion that resembles the Holy Communion. I also observed that towards the end of the ritual, some of the women volunteered to finish it. I was explained that it had to be finished, because it cannot be mixed with the other, regular holy water. The explanation was that the other holy water was for all but the one used in the tsuwa is a covenant for chosen people, in the name of the saint.

I asked about this practice and if it could be seen as a substitute for the Eucharist. Among followers of the EOTC, few receive the Holy Communion, according to what informants in this study tell, and this is also held by other research (Levine 1974; Boylston 2018). On the tsuwa relation to the Eucharist, opinions diverted. Some claimed it was like taking the Holy Communion and some were reluctant to such an idea.

The porous, vulnerable body

Both in individual trajectories of healing and in communal, like participating in maḫbär, the practices usually contain various methods of making the body whole and reducing the risk of being perforated. As has been mentioned in many examples throughout the chapters, practices do often involve the forcing out of a poison, a specific object or substance, which has entered the body. Thus, a key feature of the

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[242] Interview, Addis Ababa, 14.6.2016

healing procedures is to identify the poison which has been introduced into the body and force it out. The holy water is put on to the body, into the body and used to force something out of the body.

Jonathan was a man around 30 years old. He suddenly fell ill with stomach problems and pain. He lost a lot of weight, around 25 kilos below what he was under normal conditions. In his perception, the illness was mätät*,* enticed by some envious colleagues at work. However, he did go to the doctor, who diagnosed him with a parasitical illness. Then he decided to try holy water. Jonathan describes how the holy water healed him:

> Jonathan: I threw up and something yellow jellylike came out, like egg yolk. The next day it was something green, also jellylike. After that, I went to the ṣäbäl, drank, and was baptised, but while being baptised, I could not breathe. One day in a dream, I saw ᵓAbbo[243] with a yellow monk habit and a monk stick which had jewellery at the top. He hit my stomach twice. He said, there is (inaudible) in the stomach. I asked my father what it was.[244] He said that it was a mätät, given in the form of tea or coffee. I continued to go to the ṣäbäl and some fragmented meat like structure came out in my faeces. I was ill for one and a half years. Then, at last, something completely black came out, like the yellow and green substances. After that everything became normal, and I was healthy.[245]

Jonathan's process contains four main ingredients: poison entering his body, a dream that gives him insight, participating in the holy water practices and the counter substance, holy water, which he applies to his body in two different ways – drinking and baptizing (showering). In his opinion, the holy water then gradually forced the poison out. During the process, he could not breathe while showering in the holy water, describing how effective the water was as a healing agent. The poison, on the

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[243] This is a short form of the Egyptian saint ᵓAbunä Gäbrä Mänfäs Qəddus.
[244] His father was a priest and Jonathan thought his father had more insight into such topics than lay people do.
[245] Interview, Addis Ababa, 24.3.2016

other hand, was lured into him due to someone's sin, the envious colleagues who he claimed had wanted to harm him.

The example is an illustration of how an illness is often interpreted and treated. The material objects affect each other. The defiling objects or substances are forced out by other substances that have been drunk, as seen in the example above, injected into the body (mouth, ears and nose are what I have observed), eaten, rubbed into the skin, come to the body in the form of smoke, hit the body or thrown at the body, embraced the body, and more. There are numerous methods of hurting the evil and forcing it to leave the body. The body must get rid of the entity that has entered it. The evil spirit/illness is washed away with the water, forced out of the body in the name of various saints, angels, Christ, God, the Trinity and so on. In addition, the possibility of flow of bodily liquids like blood, semen, sweat and tears makes the body vulnerable. Firstly, illnesses and evil spirits can enter the body through its orifices. Secondly, feelings also open the body and make it accessible to evil spirits. Thirdly, sexual activity, childbirth and menstruation leave the body open and vulnerable to attack. As was discussed in other chapters, particularly chapter 3, in many informants' views, committing sin makes the body more vulnerable to evil spirits and illness. The lack of wholeness of the body is made even more challenging by committing sin. If the body is not intact or whole, there is a risk that spirits will enter. Moreover, the unity of the body and soul is challenged by evil spirit intrusion, where the person and the body are separated. The body's permeability is a challenge to people and to the Church, and in part it is regulated by a variety of rules, as has already been mentioned. The rules prevent people who have had sexual intercourse and menstruating women from staying close to the church building during Saturday and Sunday liturgy. Another prohibition applies for people who do not fast or have bleeding wounds.

The challenge of the body's lack of wholeness or intactness is also handled by letting as little as possible into the body. During the many fasts (see chapter 6 for details) Orthodox abstain from food, abstain from other kinds of pleasure and strive to adhere to ascetic ideals. Boylston has pointed out that the Orthodox calendar is a powerful

normative tool which includes a fasting regime about which he argues that: ‘Fasting is a collective practice that allows for different degrees of participation precisely because it is cooperative’ (Boylston 2018, p.39). The synchronized nature of fasting and feasting means that the foundations of religious practice happen on the scale of the collective, but also at an individual level. The fasting regime allows for individual adjustments and choice in how to practice it, for instance which periods to fast and up to what time of day. Fasting may also be, at the individual level, a tool for obtaining control of the body, a tool to control spirits. Bynum argues that medieval women’s fasting was ‘(…) less an internalizing of the church’s negative views of flesh and female than a rebellion against the moderation of the high medieval church, which was moving towards a more positive sense of the body’ (Bynum 1987, p.218). Moreover, the abstention from food was a way of fusing ‘with a Christ whose suffering saves the world’ (Bynum 1987, p.218).

In her work about fistula surgery, Hannig unpacks many aspects of how the body, the surgery and religion are interlinked among her informants who undergo fistula treatment (Hannig 2017), and shows that ‘studying the carefully situated nature of bodily affliction can offer us valuable insights into how subjects are remade in the face of misfortune’ (Hannig 2017, p.7). The women Hannig studied were advised not to enter holy water site because of their urine incontinence (Hannig 2013, p.303). Another illustrative example Hannig brings to the fore is burial procedures among Ethiopian Orthodox, where ‘All bodily orifices, including the nose, ears and anus, are stuffed with tissue paper or cotton to prevent the in- and outflow of substances’ (Hannig 2013, p.304).

In addition to fasting as a way of containing the body, the already mentioned practices of injecting or filling the orifices should be interpreted as ways of tackling the vulnerability of the body. As mentioned, Bynum points out that fasting was a way for medieval women to fuse with Christ. In this current study, the maintaining of the body’s borders is one aspect of the healing practices. Another is forcing out specific evil substance or materials and filling the body with holy substance or matter. This

does in a very concrete way fuse the body, and thus the human being, with the divine. Therefore, while the porous body represents a threat and the body's borders need to be regulated, this permeability is also an important opportunity for human beings to engage with the divine. When helpers at ṣäbäl bota sprout holy water into openings such as the nose or priests squeeze holy oil into visitors' ears and eyes, and of course the most obvious: the holy water and other substances entering though the mouth, the holy enters the body. These practices do not only represent potential control of the bodies and the human being's vulnerability to spiritual powers. What happens is that holy water and holy oil enter the body, and the body is filled with holy and healing powers which are understood as holy in a very literal way. The water contains the power of God. One aspect of this is as Boylston coins it as 'You work on the soul by working on the body' (Boylston 2018, p.156). More importantly, at least in the context of this study, is that the body is the place of illness and healing and engagement with the divine in a very intimate way, and in a concrete and felt way, which paves the way for strong and corporeal emotional reactions, affection and relationship-building.

Affection and relationships

Another characteristic of the holy water sites and how informants engage with the things and the space there is the emotional expressions of visitors, which is quite different from elsewhere in society. In a recent book, Dilger et al. pinpoint that anthropological scholars of affect and emotion have recently 'adopted an increasingly broad perspective of 'the social' in their research and have shown that environments are shaped not only by people's relationships with their fellow human beings but also by their interactions with the wider material and nontangible world' (Dilger et al. 2020, p.6).

In this section I intend to discuss how the understanding of things and the concept ᵓəmənət are tied together. We have seen that what people do is linked with the concept ᵓəmənət and looked at some of the most important practices that lead to a protected life, a life in the proximity of God, by being close to saints, angels, Mary, Christ and

others. I will look further into how relationships are established and re-established because of the ᵓəmənət embedded in how informants relate to things and the sensorial experience and emotions implied in the practices, using behaviour at the prayer places at holy water sites as examples.

When informants visit *ṣäbäl bota* they often spend time at the prayer places at the sites, which may be small houses, rooms, parts of rooms or just a wall. These places are usually full of posters of saints, angels and Christ. Visitors usually bow towards each picture on the walls, either standing in one spot turning towards one after the other or by going to each poster and bowing in front of the 'person' or 'figure' in the poster. Some spend time in front of one, sometimes more, pictures. They seem to be greeting as they bow towards each 'person' on the walls. They seem to spend time with each saint, or angels, and with Mary and Christ.

Curtains covering pictures of angels, saints, and Christ. Photo: Marta Camilla Wright.

To take one example, in the little prayer house at Weibela Maryam, the walls were covered with posters of saints, Mary, angels and Jesus. At the centre of the small room a display case with an approximately 150 cm tall poster of Mary. On one of my visits

there were flowers inside and outside the display case, and people had lit candles. Several people were praying, two women/spirits were shouting and talking, one sitting or lying on the floor. Someone approached the house, crying loudly. It was a young man who entered. He fell to the ground in front of the display case and cried loudly. He talked and cried in front of the image of Mary for some time.

Another example in a passage from my field notes is typical. It contains several common practices: making the sign of the cross, kneeling in front of icons, touching the eyes with the curtains concealing the sacred images and praying, all of which are practices for establishing relationships of affection and healing:

> A man in his fifties enters, goes down on his knees, makes the sign of the cross. He sits for a while, kneeling. He moves to one of the posters on the wall, kneels, crosses himself, sits in front of it for a while, stretches his arm out and touches his eyes with the curtains. Then he makes the sign of the cross again, turns his body to different parts of the room, possibly different saints or angels on the posters, and then moves backwards, turns and leaves. He has spent approximately 10-15 minutes in the room.[246]

Like this man, many behave in similar ways, acting as if they meet someone. This greeting and praying are ways people relate to the saints, angels, Christ and Mary, like interacting with another subject. In the icons, but also with other objects, like crosses and books, they meet the spiritual beings. Veneration of icons is part of the tradition of the Church (Chaillot 2018, p.75). Visitors cry in front of and talk with the pictures. Evil spirits that are believed to be in people talk with and shout at the icons. The objects and the pictures are 'persons', and the faithful meet saints, angels, Mary and Christ. There are books that describe and greet the appearance of Jesus, Mary, Mikaʾel and even Satan, called *Mälkəᵓe Yesus*, *Mälkəᵓe Maryam*, which underpin the

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[246] Participant observation, Addis Ababa, 24.5.2016

materiality of the superhuman beings, and the spirituality and corporeality may in this case best be understood as intertwined.

Practices are crucial, as relationships with saints, angels and the divine seem to require nurturing. People do this, for instance, at holy water sites, as demonstrated above. Moreover, such relationships are nurtured in homes, like one of my female informants, Gennet, who dedicates time to tending to her relationship with Archangel Michael, who plays a prominent role in Ethiopian Orthodox veneration (Wright 2019). Gennet is married and has three daughters. She works as a part-time cleaner. She explains that she goes to church on the 12th of each month, buys candles to burn at home and church candles to give to the Church. In addition, she gives alms. 'I do it because Michael protects my children and my house.' The reason she believes this is that once when she was at a holy water site, a spirit embodying someone else told her there were still different spirits fighting her family, but they could not get into her house because of the protection of Michael. Entering the main door of her house, a poster of Michael was the first thing we saw. Different saints and angels have also helped the family members; however, she stated that she had a closer relationship with Michael than with other saints and angels, because her husband, who used to be a soldier, had been saved from death on the day of Michael. In addition, two of her children have been ill for three years, and one of them was healed during reading of the book Dərsanä Mikaʾel.

Another informant, Solomon, explained that he was attached to another saint and took this saint as his remedy. He was a man in his forties, from Addis Ababa, who had experienced illness and problems starting from his childhood:

> Solomon: When I was 10-12 years old, I was very ill. It was anxiety (čənqät), and my body – my legs and hands – were not flexible. My mother took me to a holy

> water site. I was baptised there. Within one day, I got well. My mother told me: 'This saint is your destiny. Always drink this ṣäbäl.'[247]

He is now part of a maḫbär dedicated to this saint, where he attends monthly meetings, contributes with money to develop the holy water site and visits and participates in holy water rituals on a regular basis, all of them important practices in tending to the relationship with the saint. In this way, the saint is an important 'person' in his social network.

According to Catherine Bell, 'Ritual acts of offering, exchange and communion tend to invoke complex relations of mutual interdependency, not only between people but also between humans and the divine' (Bell 1997, p.109). However, in these examples, not only actions but with what the actions are carried out is crucial. In the examples, things are subject to emotional interaction. Recently, scholarship has discussed such relationships, as mentioned in chapter 7. One is a study on fires and another on statues, and they shed light on how people can have close relationships with the divine – and with things. In his work on Zoroastrian temple fires, Håkon Tandberg finds that informants have affectionate and close relationships with fires (Naasen Tandberg 2019). In her work on religious statues Amy Whitehead shows how Catholics engage in relationships with Mary statues (Whitehead 2013). Whitehead describes devotees, who have experiences of the statue as animated and moving - the Virgin's tear production is one of the examples. The devotees explain that they experience that Mary has empathy towards their life situations. In turn they visit the statue, they wash her and change her clothes.

This analysis of how the faithful in Whitehead's case of study visit the place of the statue, cares for it and so on, resonates with how informants in this present study relate to saints, similarly with other types of things. One resemblance is the interaction with

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[247] Interview, Addis Ababa, 25.6.2016

touch. Whitehead emphasises touch in her analysis of how her informants have intimate relationships with the statue. She argues that 'Touch aids in fostering relationships' (Whitehead 2013 p.146).

In the analysis of things in the interaction that takes place at holy water sites and how informants tend to supernatural beings in practices that involve things, the importance of things has been distilled further. The things seem to be at least helpful, but perhaps even necessary, to create meaningful relationships with superhuman beings, and touching things seems to be an important relational practice. The thinking of Sara Ahmed around affectionate things may add to the analysis of things in this context. Ahmed argues that affects and emotions are not placed in one agent but circulate between humans and objects rather than residing within the subject: 'Emotions are both about objects, which they hence shape, and are also shaped by contact with objects' (Ahmed 2014, p.7). The role of things as vessels or media and as active seems to coexist in the practices of informants to this study. The things that are related to in this specific case belong to a different type of things, things with spiritual power, and in this way they are active (Bynum 2012).

The practices that informants perform carry with them repercussions, and relationships with other people are also affected. A person's actions will bring either good or bad consequences, both to the individual and to the group, whether it is the family or wider society. It is a collective effort; a person's actions may bring blessing to many others besides himself.

Baräkät - blessing

Baräkät means blessing (Kane 1990, p.887) and clearly demonstrates the connection between being under protection and living under constant threat of being attacked by evil. Blessing and curse are linked; if you are not blessed, a curse will always threaten you. Carrying out practices is required in order to be blessed, and blessing nearly always involves touch. It is a concrete and tactile practice, which established contact between the human being and the divine. Blessing is one of the most important things

that one aims at obtaining with the practices. Dr. Abebe, a university employee and a priest expressed it like this:

> Dr. Abebe: The priest blesses the people, (he takes out his hand cross). The cross is like the staff of the shepherd. When I bring the cross to the people, who touch it with their forehead and kiss it at the top and bottom (representing the head and feet of Jesus Christ), the Holy Spirit gives them powers; when united it brings blessing. 'I am blessed' means that I receive The Holy Spirit (he leans back and spreads his arms), and our body is closely connected to God.[248]

In this quotation the physical dimension of the body is added to the spiritual dimension. It is the whole body which is blessed; as Dr. Abebe says: 'our body is closely connected to God', meaning that there is a connection between the body of the person and God. Amy Whitehead puts emphasis on touch and says: '"Touch" is […] the principal facilitating medium through which religion, religious encounters and performances take place.' (Whitehead 2018, p.218). Touching, kissing and being touched by animate things is here evidently part of the blessing.

To remain in the blessing and even add to it, a multitude of practices, many of them which involve touching, both individual and collective, improvised and standardised activities, are carried out. Blessing is generated by practices, not only the practices you do yourself. Those of others will also have an impact on you. Blessing, as well as other actions, is not limited to the person carrying out the blessing-generating action. It has collective impact. Just as doing negative things can bring misery upon others, doing positive things may bring blessing upon others, too. Diego Malara similarly describes from his field research in Addis Ababa that blessing is generated with practices, not only the practices you do yourself, but also those of others will have an impact on you (Malara 2017, p.121).

[248] Interview, Addis Ababa, 29.6.2016

I often came across work that blesses, or *yäbäräkät səra*, referring to volunteer work, which usually takes place in church compounds or at holy water sites. The work could be to participate in constructing churches, constructing buildings at holy water sites, garden work or growing vegetables in compounds of churches or holy water sites, preparing food for monthly feasts, annual feasts and commemoration feasts, distributing holy water or any other work carried out on holy ground or in the service of the church.

A group of women cutting onion in a church compound. I am in the front to the left. Photo: Tirsit Sahle.

Informants value eating together, and many practices of religious celebration involve sharing food. Sharing food and eating together in itself can constitute a blessing, as exemplified by the Eucharist itself, and eating together during religious feasts and in the maḫbär are particularly blessing actions. Food and commensality have been insightfully discussed by Tom Boylston considering his research in Zege, a small village near Bahir Dar, north of Addis Ababa. He claims that refusing to eat together is the 'ultimate form of stigma, exclusion and fear' (Boylston 2012, p.157). However, eating together can also be risky. There are informants who believe that they were

poisoned by others during common meals, even with food and drinks prepared for religious feasts. Consequently, some avoid sharing meals with others. Sennayt emphasised the importance of commensality and living together as a community, as she described that life is changing and people do no longer eat together or share lives as before. She made a statement connecting the changing life in society to the occurrence of natural disasters.

> Sennayt: You must give thanks to God. My son told me that there are floods in Japan, China and so on. This I think is because of sin. Because He said at the end of time there will be disasters such as war, floods and so on. Now we see Syria, now in Ethiopia we have also started disappointing the Lord. Formerly, we did not have this kind of problem, but now it starts knocking at our door. In previous time we would live together and eat together, now we lock our door and live individual lives.[249]

Informants claim that there is a tendency today towards an individualistic way of life in today's Addis Ababa, which is considered a step towards a sinful life. Living an individualistic life contravenes remaining with the sense of shared blessing: bäräkät, and living individualistic lives breaks with this. Orthodoxy tends to emphasise the communal and physical dimensions, and informants to this study are all part of communities of different sorts, families, neighbourhoods or religious associations.

Illness, however, as *fätäna* (testing), is viewed as something one needs to get rid of, but also something one should endure. In the latter case, it is turned into a blessing in informants' point of view. Therefore, paradoxically, informants describe the illnesses and misfortunes that they experience as a blessing. Bäššəta obliges informants to engage in spiritual practices, which in their view bring them closer to God. The paradox lies in the fact that, on the one hand, informants see illness and the misery that

[249] Interview, Addis Ababa, 2.6.2016

they experience as negative ʾədəl and they do many things to get well. On the other hand, they express that they have benefited from the experience of illness by gaining endurance and learning to live close to God.

Illness and misfortune as fortunate

The 'doing' process of obtaining a place in the proximity of God and be protected from illness is also an emotional journey, an 'affective trajectory' (Dilger et al. 2020). It starts with misery, illness and suffering, which in turn have a golden value. Several informants said that they still had symptoms of physical ailment after long periods of illness. Others express that they are not yet well, but still live a good life. Still others say that they are healed and have no further symptoms. Some are waiting for the spirit to leave for good. However, others say that they are healed and that they are well, even though they still live lives with bäššəta. The reason is that their relationship with God has been restored through their new way of living, their way of practicing their religion. Life has reached a certain equilibrium and has become a religious and a pious life, to the extent that some of my informants aspire to join the monastic life, 'when God allows'. Nevertheless, disrupting the holy water treatment is for many not an option. Informants say they are healed but continue to participate in holy water healing.

If we return to the starting point of this thesis, with the interconnection of bodily healing and salvation, the verb *danä* in Amharic means both healing and salvation. The content of these two English verbs is expressed by informants, in how they see their life changed into a better life. Some informants narrate their life and illness story expressing that the illness(es), afflictions and misfortunes, everything that has happened to them, motivated them to engage in practices which promoted an enhanced sense of meaning; it has brought them close to ʾƎgziʾabəḥer. The misery has transformed them and given their life meaning, indeed, both those who experience healing and those who do not, there is a sense of meaning, of existential fulfilment. However, those among my informants who have years of experiences with difficulties

and physical symptoms emphasise their sense of proximity to the divine. The main message is that their suffering has led them to a life closer to God, like Dereje, a male informant in his thirties:

> Dereje: I say to ʾAbbo: 'Why did you let this happen to me? I am here to serve you.' Then I get what I need. Every day needs prayer, everything has a solution through prayer. I would not have come to the spiritual life/house of God without this. I would have continued living the worldly life (alämawi).[250]

Religion as doing – suffering as a blessing

Within this religious world view, challenges and illnesses are understood as testing (*fätäna*). Among those practicing the monastic life, everything which causes discomfort or pain, be it in a physical or a psychological way, is a temptation or a test that can be an instrument to gain a higher form of spirituality if handled in the right manner, like in the case of Job. Such perspectives are shared by several informants, who transform their story of misery to a story of religious success, which also carries with it notions of respect among Ethiopian Orthodox.

Job represents an important ideal for Ethiopian Orthodox Christians. Although simplified put, Satan causes illness, God permits it to happen, sometimes to punish or sometimes to teach. The question for Ethiopian Orthodox Christians is more than 'what is my illness'. An existential question is more important: 'Why did this happen to me?'. And yet another aspect of this is about what is wrong with the relationship between the person and the divine. Additionally, an overarching explanation for suffering, apart from the fall of Satan and the introduction of evil spirits, is the perception that Ethiopians are approaching the end of time (which I elaborated on in chapter 6). There will be more illnesses, more trouble and more suffering, all signs of the time we live in, because of the tendency that people live less communal and more

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[250] Interview, Addis Ababa, 22.4.2016

individual lives. The misfortunes also must be seen as part of the multifactorial illness causation.

The emphasis on faith as doing is deeply embedded in Ethiopian Orthodox thinking and culture, according to the philosopher Messay Kebede. He says: ‘So the person who has lost the favour of God can hope to regain it. Since sins against His benefactor caused the loss of favour, prayers and supplications can retrieve grace’ (Messay 1999, p.200). A female informant, Meseret, was, according to herself, ill because of *mätät* made on her by her sister who was envious, but despite years of challenges and hospitalisation she said: ‘She did me a good thing, if she had not done it, I had focused on education, but now I am close to the Church.’[251]

In this perspective, illness is a good thing, *if* you manage to *do*. Illness is something that will enhance your spiritual development if you are able to endure it with patience. So, even if success and good health are signs of proximity to God and leading a life without sin, it is to be expected that believers will be the victims of illness and misery. Illness is regarded as an opportunity to achieve a better life, either now or after death. Thus, illness can have a positive impact on a person’s relationship with God.

Earlier in this chapter, the very concretely experienced and processing of the permeability of the body was discussed, and some points brought forward in that discussion may shed light on the perception and experience of illness as blessing, through the practice of fasting and practices of maintaining and closing the body. While Hannig argues that women with fistula are transformed into new pious subjects through the working on the body (Hannig 2017), and Boylston argues that the borders of the body are regulated to protect it from the presence of the divine (Boylston 2018), the findings of this study illuminate another point. In the doing religion, informants insist on encountering illnesses, in their view a way to reach the proximity of God. In

[251] Interview, Addis Ababa, 8.12.15

addition, as the holy water enters the body, it may be seen as the divine power entering. The focus upon practices is a way of relating to superhuman beings, and in practices, relationships are established and maintained. For example in touching powerful things, drinking them, kissing them and more.

Painting displayed in a holy water site with a Bible quote from Mark 16:16. 'Who ever believes and is baptised will be saved.'

Concluding remarks

The intimate partnership of actions and belief, ᵓ*əmnät*, leads to a Christian life saturated with practices in a ritual dense society (Bell 1997). In this chapter, I have given a brief overview of such practices building on previous chapters. On the one hand, what people do to relate to and come close to the divine and get far from malevolent spirits, to be healed and gain salvation, varies and is adapted for different situations. On the other hand, certain practices cannot be ruled out and are necessary to perform the rituals the right way, such as the procedure for confession and repentance - the nəssəḥa. Nəssəḥa is a key tool for healing and entails a range of ritualised practices, like almsgiving, taking vows (səlät*)*, prostrations, fasting, using holy water, prayer and more. In the practices, materials are put to work and influence upon the protecting and healing processes. Moreover, informants engage in a wide variety of practices to obtain protection against evil spirits and illness and to achieve healing, and my informants insisted that religion is hard work, rather than belief.

There is a strong link between ᵓəmnät and practice, which has to do with the body's permeability, pointed out previously by Anita Hannig (Hannig 2017), and demonstrated here as influential in how healing practices are carried out. The healing seems to be understood as being efficacious when the sick part of the body is touched/treated very concretely. The power of touch was shown to be important in several ways. As was discussed in the last chapter, things have a kind of healing agency. In this chapter an exploration of emotions at holy water sites showed that the things affect the human being, who, for instance, in front of a picture of Mary cry and scream. Such things are literally taken to contain the power of the supernatural being and are here conceptualised as healing things.

Chapter 10 Concluding discussion

The broad geographical and cultural context of this thesis is the big city; contemporary Addis Ababa, and the life of informants residing in the vital and economically, ethnically, socially and religiously diverse urban centre. This is a cityscape which in Ethiopia, as in many other African urban centres, represents change and invokes insecurity. The narrow context of this thesis is the holy water sites, the *ṣäbäl bota*, spaces charged with spiritual power, visited by the informants to this study to a larger or lesser degree and for a variety of reasons. Many of the informants express that they perceive themselves as living in the end times, where the societal changes that they experience represent the overarching context. Due to the end times an increased number of problems appear. These new problems, meaning problems which they claimed had not been in the 'good old days', encompass new illnesses, family problems, spiritual challenges and changing modes of communal and individual life, much of which informants call *bäššəta.*

Informants to this study, like Tigist, Sennayt and Jonathan, express that they experience a challenging, even threatening, and changing world. They describe it in different, but also similar, ways, at a personal, a societal and a historical level. Facing the challenges, life crises and suffering, they have turned to the holy water sites, religious practices and supernatural beings in a radical way, some more than others. Their response is to practice diligently according to their and other Ethiopian Orthodox followers' view upon ᵓəmnät (faith), again some more than others. Notably, this study has shown that the radical shift represents the ideal, and pragmatic solutions, nuances and variations are also part of this picture.

Some informants interpret their problems as connected to what they perceive as negative political developments, modernity and globalisation. Other informants emphasise the overarching theme of change and insecurity only to a lesser degree.

They are more preoccupied with their problems in day-to-day life and see them in the context of religion and relationships with others. All informants relate to or deal explicitly with evil spirits, express their agony, fill themselves with what they perceive as sacred substances and literally spit out or vomit what they perceive as the opposite. Such practices are usual and observable at holy water sites visited as part of this study. There, visitors often cry and beg in front of pictures of their beloved saint or angel. Others come in a less outgoing way, queue up, take their shower, get the cross blessing and carry home their bottle(s) of holy water. In the process, some informants explain that they have broken the bonds with the people they see as immediately causing the suffering they experience, and they have turned their back to modernity and globalisation, seen as part of the evil of the time they live in. As mentioned, this time is held by many informants to be the last days, a time, as described both in writing and orally, characterised by spirits unleashed, increase in illnesses and lack of love and hospitality, among other characteristics. At the same time, informants who have expressed radical views upon the importance of being loyal to the holy water healing use medical health services, biomedical medication, herbal medicine and more, explaining this in a religious perspective: those are also wisdom created by God. As has been demonstrated in the previous chapters, the practices, the views and the stories are varied, complex and nuanced. Yet, there are also some common patterns, which will be treated in this concluding discussion.

As this thesis aimed at answering *How is religion embedded in understandings of illness, illness causation and in practices of healing?'*, this chapter will further present and discuss the findings of this research, which has been done by *studying holy water healing practices among Ethiopian Orthodox Christians at holy water sites in contemporary Addis Ababa.*

The following subquestions, as presented in chapter 1, have been explored and will be further discussed in this chapter:

Firstly: How is illness comprehended and explained?

Secondly: What are the roles of spirits, things, spaces and interaction in illness causation?

Thirdly: What are the roles of spirits, things, spaces and interaction in healing practices?

Understandings and explanations of bäššəta

As was presented in Chapter 2, often the great interest in holy water sites among Ethiopian Orthodox Christians is argued to stem from the lack of available and competent health services, the cost of the same, the availability of healing sites, traditions and culture. These arguments do not fully reflect the complex and even incoherent field one enters. Considering informants' simultaneous use of modern health services, herbalists, *ṭänqʷay* and *ṣäbäl bota*, this study indicates, even if it does not provide any statistical information, that a variety of health services are available to informants in Addis Ababa. Economic and demographical concerns do not fully explain why Ethiopians in Addis Ababa uphold religious health-seeking practices. Neither do they explain why people from different walks of life, also the wealthy, the educated and the resourceful, as has been indicated through the ethnographical material of this study, participate in holy water practices. The assumption that Ethiopians choose holy water mainly for practical reasons has also been part of the explanations. However, there are plenty of examples that Ethiopians travel far to reach specific religious healing places and spend considerable amounts of money hoping for resolution of their problems. These explanations do not fully take into consideration the fundamental role of religious belief, the social and relational dimensions of healing practices and the dimension that people may experience holy water treatment as an effective treatment. Based on the research carried out for this current study, the reasons informants have for visiting ṣäbäl bota are shown to be related to how informants understand and explain bäššəta.

Concerning who the visitors to ṣäbäl bota are, one perspective held is that the main group of visitors to holy water sites are people who in a biomedical perspective are classified as mentally ill. Analyses of observations at the holy water sites studied and of interviews with informants to this study have shown that informants state that they come for many reasons: cancer, HIV/Aids, headache, stomach problems, heart problems, stress, evil spirits and more. Their presentations of their reasons for going there are not limited to what are in biomedical terms called psychological problems or mental illnesses. As indicated in this study, these spaces are visited by a larger variety of Ethiopian Orthodox Christians. Visiting such spaces is both a religious practice per se and a place where informants go for protection from bäššəta and for remedy when bäššəta strikes.

Both of these above-mentioned points give important background to how the concept of illness is understood among informants to this study. The informants' views on bäššəta are complex. However, the analysis shows that all informants to this study had similar views upon bäššəta concerning the comprehensiveness of the concept. The concept encompassed several categories: somatic symptoms, mental symptoms, social difficulties and life crises, all of which they call bäššəta. Bäššəta also included problems informants related to evil spirits, most specifically Satan. It was commonly said that bäššəta is *ʾaganənt* (evil spirits). The thesis showed how taxonomies of spirits, as of illnesses (which was discussed in chapter 4), are of less importance in the context of holy water healing and argues that this is because the cure is the same. In chapter 8 it was shown that the claimed interconnection or even interchangeability between spirits and bäššəta is explicable with a materiality perspective. Spirits dwell in bodies, shown in the examples of talking spirits and the practices of beating and chaining them. Moreover, informants also claim that the spirit is in the body in the form of eye illness or a wide variety of other physical symptoms.

Thus, one important finding of this study is that informants understand and use the term bäššəta as a broad concept covering all types of afflictions, illnesses, life crises and ailments. In chapter 8 it was shown that it is even possible to have a bäššəta or

spirit without any symptoms. Bäššəta is not just an illness, but I suggest that in this context it can be understood both as a religious concept and experience. This will become clearer as the chapter moves to discuss explanations of bäššəta. Bäššəta and cause are interlinked, in the view of my informants, a point which will be treated in a later section of this chapter.

Another finding of this study concerns what has been expressed by informants as bäššəta as a collective phenomenon. It may strike the whole family, it occurs because of ancestors' sins, it may affect groups and populations.

Although all informants framed bäššəta in a discourse of evil, some informants were more preoccupied with topics of *discontinuity* and put more emphasis upon evil as currently more potent than before, observable in the claimed increase in cases of *mätät* (harmful magic) and political and social changes. Mätät was claimed to have increased in recent years by some informants, and it was seen as a type of bäššəta. The analysis of this phenomenon in its religious and social context showed that among some informants, strong emphasis was put upon bäššəta explained by the political situation and societal changes connected to the decrease of ᵓəmənət and increase of sin, which informants claim to be currently taking place. This is exemplified by informants by changing living patterns, for instance in how women and men dress in modern fashion and thus do not consider neither social appropriateness nor respecting God. Furthermore, some exemplified it in how it is increasingly common to live without paying attention to their neighbour, without going to church, without paying respect to elders, without greeting and sharing, without eating together. These are all considered to be blessing-generating activities. Even modern building styles are linked to these negative changes. These are building styles seen as more individualistic, and some of the informants claim that now they do not know their neighbour. Neighbourhood fellowships are traditionally important to Ethiopians as a form of social security system. This last point is underlined by most informants, as they see living in reciprocal and sharing communities as an important dimension of life which has been ruptured. The hierarchies and relationships that people rely on and should be loyal to

are changing. Such developments are put forward as arguments of why illness strikes them. Some informants explicitly blame it on modernisation, seen in line with the end-times perspective they hold.

The threatening situation of the changing life conditions makes informants turn to God and other benevolent superhuman beings and to the ṣäbäl bota. Other studies from African contexts show a similar tendency, for example does Larsen find that Zanzibari Muslims find the world of spirits more predictable than other social contexts (Larsen 2014). Her informants turn to spirit cults during times of change and insecurity. This is a similar feature, although informants to the present study turn to the Church, God and what they categorise as benevolent superhuman beings and saints. They turn away from what they categorize as evil spirits, because evil spirits are seen as causing illnesses.

Illness causation - towards a relational explanatory model

As was discussed in chapter 4, different models of illness causation may bring some understanding of the ethnography presented in this thesis. For example, other researchers have analysed illness causation from the perspective of religion and religious belief, looking at whether spiritual entities or human beings are blamed or the cause(s) lie/s in nature or supernature. The distinction between natural and spiritual causation has been a common way of making a model of illness causation. In Katharina Wilkens' study, illness causation is profiled as spiritual causation (Wilkens 2011). Her priest in focus, Father Nkwera, blames it on evil spirits and God's wrath. Also in the present study, bäššəta and reasons for it are interpreted in light of what informants call the end times. God's wrath and punishment are linked to explanations of illnesses. Recently, responses to the Covid 19 pandemic have been placed in the dualism between naturalistic and personalistic illness causation, and the authors of a recent article argue that 'bio-medical knowledge' and 'religious interpretations' and the secular and religious are less compartmentalised (Østebø, Tronvoll, and Østebø 2021, p.2). A similar point has been made by anthropologist Eleni Bruni about how

nosological systems in Mekele are overlapping in different horizons of meaning, however noting that 'biomedicine and its nosologies of reference are locally vernacularized' (Bruni 2010, p.68). As was shown in chapter four, informants to the present study take biomedical explanations into consideration and use medical doctors, herbal doctors and priests, sometimes in a mix, and at times pick and choose between biomedical and religious strategies of healing. But there is still a question as to *how* they do it – that means, to follow Bruni; how is it vernacularised?

Some informants to this study turn to religion and distance themselves from other perspectives. Others, rather than combining perspectives, place biomedical and other therapies into a religious perspective, a point also made by Østebø et al (Østebø, Tronvoll and Østebø 2021). In chapter four, I proposed to discuss contextualised explanations, and I suggested that the explanations are composed of several levels of interlinked responsible agents. An initial list of causes was distilled. This included God, Satan, mätät, zar, sin, showing emotions and not taking care of oneself. That relationships were central in the explanations was also discussed.

A collectivistic world view needs to be taken into consideration when discussing explanations of illnesses and how life crises and suffering are brought about in this context. Informants' talk about illness as caused by relatives, friends, colleagues and God may call for a focus upon relationships in what may be called an explanatory model. Illness is part of not only individual lives but collective worlds, like families or kin relations. Firstly, informants argued that someone had purposely tried to harm them, which resulted in illnesses. Secondly, and interlinked with the first point, evil spirits and ʾaganənt were causing illnesses. Thirdly, God's intention to teach or punish was an important reason, and after all, God is the one who ultimately permits all illness. In chapter four, I launched the idea of a relational model based on these observations.

In the preceding chapters, the roles of space, things, spirits and bodies were analysed. Some additional explanations were brought forward, as things and spaces were also

seen as causing illnesses. It has become clear that informants explain bäššəta in various ways, taking also the materiality into consideration. These explanations include spaces, things and spirits as important factors, and a strict causal order does not seem representative of how informants talk about how illnesses appear. An analysis of the ethnographic material with things and the materiality perspective, and not only perceptions as outlined in chapter 1, has given further insights. It has been useful for the analysis of explanations of illness, as it has become clear that illness is not only experienced as caused by agents such as other humans or spirits, but the process of becoming ill rests also in spaces and things. It was further established that explanations are also based on how actors relate to each other, to things and spaces and upon relationships with evil spirits and the divine.

Following from this, I suggest that seeing the reasons informants expose in the present study into a strict causation model may serve the purpose less than looking at it as an explanatory model which may encompass a variation of explanations of different sort as well as the relational dimensions. Such a model may be called a relational explanatory model of illness, based on the focus upon relationships which has been distilled in the analysis. In such a model, human, spiritual or material things and space interact and make contributions towards either ill subjects or healed/saved subjects. To further establish this viewpoint, some explications about the role of things and spaces in explanations of illness and healing will pave the way to carve out the issues.

Things as actors or media

As was discussed in the introduction and further on in this thesis, the demarcation of things must in the context of this study include all forms that touch the senses; things, words, sounds, smells and touch. Starting from such a broad definition of thing and from 'the assumption that things, their use and their appeal are not something added to a religion but rather inextricable from it', as Meyer proposes (Meyer and Houtman 2012, p.7), looking at belief and practices with things as analytical tool has helped in unpacking the ethnographic material. However, further discussion remains. In the

materiality perspective and in the study of religion, mediation has become a common understanding of how things work in religion. ‘In the work on religion as mediation, “religion” is often understood as the set of practices, objects and ideas that manifest the relationship between the known and visible world of humans and the unknown and invisible world of spirits and the divine’ (Engelke 2010). According to Birgit Meyer, all religion is mediated (Meyer 2020). She says: ‘(…) religion as practice of mediation between the immanent and transcendent, through which the latter becomes real and tangible in the former for those engaging in this practice’ (Meyer 2020, p.4). The media then is a material which mediates something invisible or transcendent through practices, in Meyer’s terms ‘things in the middle’ (Meyer 2020, p.11). Situated in Ethiopian studies, Tom Boylston argues that mediation is also recognizable in Ethiopia: ‘Gravestones and photographs do for relationships as the sign of the cross or the taking of holy water does for relationships with God: they facilitate closeness’ (Boylston 2012, p.238). In the course of this thesis, the roles of things and spaces have been investigated. It seems appropriate to ask: is a thing a medium or a thing in the middle only, or does the concept agency come into play in some cases, in the way Bynum argues about things as active and alive in medieval Europe? In other words: do the formulations ‘facilitate’ and ‘things in the middle’ sufficiently cover what things are in the context of the current study? Informants say they get ill because of things and spaces, for example a rat, eyes or a graveyard. Informants also claim to be healed by things and use things in healing practices in certain spaces. For example, they take holy books and massage their back or stomach, kiss it or keep it under their pillow. They talk about the book chasing away Satan or feeling the spirit in their body being diminished by the holy water.

Are things (understood in a broad sense) like water, cross, book and so on ‘things in the middle’ or are they alive, in the understanding Bynum argues for in the case of Late Medieval Christianity? The analysis in this study has brought examples of acting things, they act with the power of the spirits and have agency which, I argue, must be taken in a literal sense. Even if they *are* not God, they are active with the power of the

divine in the world. The Eucharist *is* Christ. A thing (sometimes) causes bäššəta and (sometimes) heals. It seems that informants, and in the context of the ṣäbäl bota, do not have a 'need to differentiate things from persons' like Bynum argues is neither the case for Late Medieval Christians (Bynum 2012, p.280). It seems that informants to this study relate to things as divine things and not as the opposite of living beings.

The example of the water is illustrative of the role of things. It is the most important remedy for bäššəta in the current context. In one example, a young woman, perceived as embodying a spirit, tries to avoid drinking the holy water forced into her mouth by three men. Jonathan explained how the holy water which he drank and showered in forced something out of his stomach. Or in the case of the car being healed by holy water, where things work on things. In these examples, the water is important in a specific way, in a concrete way, which I suggest is not an in-between way, but as active in themselves as healing. Another dimension is that the agency does not seem to be permanently placed in certain things, but things have the potential to act, also on their own as miraculous things. The way informants treat the water is by having it touch their body in various ways, and it is concretely believed that it is the holy water which heals (combined with ᵓəmnät).

However, the divine is present in the water, although not limited to the water. Consequently, the water may also mediate the beyond. In Boylston's terms it 'facilitates closeness' with the divine power. Or as Meyer suggests, it is 'a thing in the middle'. As the thing is not God or God the thing, the divine power is not limited to the thing. Rather, the thing is a medium for contact and relationships with the divine and other benevolent spirits. Here it makes sense to mention Boylston's analysis of purity regulations among people in Zege, where he finds that it is not a main problem to his informants to make the divine present, it is the opposite which is the problem: that the divine is overwhelmingly present. The analysis in this thesis indicates that the prohibitions and regulations are not (only) protecting the sacred or the divine, but most concretely making contact possible. To take just one example, a rule followed by all: 'take off your shoes'. What this written and spoken rule does, as media, is to facilitate

contact in the foot blades touching the ground, and the ground also is media for the contact with the divine, as the foot blades touch and are being touched by the sacred, saints, superhuman beings and possibly God. This contact and interaction contributes to forming relationships with superhuman being.

Healing: Things, spirits, interaction and relationships

The materiality perspective has also helped in the analysis of spirits and spirit embodiment. Rather than paying only attention to the perceptions presented by informants, I have analysed interaction with evil spirits and their forms in a concrete sense. Evil spirits shout and scream, tell stories about human beings, tell how a person got ill and how they (the spirits) suffer. Spirits say they suffer because of the treatment that they get at the ṣäbäl bota and the piety of the person they inhabit. Their feelings are expressed, and also their inability to endure the religious practices and how they finally leave. Sometimes concrete exorcisms are carried out, sometimes the afflicted carry out practices. Spirits were described as both tangible and abstract, structuring people's lives, connected to the changing times but created at the beginning of time. To the people I worked with, spirits were often viewed as tangible for example as animals or as substances, snakes or other things coming out of the body during healing processes. Or as monologues and acting in bodies in the interaction at holy water sites. Here, the water as a divine substance and the evil spirit substance may be seen as playing out a battle in the body of the *ṣäbältäňňa,*

Thus, the spirits become tangible in things, space and interaction. In line with Paul C. Johnsons materiality take on spirit incorporation in Candomblé, I suggest that spirits take form in an active process to which bodies, the 'audience', the interaction, the space and the things contribute. For instance in the spirit talk presented in chapter eight. The words, the way the speaking was formed, the interaction it formed, the way those present interpreted it and behaved towards it all contributed in making the spirit, both identifying it and forming it. New spirits' appearance and discussions of illness

and its causes in concrete cases define the spirit. The movements made and the interaction with priests contribute to forming spirits as tangible entities.

The materiality perspective has also been a catalyser for showing how the contact human beings may have with the divine is part of a healing process. A need for protection against and cures for illness draws informants to holy water sites. Here they engage things and bodies in a variety of practices and interactions, moving closer to healing and to the divine. Spirits, spaces and things are important in the interaction which again forms relationships. The analysis of things in Amy Whitehead's study on Marian statues and how the faithful in her case of study visit the place of the statue, care for it and so on, resonates with how informants in this present study relate to saints, angels, Christ and the divine. There are no statues, but there are pictures, books, songs and prayers, water, ashes, dust, stones, perfume, incense, speech and more that informants relate to and in which they meet and relate to the saints and superhuman beings. Touching and being touched are important elements and observable at holy water sites in ritual performances and practices. Practices range from drinking the water, touching the ground, showering in the holy water, being touched by the cross, putting curtains in eyes to letting the smoke from incense touch the part of the body affected by illness. In the context of these practices, expressions of affect and emotions are prominent as informants engage with the materiality of the holy water sites. Informants express a commitment to and deep feelings towards saints, angels, Christ and God. The thesis has shown that with ʾəmnät as (embodied) practices, and with endurance and perseverance, informants believe that it is possible to change, heal and be successful.

Inspired by Anita Hannig (Hannig 2017), the strong link between faith and practice has been discussed related to the porosity and permeability of bodies and demonstrated in this thesis as influential in how healing practices are carried out. The healing seems to be understood as being efficacious when the sick part of the body is touched and thus treated very concretely. Practices aim at maintaining the borders of the body, casting out poison and evil spirits, but also filling the body with holy substance and

material. Consequently, the body does not first and foremost become purified, but more importantly becomes fused with the superhuman in the practices, which paves the way for emotional ties, relationships and healing.

Continuity: Healed and saved

One of the contentions of this thesis is that healing processes, even if they may at one level be seen as breaking with the society in which they are situated, are in line with ideals of traditions, moral values and ascetic ideals of Ethiopian society and embedded in the materiality and the meaning and function of things. Their turn to religion is in the informants' view a break with immoral and evil and a turn towards Orthodox ethics and God, to healing and well-being, which has to do with specific things and their roles in healing practices.

Exchange and interaction between humans and superhumans take place with things and spaces seen as active not only as 'in the middle'. This study has also made a case that what things are in the views of informants to this study is more nuanced than simply the opposite of living beings. Like Bynum's medieval Christians, to informants in contemporary Addis Ababa, things have agency and, in this sense, again in Bynum's terms, they live. Things, in a broad sense, are sometimes active and sometimes mediating. The evil spirits and the divine are not limited to the things, even though they dwell in things. Thus, things are also like conveyors, and thus forming the abstract, making relationships with superhuman beings possible and thus healing. Even if *zəga* and other matter may represent an obstacle for the contact between the benevolent spirits and humans, the material world is also what makes everything possible, and it is possible to be far from or close to God. It is through the materiality and their bodies informants may approach the divine.
Some relationships, seen as the immediate cause of bäššəta, are sometimes left behind. A close relationship with the saint who is your destiny, with Mary or angels, implicitly or explicitly to God, is then (re-)established. The transformation is thus both a change and a return, a break and a continuation. Elements of discontinuity and continuity are

both there. In this way the interlocutors to this study express that they have gained from the bäššəta, which became the reason for them to practice religion more diligently. They see life transformed from misery to meaning. Meseret shows gratitude to her family member who did the mätät on her. This generated the bäššəta which became the reason why she started practicing and now lives a better life, as she sees it, in the proximity of God. Equally important is the *experience* of improvement, which informants also underline. Tigist claims that her health has improved due to the religious practices she has carried out. This study has shown that understandings and explanations of illness in the context of the informants to this study must be built on an analysis which puts emphasis upon a holistic world view and the religious context. In the views of the informants, illness needs to be taken care of in a context of religious healing.

I suggest that the category bäššəta can be seen as a religious category. Even though informants take a variety of health seeking measures, they express that bäššəta needs treatment in a religious context, and they also place science into a religious perspective. Other treatments are also used, such as treatments normally categorised as biomedical or traditional treatments, such as herbalist, *däbtära* or *ṭänqʷay*. But they are also placed by many informants within the religious world view as knowledge given by God. In this perspective there is not really a difference between the traditions. They are all understood from the perspective of the same episteme, the religious. However, there is also reluctance and even opposition towards using the treatments of the modern health system, as it is also by several informants placed outside the religious sphere.

Danä takes place in a concrete, material world, where certain things and spaces are key. Radically turning to religious practices, informants experience illness in their relationships with spiritual subjects and relate to holy spaces, things and other people throughout the healing process. I argue that healing is about more than relief from suffering. Firstly, it is a way of grappling and tackling what is by informants felt as a threatening time of change. Secondly, healing processes are most profoundly about

getting rid of, establishing, re-establishing and deepening informants' relationship with the supernatural world.

Consequently, illness is for informants to this study most profoundly a spiritual and transformative experience. The title of the thesis gives name to the composite experience they have of their illness trajectories. The title contains both the notion of being healed from illness and being saved as a Christian, and this thesis has made a case that illness and explanations of illness can be seen, in the most profound meaning, as religious phenomena.

Limitations and further research

One of the strengths of this study is that it has studied topics from several angles. This is also one of its limitations, as some topics have not been treated in depth. Another limitation is that the findings of this work are limited to the ethnographic material collected during nearly one year of field research at specific places in Addis Ababa.

This research has shown that there is potential for more on the topic. The holy water sites that inform this research were in various parts of Addis Ababa, and the sites were similar, however also different in terms of behaviour at the sites and for instance which illnesses the site was famous for curing. This study did not go into the various, though surely relevant, demographic, social, economic, ethnical, religious and gender-specific profiles of the sites. Analysis of these elements could be a possible next step in research on illness, health, holy water sites and healing. A more systematic analysis of the social and ethnic background of visitors to holy water sites would most likely generate useful input into further research about these healing practices, illness and illness causation.

Only briefly mentioned, the study of gender more in depth will most certainly provide knowledge to enlighten several debates. This might be for example discussions on power relations in Ethiopian society, as well as academic discussions on gender in

general. The crossover of gender roles taking place at holy water sites represents an anomaly to the Ethiopian society. Women with male spirits and the flirting between male spirits and men are examples of that. This gives an idea about people involved finding the opportunity to break free from the norm. Materialised in the interaction of spirit and humans at holy water sites are also contradictory aspects that re-enforce common norms of women's inferiority. Contradicting this picture of interaction at holy water sites as enhancing overarching gender roles in Ethiopian society is the observation that men are beaten and abused while suffering from illnesses. These topics, however, need more research to be sufficiently brought into perspective. This was not within the scope of this research.

Yet another topic, which has been briefly touched upon, concerns how informants through their turn to enhanced religious practices seem to transform and empower themselves. In their hope for relief, the healing processes of several of the informants to this study are lengthy, and the religious endeavour is hard and strenuous. At the holy water sites, Tigist, Sennayt, Jonathan and others transform themselves and are transformed to what may be interpreted as a type of new subjects. They may be seen, as Hannig argues in her work, as new pious subjects. On the other hand, the environment and the practices that they turn to seem to uphold a system of hierarchy where informants to this study are subordinate, at least of the clergy and those who get well and are not doomed to prolonged healing processes. Saba Mahmood has written about such seemingly paradoxical setups and argued that her informants, Muslim women in Cairo, adhere to subordinating practices, which in turn empower them, because they achieve a specific sort of piety (Mahmood and Mahmood 2011). From another context, Muslims in Zanzibar, Kjersti Larsen argues that as the Swahili are experiencing deteriorating economic, political and social conditions, Islam is invoked as a source of knowledge that both explains the state of life and living and helps in how to cope with and how to improve the situation (Larsen 2009). However, it could be explored if informants to this study are marginalised and not empowered, but simply maintain the subordinate status they have, and the hierarchical system prevalent

in Ethiopian society. Another related area of study is suffering and emotions and the understanding of evil. The people I worked with interpreted what happened to them in a discourse on evil, formulated as part of a modernisation and globalisation development, happening in the end times in eschatological terms, when evil spirits were unleashed, and immoral, spiritual decay and evil flourished. David Westerlund, who discusses and compares illness causation in five different ethnic groups in Africa, calls for further studies in issues of meaning and of evil in African studies of health and religion. Studies on how globalisation, modernisation and other processes are interpreted and reacted to within the context of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity could be important contributions to understanding political processes in Ethiopia. It could also contribute to understanding the role of religion for the individual as well as the collective. Also, Wilkens points out that ritual forms of healing provide meaning within a wider cultural and religious context. A discussion of issues of meaning and evil and how these are interconnected with illness causation and healing and discourses of modernity, globalisation and change in Orthodox Christianity could be a fruitful path for continued research. Yet another area to be explored further is embodiment and the senses, topics discussed only briefly in this thesis.

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Appendix 1 Glossary

ʾ*Abba* father (monk or priest)

ʾ*Abbo* Short version of the name of the Egyptian saint ʾAbunä Gäbrä Mänfäs Qəddus

ʾAbunä ʾArägawi Saint, 6th century, one of the nine Syrian monks

ʾAbunä Gäbrä Mänfäs Qəddus Egyptian saint (n.a)

ʾaganənt evil spirits

ʾaganənt ʾalläbbat/ʾalläbbät s/he has evil spirits

ʿalämawi worldly

anchi you (f)

ʾandənnät unity, union; integrity

ʾantä you (m)

ʾaräqe liquor

ʾasmat literally “names”, but may be referred to as magic

ʾasṭämaqi caretaker, takes care of people who reside at holy water sites

ʾaṭmaqi priest who works at a holy water site

ʾaʾəmro qäyyari someone who changes another’s mind

ʿaynä ṭəla ‘shadow of the eye’, evil eye

baḥtawi hermit, ascetic, anchorite

baläzar zar master

belḥor devil

bäräkät blessing

bäššəta disease, illness, sickness (see chapter 4 for a discussion of the term)

buda a type of evil spirit or a person (who has evil eye)

bunna coffee

čənqät anxiety

č̣ənqəllat qäyyari someone who changes another's head/mind

danä he was healed; saved; redeemed, he was healed

däss bəloññal I am happy

Dawit Psalms of David

däbtära an unordained priest, church musician, believed to know magical methods

dəgam, dəggəmt magic spell; of the verb *däggämä*, which means recite, in this case to throw magic spells on someone.

dərsan homily

dərsanä homily of…

Diyabəlos Devil

ʾəddəl destiny, luck

ʾəddəsat renewal

ʾəǧäsäb 'People's hand', meaning a magical action to make harm

ᵓ*Əgziᵓabəḥer* God

ᵓ*Əmmäbərhan* Mother of light, Mary

ᵓ*Əmmäbete* ‘My mother’, Mary

ᵓ*əmnät* faith, belief; sand or ashes used for healing

ᵓ*ənğära* sourdough ‘pancake’ which is the staple food of most Ethiopians

ᵓ*ərkus mänfäs* evil spirit

ᵓ*əṭan* incence

ganen demon, evil spirit

ğäbäna traditional coffee pot

gabi thick, woven cotton blanket/shawl

halafi head, boss

ḥəmäm illness, disease

ᵓ*Iyäsus* Jesus

kätäma town, city

krəstənna tänässa be babtised as a child

qʷarf a root eaten by monastics

Ləkəft a disease associated with spirits

Mädḫane ʿaläm Saviour of the World

mädḫanit medicine; poison

maḫbär association

Mälkəᵓ Saṭnaᵓel ‘Image of Saṭnaᵓel’

mämhər teacher

mänfäs spirit

mänfäs ᵓalläbbat/ᵓalläbbät s/he has an evil spirit

mänfäs yazat she was caught by an evil spirit. (This expression is the same as *gunfan yazat*)

mänfäsawi spiritual

mängəśtä sämayat Kingdom of Heaven

mäqabər bet grave

mäqdäs area in the church, holy of holies where the Arc of the covenant is kept

mäsqäl cross; yearly feast

mästäfəqr love magic; aphrodisiac

mästema devil

mätät magic, harming others by spiritual manipulation

matäb black cord worn around one’s neck indicating adherence to Christianity

näfas wind

näṭäla white shawl

nəṣuḥ pure, clean

nəssəḥa penance

Ṗagʷme the thirteenth month (of the Ethiopian calendar)

Ṗente Protestant, pejorative

qal kidan covenant, vows (marital)

qalləčča spirit master

qəba qəddus holy oil

qəbəle lowest administrative and local government unit

qəddase mass, liturgy

qəddus holy

Qəddus qəddəst part of a church, which is the priest's domain

qəne maḫlet part of a church, the outer aisle where hymns are sung, accessible to laity

qes priest

qiṭṭa flat, unleavened bread

qolo tämari student of traditional church education

qošaša bota dirty place, landfill

rasen alawqəm I am not aware of myself

ṣäbäl, ṭäbäl holy water

ṣäbäl bota holy water site

ṣäbäl ṣadiq holy water of the righteous

ṣäbältäňňa a person who participate in the healing practices at holy water sites.

sälabi evil spirit

saṭnaʾel/säyṭan satan, devil

səlät vow

śəśśət greed, which is viewed as a sin, and a spirit

ṣəwwa chalice

subaʾe seven days-period of seclusion for prayer

tabot Arc of the Covenant

ṭälla homebrewed beer

ṭäna yəsṭälə̃ñ may God give you health on behalf of me

ṭänqʷay traditional healer

täzkar memorial celebration for the dead

täṭämmäqä to be baptised

ṭəmqät baptism; Epiphany – the baptism of Jesus Christ

waga reward, price

Wədasse Maryam Praise of Mary (a kind of prayer)

yäʾaʾəmro čəggər mental problem

yäʾayn čəggər eye problem

yäʾamləko mänfäs idolatry

yäbätäsäb tata a disease or problem stemming from the family

yäbäräkät sәra work that blesses

yämәnfәqәnna mänfäs spirit of heresy/Protestantism

yämäqabәr mänfäs grave spirit

yämәṭәl bäššәta illness that make you fall

yänäfs ᵓabbat confessor

yäqәddase ṣäbäl the holy water blessed during the liturgy

yäsәrqot mänfäs/*yäleba mänfäs* stealing, spirit of theft

yäsäyṭan śәra bәzu näw the multidimensional work of the devil, literally, the devils work is a lot

Yäsäw ᵓәǧ 'peoples' hand', magic

yäwuššät mänfäs spirit of lie

yäzәmut mänfäs spirit of adultery

Yohannәs Johannes

zar zar (spirit)

zәga flesh

zәkr commemoration, celebration of a saint's day

Appendix 2: Key informants

Tigist

Tigist is a female informant in her fifties from Addis Ababa. She grew up in a residential area in the outskirts of Addis Ababa in a traditional compound housing several families, sharing tap water and a courtyard. I met her several times at length, the first time more briefly at a holy water site on the other side of town from where she grew up. Tigist says she was a clever pupil in school and had ambitions to become a doctor. However, she was repeatedly ill over a period of twelve years, and as a consequence, her schooling was also repeatedly interrupted. She and her family believed she was inhabited by a spirit, and she explains that she had episodes of not remembering what happened in the *ṣäbäl bota*. When she was a child and later a teenager, she explains that her family used to tie her hands because, as she explained, "the spirit made me run away to the river". She explained that she had and has many different illnesses, and that she used holy water and went to hospitals for checkups. She expresses the opinion that one should not stop using holy water and go to hospitals, but rather endure the treatment even if it comes with difficulties. When the holy water causes pain or uneasiness, it is in her opinion an indication that it works. At the time when I met her and interviewed her, she lived in a rented room near the *ṣäbäl bota* where she believed she was healed. She had an ambition to become a nun, but she explained that she had not been given the permission from God yet.

Bechelech

Bechelech is a woman around 35-40 years old, originally from the countryside. She is illiterate and has worked as a servant in the house of her older brother in Addis Ababa from early childhood. She explains that she was brought up by her brother's wife who made her take care of her children, Bechelech's nieces and nephews, and did not send

her to school. In addition, she had to work in other people's houses when she got older. She describes her childhood as "growing up under terrible conditions". She met her husband and gave birth to their first child at the age of fifteen. She has three adult children and is divorced from her husband. However, she explained that they had started being friendly again. As an adult she worked for five years as a migrant worker in the Middle East. She stated that the problems affect the whole family and was *mätät*. She was getting better, in her view thanks to Mary.

Sennayt

Sennayt is a woman in her fifties. She has been married twice and has three children; she has had five abortions. She was divorced from her last husband in court and was given the right to her last child, a son. She used to work in a government administration, and later in administration at a university until the government started requiring diploma for the type of job she had in the institution where she worked, so she had to change her job. She started to go more frequently and regularly to ṣäbäl *bota* after a close relative died, approximately ten years ago, and she visits many different ṣäbäl bota. Sennayt believes that there are more bäššəta nowadays because of increased sin and that Ethiopians are far from God. In her opinion if God had forgiven peoples sins, He would have given them a good government and not the EPRDF[252] government. Another factor to the negative developments is that the covenant with Tekle Haymanot is over. In her opinion healing bäššəta was easier before. Moreover, the capacity of modern medicine is decreasing and ṣäbäl is the only cure for bäššəta. Sennayt will start taking the Eucharist when she retires in a few years and her plan is to become a nun, perhaps in Debre Libanos.

[252] Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) is the former Ethiopian governament (1991-2019).

Meseret

Meseret is a woman in her thirties who used to be a shopkeeper. She has never been married and has no children. She has been interested in becoming a nun since her youth. The first time she went to a stay in a monastery was at the age of 19, where she went with a group of students who had thought about going to a monastery for some years. They went to different monasteries. Meseret went to a monastery and stayed for two months. In the second month a priest came and told her that she would not be given a permission to become a nun. She got ill after the funeral of one of her uncles. A friend of the deceased saw her there, liked her and he proposed to her. Then her friend was jealous, and Meseret believes that this is the reason for her illness. Meseret has been ill since then, been to different ṣäbäl bota, for instance she has been many months to Entoto Mariam. She has also been hospitalised. At the time when I met her she lived in a rented room at a ṣäbäl bota and was a student.

Jonathan

Jonathan is a male informant around thirty years old, born and raised in a neighbourhood in Addis Ababa. Jonathan is married with two children. His father, although now elderly and not serving to the same degree, is a priest in the EOTC who regularly took Jonathan to church early mornings during his childhood. Jonathan is a government employee, but when the office was going through a phase of reorganization, his problems started. Jonathan got stomach problems, he had much pain and lost weight. Jonathan believes that his *bäššəta* was due to bad medicine that his colleagues did on him during the process of the reorganization at work because they were jealous with him, who was in line for a better position, because they wanted the jobs themselves.

Kassahun

Kassahun is in his twenties from a town near Addis Ababa. His father is an engineer and his grandfather was a theologian and a teacher in the Church (EOTC). According

to Kassahun, his family did not want him to pursue secular education but favored an education in the Church. When Kassahun grew older his family let him study in the ordinary school system. He was a clever student and managed to go to university. At the time I met him he was a student at university level, although temporarily at a holy water site. Kassahun holds that his problems started after he lost his notebook while he was at the university campus. He started sleeping long hours and at the midterm exam he saw only blank sheets. He talked to his lecturer who advised him to go to a specific holy water site in Addis Ababa. He believes that a close friend gave him *mädḫanit* because of envy. This had been exposed during healing practices. He had stayed some months in a holy water site at the time I met him. Kassahun feels that as he is now closer to the Church, his condition has improved. In his opinion, the problem of mädḫanit and similar practices is increasing because of better opportunities in society and more competition.

Dereje

Dereje is in his thirties. He grew up in a central area in Addis Ababa and studied until grade 12. He lived with his father and stepmother, stepsiblings and brothers and sisters. His mother lives in another city and they are in touch through telephone. He used to be a clever student and had a job. Then he started to feel tired, and he left his job and started a small business on his own, a shop for shoe repairs. He got ill, according to him because of *mätät* carried out by someone in his family. The reason for his misery, according to him, is that he is the oldest of the siblings and supposed to inherit the family house. He was not in touch with any in his family at the time of the interviews. He said: 'I say to Abue (a saint): "Why did you make me like this, I am here to serve you." Then I get what I need. Every day needs prayer, everything has a solution through prayer. I would not have come to the spiritual life/house of God without this. I would have continued living the worldly life.'[253]

[253] Interview, Addis Ababa, 22.4.2016

Abba Abraham

Abba Abraham is a married priest around 45. He was usually at duty in the maẖbär in which I participated during field research, and I therefore both spent long hours with him as part of the maẖbär and interviewed him several times about different topics related to bäššəta*,* ṣäbäl*,* the maẖbär, the Eucharist and other related topics. We usually met in church compounds for our conversations. Abba Abraham focused on issues related to his work as a priest, and not on his family or society in general.

Qes Tesfa

Qes Tesfa is a married priest, around 35 years of age. He has three children. He works in a parish in Addis Ababa, where he also serves at a ṣäbäl bota. I interviewed him several times, most of the times in his home, a traditional wattle and daub house. We were chatting about the ṣäbäl and related topics, while his wife prepared coffee and the children were playing. After repeated meetings he explained that he knew *mästäfəqr*[254], which may be translated as 'love magic'.

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[254] The aim of this type of practice is to make one person love another person and stay faithful for instance if someone is travelling to be away for some time.

Appendix 3 Rules at holy water sites

Some holy water sites have written rules placed by the entrance of the site. The following rules I have gathered during my field research for this thesis. All of the examples are from Addis Ababa. The rules are from the following sites (the rules will be presented subsequently):

1. Baata, next to the Baata church, Arat Kilo
2. ᵓAbunä Gäbrä Mänfäs Qəddus and ᵓAbunä ᵓArägawi holy water site, Ferensay
3. Mädḫane ʿaläm, Werkesefer Maryam Church, Werkesefer (The rule is of one specific house with a pool. There were several water sources for people to baptize themselves.)
4. Kotebe Emanuel, next to Kotebe Emanuel Church, Kotebe
5. Yeka Michael invisible Kidane Mehret holy water site, near Meganagna Mikael Church
6. Weybela Mariam, under Jesus Church, Ferensay

1.

Translation of rules inside the church in Baata holy water site.

Jesus said that I am the light of the world, and then he spat on the earth and took the soil, then put it on the face of the blind. Then he said 'Go and be baptised in the Siloaom baptism place'. John 5

Let fasting people have priority. Unless you are severely sick, do not drink holy water during fasting time. The major periods of fasting are the following:

The Fasting of prophets (Christmas)

The Fasting of Nenewe

The major fasting (Hudade)

The Disciples' fasting

Wednesday and Friday

Filseta (the 16 day fasting of Kidane Mehret)

Gaad (one day of fasting before epiphany)

2.

The holy ᵓAbunä Gäbrä Mänfäs Qəddus and ᵓAbunä ᵓArägawi holy water site. We kindly request you to abstain from forbidden activities in this place.

First you should have a cross around your neck.

People with tape-worm must not let themselves be baptised.

Nail polish and hair extension are strictly forbidden.

To be baptised wearing trousers is forbidden for female

Entering the holy water site with shoes is forbidden.

Remarks:

Please try to spit in the toilet.

Use the toilet properly and put waste in the baskets.

We request that you vomit outside the compound.

You are in the holy place; take off your shoes, Acts. 7:33

3.

The rule of one specific houses with a small pool of holy water in Werkesefer Mariam, where there were several wells where people could be baptised.

“This Mädḫane ʿaläm holy water is respected and glorified.

No entrance for children. Children who enter will be attacked by a snake or anaconda.

Talking while inside the holy water is forbidden. If you talk you may not be cured rather you will be punished.

It is forbidden for those below the age of 13. Anyone not respecting this will do so on their own responsibility.

People who put *ʾəmnät* [holy ash or soil mixed with holy water] on their body cannot enter before they have washed their body. People with wounds and bleedings cannot enter this holy water site.

People who have sweated must first wash their body.

Since you have come here for healing, you should respect the rules.

4.

Rule for Kotebe Emanuel

Warning

For men with long hair, earrings, who smoke cigarette or hashish or chew chat are tools for evil spirits. Those addicted to these drugs must pass through penance before baptism.

Those who have had ‘wet dreams’ must not enter the holy water site.

Nail polish, ensosila [local colouring herb for the skin], henna, cut eyebrows, trousers are forbidden; those who are having their period should enter to holy water only after 7 days and after having showered.

Married people should only come three days after sexual intercourse.

Entering the holy water site with jewelleries is forbidden because it attracts *ʾaganənt* [evil spirits].

5.

The rules from Yeka Michael (siwrua) invisible Kidane Mehret holy water site:

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The beginning of wisdom is fear of God (Psalm 110:10).

Do not worship any idol. Do not kneel down for them (Exodus 5:3).

You are in a holy place - take off your shoes (Exodus 25:1).

Baptism and fetching holy water are only available up until 12 a.m.

When you come to baptism:

For women:

Keep yourself clean.

Do not come with butter in your hair and coloured hair.

Do not paint ensosila [local colouring herb for the skin].

Do not come with polished nail, and lipsticks.

Do not come in trousers.

For men:

Do not come with long hair.

Do not come with earrings.

All these are forbidden in the name of God.

Warning

This place is holy, therefore, spitting and throwing waste is strictly forbidden.

If you are not clean, it is forbidden to enter to *ṣäbäl* [this refers to menstruation]

6.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Welcome to the powerful and miraculous Weibela Maryam Ṣäbäl:

The rules and regulations of this place:

Perform penance (Nəssəḥa) before you come to this ṣäbäl.

For women: nail polish, hair polish and artificial hair (wig) is forbidden.

For women: wearing trousers or miniskirts is forbidden.

Women in their period must keep away for seven days.

Those who have had ‘a wet dream’ should come only after taking a bath and after 24 hours.

People with tapeworm cannot drink or be baptised.

Put your shoes on the shoe shelf.

You should attend to your personal hygiene before coming to the holy water site.

Keep in line when waiting for baptism.

Cutting trees and herbs in the compound is forbidden.

Help the needy people, give them priority and support them in any way.

It is forbidden to drop human waste, including toilet paper, spit or vomit inside the compound.

Protect the materials and equipment of the holy water site from damage.

If you want to drink a lot of holy water in order to vomit, you should go out of the compound.

Keep the rules and regulations; then you will be blessed by The Holy Virgin Mary.

You are at a holy place; take off your shoes. Exodus 3-4

Appendix 4 Free-listing Survey

The free-listing survey consisted of four questions. 31 respondents were asked. Respondents[255] were asked four questions:

1. List all diseases/illnesses you can think of.
2. List all diseases/illnesses you can think of that are related to mental illness.
3. List all the reasons for diseases/illnesses that you can think of.
4. List diseases/illnesses that are caused by evil spirits.

All in all the 31 respondents registered a wide range of names of diseases/illnesses, a total of 104 different names.[256]

Table 1: List all the diseases or illnesses you can think of

1	Gastritis	21
2	Hiv/AIDS/Almaz Balechera	18 (17 resp)
3	Cancer/breast cancer	17
4	Zar/*Dəggəmt* /Ye ayer ganen/ *ʿAynä ṭəla*/Give bad medicine/ *Yäsäw* *ʾəğ*/*Mätät*/Buda/Spirit/Satan	14 (mentioned 28times)
5	Kidney	14
6	Disc/Back pain	14
7	Diabetes	12
8	Heart attack/Heart problem	12
9	High blood pressure	11
10	TB	11
11	Eye illness	9
12	Cold/Flu	9
13	Typhoid	8
14	Epilepsy	7
15	Sexual transmittable disease	7

[255] The respondents in this survey were recruited both at holy water sites and in different areas of Addis Ababa, randomly on the street.
[256] The names in apostrophes are local, Amharic names. I have not identified or translated these names.

16	‘Mitch’	7
17	‘Kintarot’	6
18	Mental problem	6
19	Tyfus	6
20	Liver	6
21	Bird (Fever)	5
22	Stress/anxiety	5
23	Cholera	5
24	Deafness	5
25	Headache	5
26	Amoeba/tapeworm/parasites	4
27	Toothache	4
28	Appendix	4
29	Sinus	4
30	Paralysis	4
31	Leprosy	4
32	Diarrhoea	3
33	Blindness	3
34	Cholesterol	3
35	Nerve problem	3
36	Loneliness	3
37	Wounds	3
38	Madness	3
39	Nightmare	3
40	Hand illness	3
41	Bronchitis	3
42	Hepatitis	3
43	A disease of body joints	3
44	Itching	2
45	‘Megagna’	2
46	Disability	2
47	Cough	2
48	Stomach ache	2
49	‘Ankelis’	2
50	‘Quwaquwat’	2
51	Addiction	2
52	Low blood/anemia	2
53	Pain on your leg or arm	2
54	Infertility	2
55	Ear illness	2
56	Nose bleeding	2
57	Leg illness	2
58	Malaria	2

59	Swollen body	2
60	Allergy	2
61	'Kidney-sand'/Intestine/'Shererit shint'/'Nekersa anget lay'/Mouth infection/'Reeh'/Burn on back/Heart burn/*ˀAganənt*/Measles/'Kintarot that grows on your head'/Bronchus/Polio/Physical disability caused by accident/Lack of vitamins/Injury/Stroke/Heart disease/Autism/Confusion/Infection-like gynaecological problem/Epidemics/Goiter/Intestine infection/Tonsil/Bladder illness/Vaginal illness/'Amotteter'/Asthma/Bacteria/Virus/Hepathitis/Depression/Infection/Influensa kidney/'Gangrene'/Alzheimer/Swollen leg/Vomit/No sexual stimulus/Wound/Talking alone/*Ləkəft*	1

Table 2: List all disease that are related to mental illnesses/diseases.

Anxiety	18
Madness	10
Depression	5
Epilepsy	4
Buda	3
Mätät	2
Yäbätäsäb tata	2
Confusion/Personality disorder/Autism/Paralysis/Tumor/Delusion/Drug abuse/Alzheimer/Spirit illness/Trauma/Fear/Headache/Loneliness/Mental illness after childbirth/HIV/Aids/Typhoid/"Low blood"/Cancer/Waterborne diseases/Asthma	1

Table 3: List reasons for illnesses/diseases.

Evil spirits, Satan, Buda, *ˀAganənt*, Idolatry, Evil eye, *Mätät*, *ˀAsmat*, *Dəggəmt*	23
Food (malnutrition, food poisoning, unhealthy food and more)	12
Not take care of oneself, bad hygiene	10
Work burden, Stress	6
Heresy	5
Alcohol	4
Unprotected sex	4
Polluted environment	3
Addiction	3
Accidents	3

Change in weather	2
Selfishness	2
Life style	2
Waste/Dirt/Lack of cleanliness	2
Negative emotions	2
Problem caused during pregnancy/High age/Loosing all you had/Poverty/Harmful traditional practices/Disagreement in the family/*Däbtära* and *ṭänqʷay*/Blood pressure/Physical disability/Polluted water/Overthinking/Bacteria/Virus	1

Table 4: List diseases/illnesses that are caused by evil spirits.

All are caused by evil spirits/satan	12
Stress	6
Buda	5
Madness	5
Zar	4
Disability	4
Back pain	3
ʿAynä ṭəla	2
Headache	2
Epilepsy/Paralysis/Talking alone/Heart attack/Intestine/Autism/Kidney/Spirit illnesses/Fear/Itching/Brain tumor/Envy/*Ləkəft* /Diabetes/Blindness/Anxiety/Blood pressure/Wounds/Gastritis/Loneliness/Disease of the mind/*ʾAganənt* itself/*ʾAsmat* itself/*Mätät*	1

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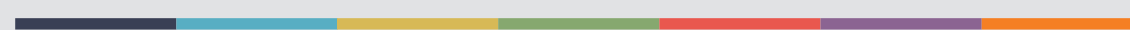

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