UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Intelligible Tolerance, Ambiguous Tensions, Antagonistic Revelations: Patterns of Muslim-Christian Coexistence in Orthodox Christian Majority Ethiopia

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Anthropology

by

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The Dissertation of John Christopher Dulin is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication in microfilm and electronically:

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Intelligible Tolerance, Ambiguous Tensions, Antagonistic Revelations: Patterns of Muslim-Christian Coexistence in Orthodox Christian Majority Ethiopia

by

John Christopher Dulin

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This dissertation examines movements between harmonic and antagonistic modalities of Muslim-Christian relations in a context of increasing religious plurality. In Gondar, Ethiopia, an educational and symbolic center of Ethiopian Orthodox

Christianity, the Muslim minority has recently sought increased public parity with the Christian majority, taking advantage of the unprecedented provisions for religious freedom in Ethiopia's 1994 constitution. These developments helped fuel an episode of open antagonism, and some violence, between Muslims and Orthodox Christians in 2009. Most of the time, Gondaré Muslims and Orthodox Christians coexist without issues, engaging in practices that construe intergroup relations as harmonic. They also work to manage latent antagonistic potentials through religious codes of silence, and are able to tolerate a mixture of affinity and vague antagonistic feeling for the religious other. In addition, many Gondaré Muslims and Christians subscribe to a narrative of primordial Ethiopian tolerance, which asserts that both religious groups have lived together peacefully for centuries. However, an open "relation of antagonism" can form when latent, ambiguous tensions burst onto the social surface and become "clear" (gelṣa). This dissertation argues that religious rituals in Gondar have a role both in facilitating mutual recognition across religious boundaries *and* "revealing" latent antagonisms, thus fueling interreligious conflict. The potential that is realized in any given situation depends in part on how Muslim and Orthodox rituals intersect—that is, how events and human actions bring different rituals onto the same scene, and whether or not this co-presence is seen as subversive to the high values the rituals perform. The project of interreligious coexistence in Gondar involves not only negotiating the co-presence of individuals with different religious identities, but also negotiating the co-presence of different ritual complexes. Relations between different ritual complexes are important because rituals have macrocosmic entailments, transvaluing the here-now to a higher scale, bringing actors into more direct relation with higher values, and, at times, linking lived time-space to

distant historical events. In Gondar, ritual's propensity to link up with higher scales can evoke imaginaries of both macro-recognition and macro-conflict, typifying the religious other as a primordial friend or archetypical foe.

Introduction

Muslim-Christian Relations in Northwest Ethiopia and Anthropological Theory

Various residents of Gondar, Ethiopia have described their natal home as a "land of tolerance" and as a "land of blood." The former description is the everyday story Gondarés tell themselves (and outsiders) about themselves. The latter description, "land of blood," or "*akeldama,*" was printed on T-shirts worn by a group of Orthodox Christians at a time of heightened tensions between Christians and Muslims in 2009, during which groups of Christians also reportedly chanted "The mosque will be demolished!" and "We will make Ethiopia a land of blood!" [1] The "land of tolerance" label is meant to describe a normative condition in Gondar, while the label "land of blood" creates a sort of shock-effect by virtue of its violent contrast with the norm. In this dissertation, I will look at the modes of Muslim-Christian relations in Gondar that inspire these contrasting designations. In particular, I will look at movements between more antagonistic and more harmonic relations during a period of slowly declining Christian hegemony. Gondar is a Christian majority city with a 200,000 plus population and is the former 17th century capital of Imperial Ethiopia, as well as a symbolic and educational center of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity. It is famous for its 44 historical churches an the vast castle compounds built by the Ethiopian kings of the 17th and 18th century. In the tourism industry, Gondar's tagline is "The Camelot of Africa," which is consistent with the impression it gives tourists as something of a medieval time warp; a surreal mixture of the very old and relatively new. While Gondar is home to Ethiopia's top medical school and is undergoing infrastructural developments at a rapid pace, the impression of medieval/ modern hybridity is created by the combination of conspicuous castles, early 20th century Italian architecture, liturgical chants and prayer calls heard throughout the city. This impression is strengthened by the many cobblestone roads and the persistent use of donkeys and horse-pulled carts that plod along Gondar's streets as automotive vehicles zoom by. Many Gondaré Orthodox Christians are proud of the city's reputation as "traditional," and experience "nostalgia" for the bygone era the castles represent (Marcus 2002)—an era of uncompromised Orthodox Christian hegemony and ostensible religious homogeneity, an ideal that becomes more remote with Gondar's ever increasing religious diversity.

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[1] According to the Gospel of Matthew, akeldama was the Aramaic name of the field purchased with the "blood money" of Judas Iscariot, which he had received as payment for betraying Christ. So in addition to making a veiled threat that could possibly elide the notice of government authorities, the biblical reference evokes a prototypical betrayal. The literal translation of the Aramaic term is "field of blood" would translate literally into Amharic as "yedem méda" but the police records of the 2009 conflicts, and the Orthodox Amharic Bible, translate the term into Amharic as "yedem merét," or "Land of Blood." Akeldama was also the title of a documentary film aired on state owned television in November of 2011 dealing with the threat of terrorism in Ethiopia. This film has been criticized as a propaganda tool, the goal of which is to paint all those who oppose the current regime as terrorists (Mariam 2011).

A young Orthodox Christian man once told me that Gondar is the best place in Ethiopia to celebrate the Orthodox Christian holiday of Ṭimqet (Epiphany), because "everyone is Orthodox." After making this statement, the young man paused and back-peddled, admitting that, whereas before Muslims were confined to a village outside the city, these days, because of the current government's policy on religious freedom, the Muslim population has spread throughout Gondar, and, he estimated, has now risen to 40% of the population. The former statement reflects an ideal representation of Gondar as uniformly Orthodox Christian, and a notion that Christian homogeneity is what makes Gondar special. His later estimation grossly exaggerates Muslim numbers, almost as if any major signs of Muslim expansion suggest the Christian majority is in a demographic nose dive. The most recent 2007 census puts Muslims at 11.8% of Gondar's population, while Orthodox Christians comprised 84.2% (Central Statistical Agency 2007). However, the heavy concentration of Muslims in the market area may give the impression that Muslims are more numerous than they are. Orthodox Christians from all over Gondar encounter a sea of Muslim thobes (tunics), hijabs, turbans, and taqīya (skullcaps) whenever they go to the major market to purchase wholesale goods. Add to that the apparent concentration of wealth in Muslim hands due to their historical profession as merchants, as well as the recent construction of mosques in areas that were previously restricted to Christian churches, and *Islam* in Gondar appears to be in ascendance. By contrast, many Christian Gondarés sense that their once-ascendant, Orthodox Christian religion is being pushed to the relative margins by western music, dance and gender norms, the secularism of Gondar University, and, perhaps most importantly, by the rising tide of religious alterity seen in Pentecostal preaching, Muslim prayer calls, and towering minarets.

In the efforts of religious minorities to achieve parity with the Christian majority, the religious landscape is one of Gondar's most contested arenas. Boylston observed that, for rural Ethiopian Orthodox Christians, churches serve as a "synecdoche of the wellbeing of the community as a whole" (2012: 163) and provide a sense of continuity with what he calls the "deep time" of sacred history. In Gondar, I also observed that while churches serve as an emblem of community wellbeing for Orthodox Christians, mosques can emblematize the opposite to, even a *threat to* the wellbeing of the Christian community. Mosque construction precipitated all major violent conflicts between

Muslims and Orthodox Christians in recent memory. Three times in 2009 Muslims either built a mosque or attempted to build one, and three times, it sparked an episode of violent antagonism with the Christian majority. These episodes involved either Christians and Muslims throwing stones at each other, Christians throwing stones at mosques, and/or Christians throwing stones at cement trucks (stones are a weapon of choice). These scenes of conflict provide a silhouette-like contrast to more everyday scenes of Muslim-Christian friendship. It was not uncommon to see a group of teenage girls walking down the street together in a row, arms draped over one another, some wearing hijabs, some with uncovered heads and conspicuous crosses hanging from their necks. It turns no heads when Muslim and Christian adult men hold hands while strolling down Gondaré streets, as good friends of the same sex often do in Ethiopia. Finally, as referenced earlier, there are meta-narratives that go along with these scenes. They tell of how Muslims and Christians have a long history of living together in Ethiopia, how they know each other well, and love each other.

The Ethiopian government promotes this narrative of longstanding Muslim-Christian coexistence, and invokes it during times of interreligious tension and violence. For example, in December of 2015, shortly after a mysterious attacker threw a grenade in the Anwar Mosque in Addis Ababa, a government newspaper published an editorial titled "Ethiopia - a Show Case of Religious Tolerance." The editorial promoted an idea, so common in state discourse it has become cliché, that Ethiopians are naturally tolerant, that peaceful coexistence between those of different faiths reflects the primordial condition of Ethiopian culture:

> Religious tolerance is the natural culture of Ethiopians wherever they are. Even before the formation of the central government and a relative modernization of the country, religious tolerance was not taught; it was acknowledged and respected, cherished (Editorial 2015).

The editorial goes on to assert that those who engage in religious violence are going against the grain of a 1400 year-old tradition of “peace and harmony,” and “will only breed extremism which could easily develop into terrorism.” This editorial contains both appeals to modernity and appeals to tradition. The Ethiopian state has identified with the narrative of modernity since before, but especially after its Marxist revolution of 1974, and regularly mixes modern and traditional motifs (Donham 1999). By labeling those who participate in conflict “extremists,” this editorial positions religious antagonists as enemies to modernity—particularly, the narrative of progress, the sense of moving beyond a traditional past, toward a more rational, prosperous, and clear headed future. In addition, by associating tolerance with autochthony, it appeals to national pride and nativism, blaming alien forces for conflict in a way that bolsters the state’s own authority in prosecuting its political enemies (Desplat and Østebø 2013). In the Ethiopian state’s use of the idea of tolerance to authorize political objectives, it takes a path well-trod by many a modern nation states (Brown and Forst 2014; Brown 2006). The particular way the Ethiopian state goes about treading this path is not my main concern here. I mention this discourse here in the opening because it illustrates the salience in Ethiopian and global imaginaries of the question I will address in this dissertation: What enables the coexistence of different religious communities, and what turns a relation of interreligious harmony/coexistence into one of antagonism?

Political anthropologist Robert Hayden (2013) has developed a comparative framework called “antagonistic tolerance” that is meant to explain conflicts, like those in Gondar, that center on the religious landscape. According to this framework, the religious group with the largest, most conspicuous buildings, in the most central part of town, tends to be the one in the dominant position of power. In such a situation, subordinate groups are “tolerated” in so far as they accept their subordination and do not challenge existing interreligious power hierarchies. When the power-position of the dominant religious group destabilizes enough to allow interreligious competition, “vying groups will build structures that competitively challenge the height, visibility, audibility, and/or massiveness of the rival group’s religious structures” (413). A brief historical outline shows how developments in Muslim-Christian relations in Gondar cohere with Hayden’s claims about the relationship between power and religious structures. This will serve as my jumping off point.

In 1668, Emperor Yohannes made the dominance of Orthodox Christians in Gondar unequivocal with his edict of religious segregation, which confined Gondar’s Muslim population to a marginal stretch of land on a slope outside the city, a “Muslim neighborhood” called Addis Alem. From that time up until the decades preceding the Italian occupation in 1936, Christian dominance in Gondar remained unchallenged by its sizable, and relatively wealthy Muslim minority. However, during the five year Italian occupation, Italian authorities courted favor with Ethiopian Muslims as part of their “divide and rule” strategy. As part of that strategy, they allowed Gondaré Muslims to build a mosque on land adjacent to the bustling Saturday market north of Addis Alem. This officially established the Muslim community beyond the borders of the marginal stretch of land to which they had been confined for centuries (Solomon 2004; Ahmad 2000). Throughout much of the 20th century following the end of the Italian occupation in 1941, the Orthodox church and the Ethiopian state remained intertwined, and Muslims were politically marginalized (Ficquet 2015; Ahmed 2006), nevertheless Gondaré Muslims slowly moved out of Addis Alem, and built small, discreet mosques further into town. Orthodox Christianity's official political dominance in Ethiopia did not end until the Marxist revolution in 1974, which marked the rise of a secular government that separated the Orthodox church from the state, the official recognition of Muslim holy days as public holidays (Ahmed 2006: 11). Ethiopia's regime change in 1991 and specific provision on religious freedom in the new constitution continued this move toward religious pluralism, providing "a government-independent framework for religious plurality," (755) and introducing "religious freedoms…at an unprecedented scale" (Haustein and Østebø 2011: 756). Since the initial disestablishment of the Orthodox Church, Muslims in Gondar have expanded and enlarged existing mosques, allowing them to house more worshipers, and topped them off with high minarets, giving them public visibility. Perhaps most problematic for the relationship of Muslims with the Christian majority, some members of the Muslim community have founded new mosques in what were previously known as "Christian neighborhoods."

This account of Gondar's transition from an Orthodox monolith to a more contested religious arena shows how interreligious power relations have shifted over time, and how, as the antagonistic tolerance framework predicts, shifts in the power balance brought with them changes to the religious landscape. Orthodox Christians and Muslims were not made equals in one fell swoop, as Christians still comprise the majority of the population and fill the majority of government administrative positions, but legal changes have laid the groundwork for Orthodox Christian hegemony to be challenged bit by bit, or, one could say, mosque by mosque. Yet, even though there is a fit between Hayden's general framework and features of Gondar's history, if we are to understand the particular patterns of interreligious relations in Gondar, we need to add a great deal of fine lines to these broad, comparative brush strokes. This framework presents a number of research problems that deserve a deeper, more thickly descriptive exploration.

First, given that, according to Hayden, a condition of shifting interreligious power hierarchies is supposed to create conditions of *less tolerant* antagonism, the question remains of how different religious groups manage to get along on a daily basis when power relations are in flux. In this dissertation, I will describe how Gondaré Muslims and Christians engage in routine practices that foster feelings of mutual respect across religious lines, while also engaging in an ancillary set of practices that manage the tensions created by interreligious competition.

Another problem that Hayden's framework highlights is the question of *why* physical religious structures emerge as primary sites of interreligious power struggle. One major answer Hayden provides to this question is that, because religious structures indicate a population's presence and influence, they are implicated in *territorial* struggles between different religious populations, which also tend to focus on contestations of presence and influence (see Hayden 2013). Hayden's view that religion is often a cipher for non-religious issues, especially in the context of conflict, comes out clearly in the distinction he makes at one point between "religion as faith, as a way of life or practice" and “religion as ideology” espoused by “actors on a wider social scale, particularly religious leaders who promote doctrinal consistency or political leaders who espouse communal incommensurability” (Hayden 2002: 215). When actors mobilize religion as an ideology, religion often functions as an “identifier of populations contesting for or protecting non-religious, usually political or socio-economic interest” (Nandy 1990: 70, quoted in Hayden 2002: 215). Other prominent anthropologists make a similar distinction. For example, in his analysis of anti-Tamil violence in Sri Lanka, Tambiah describes a distinctive kind of Buddhism that developed in reaction to the colonial experience as reflecting what he calls “the ideologization of religion as a charter which represented a shift from ‘religiousness’ to ‘religious-mindedness,’ from religion as a moral practice to religion as a cultural and political possession” (1992: 59). From his perspective, the conflicts then between Hindu Tamils and Buddhist Sinhala were not about religion, per se, but about a nationalism which had annexed religion and appropriated it (cf. Stadler 2015; Duijzings 2000; van der Veer 1994).

As valid as these accounts of particular conflicts may be, if you ask many religious actors, religion is about religion, not something external to it. While politics and territory may have a place in the religious imagination, they have a place as contingencies of religious powers and authorities, not the other way around. I do not think the anthropologists cited above would dispute this, though they have given this feature of *religion-in-conflict* less attention than I will here. In Ethiopia, while religious imaginaries are historically tangled up with political/nationalistic imaginaries and claims to territory, religious identities are not currently invoked in any state projects, except in attempts to temper “extremism”; nor is religion appealed to in democratic politics, at least not overtly, in large part because the state prohibits political movements based on religious identities and concerns (USDS 2011). This makes the current context of Ethiopia quite different than, say, that of South Asia (Brass 1998). The muted role of state politics in these struggles over the religious landscape provides an opportunity to focus on how religion as *a force in its own right* shapes the course of shared social life in Gondar (cf. Handelman 2004). This need not oppose accounts that highlight the more instrumental role of religion. On the contrary, though I have little interest in an instrumentalist account here, an understanding of religion as a kind of emergent, sui generis social force can add to our understanding of why religion functions as such an effective political instrument in some contexts. Generally speaking, in addressing the question of why contests over landscapes in Gondar become so intense, and even violent, I will show how a self-understanding internal to religious social formations helps define what is at stake in battles over symbolic edifices. To take the self-understanding of Islam and Christianity in Gondar seriously is to look for the ways power and territory serve as *means to* religious ends—for, at least in their ideal-typical form, these major monotheisms present themselves as what Weber called “ultimate ends” (1946a: 120).

On the “Religiousness” of Religious Conflict and Religious Coexistence

An analysis of human conflict that gives a robust role to the religious dimension runs into a predictable set of problems. First of all, the argument that there is no consistent, transhistorical, substantivist definition of religion has won the day in religious studies and the anthropology of religion (Asad 1993; Smith 1988), and has now been absorbed as disciplinary common sense (for review see Bialecki In press). In some respects, I can elide this issue because my analysis is particularistic, in that I am only making claims about historical traditions, Christianity and Islam, as they present themselves in Gondar. Furthermore, the account I have given of Ethiopia's political history shows that the categorical distinction between the secular and the religious is at play in major Ethiopian discourses. Therefore, given that the modern category of religion is, as Asad claimed, the "Siamese twin" of the secular (2001:183), I am justified in working within a common sense category of religion as the "not secular," or that which secular discourses define as their alter, because the secular/religion binary has sufficient resonance with categories in my field site (see Bittiza 2014). Thus, I would not be imposing a historically particular category from the outside as if it were universal.

These caveats notwithstanding, in this section I am going to work out some theoretical language for discussing 'the stuff' of Christianity and Islam in Gondar. Because I will draw on theoretical concepts anthropologists of religion, value and ritual have developed based on their research in different parts of the world, these concepts may also have some use in approaching religious conflict, and interreligious relations, outside of Ethiopia. The broader applicability could apply to both religious and ostensibly non-religious phenomena. My objective here is to develop a theoretical framework that helps us conceptualize the power of religious institutions and practices in social life without necessarily making the claim that these powers are unique to religion.

Before I get into theoretical specifics, I should recognize another problem that arises when one attempts to posit *religion* as an impetus for religious conflict, and that is the danger of slipping into the polar opposite of the religion-as-cipher position: religious primordialism. These arguments posit religion as a deep logic, or a source of core values, at work in whole civilizations, creating inevitable conflicts with those who hold opposing values (Huntington 1993; Lewis 1990). Among contemporary anthropologists, Kapferer's (1988) book on violence in Sri Lanka has been criticized, perhaps unfairly, for seeming to fall "into a primordialist mode of interpretation" (Fearon and Laitin 2000: 846). My approach is similar to Kapferer's in the seriousness with which it takes religious cosmology and values. Here, I will briefly discuss his thesis and criticisms of it, in order to show how the focus of my argument both complements and differs from it. Kapferer sought to explain the "fury" of Sri Lanka's 1983 anti-Tamil riots with reference to an ancient, pre-colonial Buddhist "ontology," which he saw reflected in the exorcism rituals he had studied previously and Sinhala Buddhist myths of kingship. For Kapferer, ontology is an unconscious, pre-reflective logic that can be given innumerable lived significances in different contexts, but also constitutes the "fundamental principles of a being in the world and an orientation of such a being toward the horizons of experience" (1988: 79). The Sinhala ontology, as he elaborated it, posits that the integrity of the self, society, and the cosmos is dependent on their encompassment within an ordering hierarchy embodied by the state. "Demons" are alien entities that must be violently destroyed and/or encompassed; otherwise, they threaten to plunge society into chaos. He argued that these Sinhala Buddhist "metaphors of evil" were reflected in state ideology, and served as an impetus for anti-Tamil violence once the victims were implicitly identified as a kind of "demon" that threatened the state's integrity.

Kapferer's thesis has been criticized for giving too much attention to structure, too little attention to human agents (Woost 1994), and for ignoring the ongoing political dimension of the conflict (Spencer 2007). Moreover, Tambiah (1992) claims that Kapferer overemphasizes the continuity between the cosmology of the pre-colonial

Sinhala Kingdom and the post-colonial nation-state. Van der Veer has positive things to say about Kapferer's analysis, but notes critically "that he reifies 'Buddhist ontology' making it a system of orientations that entirely governs cognition, while neglecting the ways these orientations are produced and contested" (1994: 84). If I were to extract a common thread that ties together the criticisms, a drawback of Kapferer's argument is that it posits religious ontology as deep, pervasive and constant, making it appear as an essentialist core lurking behind and generating political discourse and collective violence.[2] The links he makes between the ontology and violence in his descriptions of conflict are mostly indirect. While he notes a similar "dynamic" at work in both contexts, there is no metonymic connection between the rituals and violence—that is, there are no real-time links; rather, he notes a metaphoric extension of the same underlying ontology to both rituals and state governance and discourses (Kapferer 2012). Religious logics are not explicitly on the surface, but operating *behind* these events, mostly implicit in the discourses and actions of the state and the violent mob. By contrast, the discussion on the role of religion in conflict in this dissertation will focus on the influence of religious values clearly visible on the social *surface*.

Keane suggested that general value systems, like those that Kapferer outlines, exercise their force in everyday acts of "evaluation," acts of calling people to account for their actions, and giving an account of oneself, and in "ethical descriptions of actions" (2015: 159) that justify one's own moral standing, or "typify" the actions of another as unethical (133-163).[3] The concept of typification comes from Alfred Shultz's (1967) theory of social action, wherein he distinguishes how humans imagine the actions and intentionality of others at different scales of interaction. When two individuals have shared social histories, they draw upon particular details from their shared biography to understand the other. In more anonymous interactions, such as those with a police officer or store clerk, one draws on general social types to make assumptions about the other's role, motivation, and future actions. People regularly evaluate one another in terms of broader typifications marked with relatively positive and negative valences. Individuals signal to others that they embody a particular ethical type—honest person, competent person, or an unethical type, an asshole, a phony—through the use of corresponding registers, gestures, deictics, narratives, and displays of affect (Agha 2007; Hill 1995). According to Keane, value systems insert themselves into people's lives through these kinds of recognizable, type-evoking signs, as well as implicit and explicit evaluations, which are visible on "the surface of things" (2010: 69). In this dissertation's ethnography, the social *surface* is going to take on a particular significance because of the culturally specific ways the retention of secrets and the display of surfaces underpin evaluation in Gondaré social practice (see Messay 1999: 180-193; Levine 1965). I will elaborate upon the role of surfaces and secrets in Gondaré social practice in Chapters 6-8. Now, for the purpose of giving a theoretical background, I want to focus on the transcendence of typifications (Natanson 1986), that is, typifications at the higher degrees of anonymity, which transcend the biographical particularities of the individuals being typified, and represent social others *primarily* in terms of general, higher scale social imaginaries.

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[2] Though few acknowledge his argument that ontologies were extremely polysemous, nor his recognition that Buddhist ontology was one among a number of ontologies operating in Sinhala society.

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[3] I abandon the category of ontology in favor of cosmology and values, not least because of ontology's contested place in contemporary anthropology, but also because it implies forces operating on the depths of consciousness, and I want to move away from that more to the surface.

A number of social scientific discussions of religious and ethnic violence converge on the insight that those who engage in anonymous group violence act within higher scale imaginaries (nation, globe, cosmos) that often typify the target as essentially evil and/or threatening (Das 2007; Devji 2005; Gassem-Fachandi 2012; Juergensmeyer 2000; Kapferer 1988; Sells 1996; Taylor 1999). Tambiah's (1996) concept of focalization and transvaluation offers one of the more influential iterations of this insight (see Sahlins 2011; Froerer 2007). Focalization refers to "the process of progressive denudation of local incidents and disputes of their particulars of context," and "transvaluation refers to the parallel process of assimilating particulars to a larger, collective, more enduring, and therefore less context-bound cause or interest" (Tambiah 1996: 192). That is, transvaluation consists of an uptick in imaginative scale. It also ups the stakes, and progressively polarizes and dichotomizes "issues and partisans." The violent incidents that result "become self-fulfilling manifestations, incarnations and reincarnations of allegedly irresolvable communal splits." Different incidents and individuals become "linked", "amalgamated" and "labeled" as one transcendent and value-charged type of thing. For example, according to Kapferer (1988), violence in Sri Lanka was associated with Hindu Tamils being typified as, or "linked" and "amalgamated" with, a prototypically evil and degrading agent, demons, as well as mythical enemies of the pre-colonial Buddhist state.

Episodes of collective violence were the empirical raw material Tambiah (1996) drew upon in his discussion of transvaluation. His focus was on *events*, often events that garnered the attention of the mass media, which aided in the process of transvaluation.

However, here I want to understand conflict events in the context of non-violent modes of relating, which often precede and follow a period of open antagonism. One strength of Kapferer's (1988) book was that he explicitly recognized that antagonistic discourses do not paint on a cosmological tabula rasa when they communicate with populations and incite large scale violence. In his account, the demonizing discourses of anti-Tamil rhetoric melded and resonated with other more common transvaluative linkages that unfold in Sinhala rituals, rituals that regularly "amalgamate" the ritual participants with the Sinhala Buddhist cosmos. Here, I am going to treat ritual as an everyday kind of transvaluing media.

Transvaluations notwithstanding, Kapferer (2012) is at pains to emphasize that a synergistic relationship between ritual cosmologies and violent rhetoric *does not mean the violence was an outgrowth of the ritual logics* in a determinative sense. Whatever everyday mode of non-violent coexistence prevailed between Hindu Tamils and their Sinhala Buddhist neighbors prior to the violence, Hindu and Buddhist rituals were likely included as peacefully coexisting entities. Moreover, their practitioners managed to take imaginative ritual sojourns into higher planes *without* becoming violently enraged at their Tamil and Sinhala neighbors (see Bastin 2012). So, one could say, while rituals, especially the cosmological imaginaries they make present, may play a part in shaping episodes of violence, they also participate in conditions of coexistence, because the *rituals also coexist with religious others* as constituents of their practitioners. Thus, in giving an ethnographic account of the role religion plays in shaping Muslim-Christian coexistence in Gondar, I pay attention to how the transvaluing tendencies of religious ritual configures with everyday practices of coexistence (cf. Das 2007). In this view, the question of coexistence not only concerns how *individuals* from different religions coexist, but how *different transvaluing media coexist*—that is, until they do not.

Now I would like to elaborate a bit on the concept of ritual as a transvaluing media. Stasch (2011) in his literature review argues that anthropological studies on ritual have converged on the understanding that "A ritual event is characterized by the exceptional quantity and vividness of the *general types* that are felt as present in its concrete particulars" and "is composed of densely crisscrossing indexical and iconic relations *between the ritual spacetime and larger macrocosmic orders* made present in that spacetime" [italics added] (161; see also Caton 1986, 1993; Kratz 1994; Keane 1997; Stasch 2003; Shoaps 2009).[4] Rituals then, according to Stasch's synthesis of anthropological literature, involve dense interconnections of different kinds of signs, which together make a larger macrocosmic order present in the "microcosm" of ritual, or the "interactional here-now" of ritual participation (Stasch 2011: 160). He also adds that oratory can create similar links and be layered upon ritual forms to forge macrocosmic connections through a "coordination of signs across multiple semiotic media."

I see these dense, redundant links and multimodal resonances as creating an emergent force, greater than the sum of its parts, that imposes itself upon practitioners as a reality that is beyond them; it looms as something seemingly autonomous (Handelman 2004; cf. Rappaport 1999; Bloch 1986), drawing populations in and calling upon them to partake. In its emergent autonomy, rituals can strike practitioners as much more than a product of their actions; rather, participants understand themselves, and sometimes the world, as constituted by the rituals, just as the world and the persons who live in it are constituted by the larger macrocosmic order that the rituals make present. Taking into account how religious rituals fit into patterns of interreligious coexistence is justified, not only because they transvalue the here-now to higher imaginative scales, but also because they have a certain autonomy as something like “super actors” in the world of human affairs. The work of coexistence, then, is not just about negotiating the coexistence of Christian and Muslim persons, but it also involves negotiating the coexistence of Muslim and Christian ritual complexes. In trying to navigate religious rituals and religious others, actors must negotiate entities that are not entirely in their control. For this reason, in the ethnography that follows I will sometimes talk about non-human entities, like Arks and rituals, as if they are acting in the world, not in the place of human agents, but alongside them, though I think it is sometimes difficult to untangle to what degree humans are acting and to what degree other forces are acting through them. I am willing to leave it ambiguous while recognizing the existence of emergent forces at play in social life and conceiving of rituals as a major source of supra-individual forces.[5]

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[4] A sign in this context is a thing that evokes something else or makes another thing present. An indexical sign makes another thing present through spatio-temporal contiguity like smoke to fire. An iconic sign makes another thing present through physical resemblance like a statue or painting (Pierce 1998 [1894]).

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[5] This is consistent with classical Durkheimian 2001) [1912] understanding of ritual. He argues that the practice of ritual gives the practitioners a sense that the ritual objects are greater than themselves, and through ritual practice, one experiences effervescence and the practitioner feels caught up into something greater. The fact that the ritual creates this effect of being part of something greater, which marks the ritual as sacred because it is an out of the ordinary feeling, suggests that other, non-ritual contexts are more individuating. As much as anthropologists have tried to get away from Durkheim, it is hard to escape an acknowledgement of the ordering power of larger social forces (Yan 2011). My willingness to clearly recognize that ritual can create an emergent force also takes inspiration from dynamic systems theory, which holds that lower order processes can give rise to emergent higher order phenomena that are greater than the sum of its parts, and which come to order the parts that give rise to it (Deacon 2013; Delanda 2011). Delanda’s (2006) version of assemblage theory gives a sense of how to conceive of different levels in emergent phenomena without reducing lower order phenomena to whims of the higher. Within the framework of one of his accounts, we can see a human person as an assemblage, who then forms part of a wider assemblage like the market. The higher scale force of the market exerts force on the person, but lower scale force of the person also exerts force back on the market. Hence lower order emergent forces, i.e., human minds/bodies interact with higher order emergent forces, i.e., the market, in a large dynamic system—the resulting process is a product of all the forces combined. In the context of the anthropology of

In addition to rituals, some have pointed out that features of *space* also evoke wider scale imaginaries (Bachelard 1964; Stasch 2013). This affordance of symbolic/material topography is intensified for ritual spaces because of the unusually dense macrocosmic links which are continually forged within their walls. The mosque is a good example of a structure with dense macrocosmic links, due to the rituals and narratives associated with them. One of the traditions of the prophet Muhammad states that the earth was a mosque before the fall, and that Adam built the first mosque once cast out of Eden (Mahmutćehajić 2006: 57). Bosnian Islamic theologian Rusmir Mahmutćehajić's (2006) elaborated upon the macrocosmic connections of these iconic Islamic edifices in a book titled "The Mosque: The Heart of Submission." Despite the title's suggestion that he is going to focus on the holy structure of the mosque, he focuses most of its discussion on how "the self," the created, should bring itself into full and complete submission to "oneness," what he also calls "Reality" (with a capital R), a word he sees as synonymous with God, or the creator. He later argues, essentially, that the prayers performed in the mosque have macrocosmic entailments, enacting the obsequious position of creation in relation to creator: "Prayer is the way to join oneself with the cosmos in praise of God"; it is "our participation in the submission of the worlds" (34), "Everything that is in the heavens and on the earth submit to him" (10). Muslim prayer enacts submission to God both iconically, putting one's forehead to the ground, and indexically, making the proscribed gestures in exactly the right way, at exactly the right time, pointing toward Mecca while hearing the words, "God is great" over and over in the

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religion, Bialecki (2014) suggested that a methodological atheist could see God as an emergent product of religious activity, one that acts back upon the persons that produced it through said activity. That is the kind recursive process I am talking about when I say rituals are kind of "super actors" or "emergent forces."

language of the Quran. As the “heart of submission,” the mosque encapsulates this submissive stance, which all of creation assumes, and to which all Muslims must join: “Thus, when our will conforms to the will of God, we are the complete image of our Creator…This makes us into His mosque, the locus where the Divine will finds expression” (14).

The way Mahmutćehajić identifies the mosque as “the locus” of high Islamic values, like *tawhīd* (oneness) and submission, points to a major reason the macrocosmic links in ritual inspire so much labor and attention from the religiously inclined. As Joel Robbins writes, “Rituals often are…actions that fully realize a specific value or values and therefore stand out in social life as exemplary and command people’s attention on that basis” (2015: 21). He talks about values in this essay in the classic Weberian sense: as conceptions that impose meaning or order to a chaotic world, and imbue an otherwise meaningful existence with moral valence (19). However, Robbins also notes that values frequently fall short of being realized. A value, then, in this formulation, is a culturally specific version of what *ought* to be, and rituals help turn an ought into an is. To outline how ritual creates a site for, as Robbins says, “perfecting the shape of representations in relation to values,” he quotes Kapferer’s (2006) statement that ritual “allows people to break free from the constraints or determinations of everyday life” and “slow down its flux and speed” (2006: 676), as well as Smith’s definition of ritual as “a means of performing the way things *ought* to be in conscious tension with the way things *are* in such a way that this ritualized perfection is recollected in the ordinary, uncontrolled course of things” (1988: 63; both quoted in Robbins 2015: 21-22 [italics added]). By slowing things down, ritual transvalues the here-now and allows participants to touch higher values that are more elusive in the flux of everyday life.

Gondaré Muslims talk about mosques as this kind of slowed down, controlled space. Mosques offer an environment where they will not be distracted by the noise of life and can focus fully on prayer. A great number of my Muslim informants were also familiar with the Hadith (sayings of the prophet Muhammad) that assigned a specific numerical value to the superiority of prayers in the mosque relative to prayers outside the mosque:

> The prayer offered in congregation is twenty-five times more superior (in reward) to the prayer offered alone in one's house or in a business center, because if one performs ablution and does it perfectly, and then proceeds to the mosque with the sole intention of praying, then for each step which he takes towards the mosque, Allah upgrades him a degree in reward (Hadith no 620, Khan 1993).

This Hadith identifies the mosque as a site of more perfect value realization and thus also introduces a value hierarchy that ranks some prayers as superior to others. The higher value is more than an abstraction, it has a pragmatic effect, as the higher value prayer merits greater divine reward. The latter part of the prophet’s statement suggests that the greater value of prayer in the mosque, and its efficacy in winning a greater reward, is tied to its macrocosmic connections to the heavenly realm:

> When he enters the mosque he is considered in prayer as long as he is waiting for the prayer and the angels keep on asking for Allah's forgiveness for him and they keep on saying: 'O Allah! Be Merciful to him, O Allah! Forgive him, as long as he keeps on sitting at his praying place and does not pass wind.

Finally, even though the perfectly controlled environment of the mosque cannot be replicated at home or at work, Gondaré Muslims feel the force of the call to submit to

Allah with varying degrees of intensity in these other spheres, or, to repeat Smith, the "ritualized perfection is recollected in the ordinary, uncontrolled course of things" (1982: 63).

This completes the basic theoretical explanation for how I am conceptualizing religion as force in human affairs in Gondar. To synthesize what have discussed thus far, religion has a social presence in ritual practices that serve as microcosms of a wider macrocosmic order, and allow the faithful to realize higher values, and sometimes fight hypostatic evils, associated with the macrocosmic sphere. Rituals often present as semi-autonomous, giving the values and cosmos embodied therein the quality of an external force that exerts a pull on people. Keeping my discussion of values tied up with macrocosmic imaginaries is consistent with different theorists of value, like Weber (1946c) who posited that ultimate values give meaning to the cosmos, Dumont (1980) who associated higher order values with the social whole, Graeber (2013) who claimed that values and evaluative action is carried out against the backdrop of, or rather, brings into being, a "totality" (see also Graeber 2001). The association of values with the macrocosm also gives attention to both the trans(cendence) and the (e)valuation components of processes of transvaluation (Dulin In press). Finally, the association of religious values with the macrocosm is also important because religion in Gondar tends to be associated with that which is *higher* than mundane, ordinary life—higher authority, higher values, and higher scale. While it is true that, as Keane observes, "One distinctive project of any monotheistic religion…seems to be the effort to rationalize ethics under an organizing principle" (2015: 210), I also will show that conceptualizing the *higher values* of each respective monotheism in terms of a neo-Dumontian value hierarchy (courtesy of

Robbins 2004; 2013b) helps us conceive of why in some contexts the force of monotheistic religion creates an almost irresistible pressure to rationalize—or, in other words, pressure to organize human activity around its orbit—but in other contexts, this pressure is only weakly felt.[6] I will flesh out how this dynamic unfolds in Gondar in Chapter 4, where I will explore the implications of the interplay of higher and lower value scales for patterns of interreligious coexistence and conflict. Overall, the account of religious coexistence and conflict that follows focuses not just on how individuals coexist and clash, but also how and when their rituals, cosmologies, and values coexist and clash.

Before I conclude this theoretical section, I should add a word about territory. It may seem that, with my discussion of religious cosmology and values, I have moved some distance from Hayden's hard-nosed framework focused on power and territorial struggle. This movement away from a focus on territoriality may seem problematic, considering that I recognized at the beginning of this introduction that the antagonistic tolerance framework coheres well with recent histories of Muslim-Christian conflict in Gondar. This pivot away from territory may also seem problematic because this dissertation deals with one of the more territorialized Christianities (Bandak and Boylston 2014; du Boulay 2009; Roudometof 2014; Stewart 1991 cf. Coleman 2000; Robbins 2006). Orthodox identity is often closely linked with national identity (Herzfeld 2002; Hirshcon 2010), and Orthodox practice reflects a greater comfort than Protestant practice with sacralizing material entities (Boylston 2013b; Theokritoff 2008; cf. Engelke 2007;

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[6] I call this *neo*-Dumontian because Robbins project of understanding how different values relate to one another, while it draws on Dumont, does not adopt his normative project that views hierarchy as standard, and as a positive, and western individualism as pathologically, and uniquely, prone to totalitarianism and racism (Dumont 1980; 1986).

Keane 2007), including specific stretches of territory. Additionally, the long history of Orthodox-Muslim relations in the Ottoman Empire (Hasluck 1927), and the contemporary Levant (Bandak 2014), shows that Muslims manage to match Orthodox Christians tit-for-tat in their territorializing imperatives (Bowman 2010; cf Deeb 2006). Given the territorial focus of the Muslim-Christian conflicts discussed in this dissertation, it is important to develop some theoretical language for bridging the gap between an analysis like Hayden's that focuses on territoriality and the value-centered approach I am taking here.

Deleuze and Guattari often likened heavy territorialization to a tree. The roots and trunk of the tree represent a center of power and branches represent how surrounding elements are connected to or territorialized by that center, through what they called "resonance" and "redundancy" (1987: 211). The bureaucratic state is a major example of an arborescent social structure, as the state territorializes its different specialized segments by ensuring, among other things, their functional *resonance* with state imperatives, like disciplining projects or the protection of capital, and *redundant* compliance with state regulations and norms. Deleuze and Guattari would distinguish state territorialization from "primitive segmentarity" wherein different segments, like clans, or say, spheres of exchange, are more autonomous from one another, more flexible, or as they say, "supple" (210). A different kind of example of arborescence might make the applicability of the tree analogy to religion more clear. In Deleuze and Guattari's (1977) criticism of psychoanalysis they claimed that Freud de-territorialized personality, desire, creativity, and re-territorialized these facets of human experience and development in the oedipal conflict, making them all the effects of a single fundamental cause. This transformed all the “supple” flows of human bodies, desires, and the unconscious into branches of the trunk of “the nuclear family,” which itself, according to them, is a branch of capitalism’s system of social reproduction—capitalism being the globe’s dominant system of value.

Monotheism is something like the prototype for arborescent forms of thought and social organization, so it is an apt metaphor for my analysis of territorializing monotheisms (Holland 2013: 116). If we see territorialization as creating fields of resonance and redundancy that link up with more abstract, transcendent centers of power and being, then we can conceive of high rituals as territorializing centers. I have described rituals here as something like a territorializing tree, microcosmic sites of dense, redundant indexical and iconic signs that resonate with, and link up with, a wider macrocosm, i.e. trunk. So in what follows, when I discuss territorialization, I am referring to the process through which each ritual center territorializes its surrounds in order to make them branches of their monotheistic value tree—which is given its most perfect, most redundant, resonant, and hence territorialized expression at the ritual core.[7] In short, I see religious values as creating drives towards certain forms of territorialization, and hence defining what is at stake in struggles over the control of territory. I will flesh this out in Chapters 1-3.

Fieldwork, Method and Limitations

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[7] This is not to say that Orthodox and Muslim ritual forms do not also have rhizomatic features, or that they have the fascist tendencies of certain highly arborescent forms that Deleuze and Guattari elaborated upon. While Deleuze and Guattari were clear that many social formations have a combination of rhizomatic and arborescent characteristics, or stateses (e.g. 1987: 17), here I use the term because I want to draw attention to how Muslim and Orthodox practices resonate with a ritual center. I will use their concept as a tool, like they suggested, without pulling much else out from their framework.

This dissertation's ethnography is based on a total of 21 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Gondar, Ethiopia. I stayed in Gondar for a month in August of 2010, then lived in Gondar uninterrupted between September, 2013 and May, 2015. I began my fieldwork in 2013 focusing on the Orthodox Christian community, making regular visits to churches and forming a network in my neighborhood. During the first half of my fieldwork I rented a floor in a two story building housed within a residential compound near the center of town. In Gondar, wealthier individuals lived in homes nestled within walled compounds, which also often contain separate buildings with smaller residences that the owners rent out. I lived in one of these residences with my spouse and two daughters, which connected us to the main family as a quasi-member of the household. My compound resided in a neighborhood, known as Autoparko, which functioned as an expat neighborhood during the Italian occupation from 1936-1941. "Autoparko," is Italian for "parking place," reminiscent of the fact that Italian expats owned cars and parked them inside the walls that surrounded the villas they built for themselves (Solomon 2004). Because of its large number of spacious, gated homes, it is known as an affluent area. Though most of Autoparko's residence used to be Christian, in the last ten years or so, some wealthy Muslims have purchased the nicer properties, which has some Orthodox residents concerned that they are becoming a minority in what was formerly known as a "Christian neighborhood." In August 2014, we moved into our own house in a neighborhood further out from town near Gondar University. I did not work much to integrate into this neighborhood and attempted to maintain my ties to Autoparko and the nearby city center. In July of 2014, I also rented an office in one of Gondar's market centers, which helped me form relationships with individuals running local businesses.

When I began my fieldwork, I had the objective of carrying out comparable fieldwork with Muslims, Pentecostals and Orthodox Christians in Gondar. This, of course, presented challenges. After focusing on Orthodox Christians for the first six months or so, I eventually obtained permission to sit in mosque courtyards and worked to expand my Muslim network. My movement between the two communities was not always smooth, and sometimes it garnered disapproval. This was costly in some ways, making certain individuals less inclined to participate my research, but it was also instructive. As I will show, my ambiguous place "betwixt and between" the two communities helped me learn the pressure points—the sites where the boundaries between the two communities were ridged and inflexible and points where the boundaries were more porous, as well as the sites where the boundaries hardened and slackened under different circumstances. My place in-between also helped me understand the kinds of social interaction between the communities that were acceptable and encouraged.

Therefore, one major methodological choice I made in my research was to absorb some of the costs of moving between communities in order to learn more about the border separating them, as well as the rules of border crossings. This also meant I had to scale back my original research plans in some ways. For example, even after acquiring permission from Muslim leaders to hang around the mosque courtyards, and being encouraged by several Muslim friends to do so, I eventually discontinued my mosque attendance because there always seemed to be a group that was ill-at-ease about my presence. The political situation at the time of arrival also increased the challenge of working with Muslims. As I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 8, during the years leading up to my fieldwork with Ethiopian Muslims, the government had been engaged in a protracted confrontation with its Muslim citizens over state interference with their religious activities and organizations (Ficquet 2015; Østebø 2013b). Given that these unpopular interventions were justified with the rhetoric of the U.S. led "War on Terror," Gondaré Muslims had good reason to suspect me of being a spy, or at least to assume that whatever use my research would be put to, it Would not serve their interests. All in all, then, I must admit at the outset, that I had greater access to the Orthodox Christian community and this will probably be reflected in my ethnographic account.

As for my work with Pentecostals, this aspect of my fieldwork was largely a success, but the data I was able to obtain on all three communities was so extensive that it became unwieldy. To keep the dissertation of manageable scope, I had to set aside the data on Pentecostals for now and focus on Muslims and Orthodox Christians. Giving a thorough treatment of how Pentecostals fit into patterns of coexistence and conflict in Gondar would only strengthen and enrich the picture painted here, but the space needed to do all the communities justice, while still allowing me to say what I wanted to say about Orthodox-Muslim relations, goes beyond what is appropriate for a dissertation. I make brief comparisons with Pentecostals at different points insofar as it illuminates patterns of Muslim-Orthodox relations.

In order to make up for the costs of moving between different communities, I hired two Muslim research assistants, employed at different times, and two Orthodox Christian research assistants. They conducted some interviews on their own, and helped me arrange some with important members of each community. They also transcribed and helped me translate a high volume of interviews. As for my access to public religious teachings, both Muslim and Orthodox teachers broadcasted their voice over a loudspeaker, and passersby could listen from the street outside mosque and church compounds. Every Friday we could hear preaching from a nearby mosque from our office. Therefore, a large portion of Muslim and Orthodox teachings in Gondar were part of the public domain and easily accessible. With the help of one of my research assistants, I gained access to police records relating to the conflicts of 2009, which I draw upon in my account of these events in Chapter 6. Finally, though I have a high volume of interview data, I have attempted to rely on participant observation data as much as possible in my ethnographic account. Over the course of my fieldwork I wrote over 260,000 words of field notes, wherein I recorded observations of rituals, holidays, social practices and casual conversations. Because these notes record observations while in the throes of the ethnographic context, they are given priority in the ethnographic account, while the interview material serves as a supplement.

Overview of Chapters and their Theoretical Frame

One of the hallmarks of the approach taken here is that I locate values on the surface of social interaction; that is, I focus on actions that have recognizable value-relevance. In approaching the concrete ethnographic details, I find it helpful to draw on Munn’s (1986) treatment of what she calls, “value creation” as a form of work, that is, as a collective labor. Understanding value realization as a form of work is useful here because it takes values out of airy realms of ideology, and recognizes the blood, sweat and tears often involved in attempts to turn an ought into an is (see also Graeber 2001). For example, to create and sustain a ritual center of value realization, like an Orthodox church, requires extensive expenditure of time and resources. In addition to the hard labor of construction, I often saw clergy members sitting in front of a church compound, loudspeaker in hand, soliciting funds from the faithful to build a specific church. The small and large bills Christians dropped in the donation pile are the hard earned fruits of their ordinary labors; labors expended in an economic environment that many find quite stifling and frustrating. In addition, keeping up with the liturgical schedule of a functioning church requires grueling labor on the part of clergy, sometimes requiring them to stay up all night performing liturgical chants while fasting (abstaining from food and drink). Finally, the ability of clergy members to perform this labor is only earned after years of study and practice, often while begging for food door-to-door and living in poverty. Keeping this labor intensive dimension of value pursuits in mind, I will describe the activities that set out to realize a given value as "value-work." I will also use the term "value complex" to describe the loosely integrated collection of discourses, practices, evaluations, cosmologies, and rituals that reflect, or seek to realize, high religious values like "submission to God," as well as lower scale social values like "harmony" (see Chapter 4).

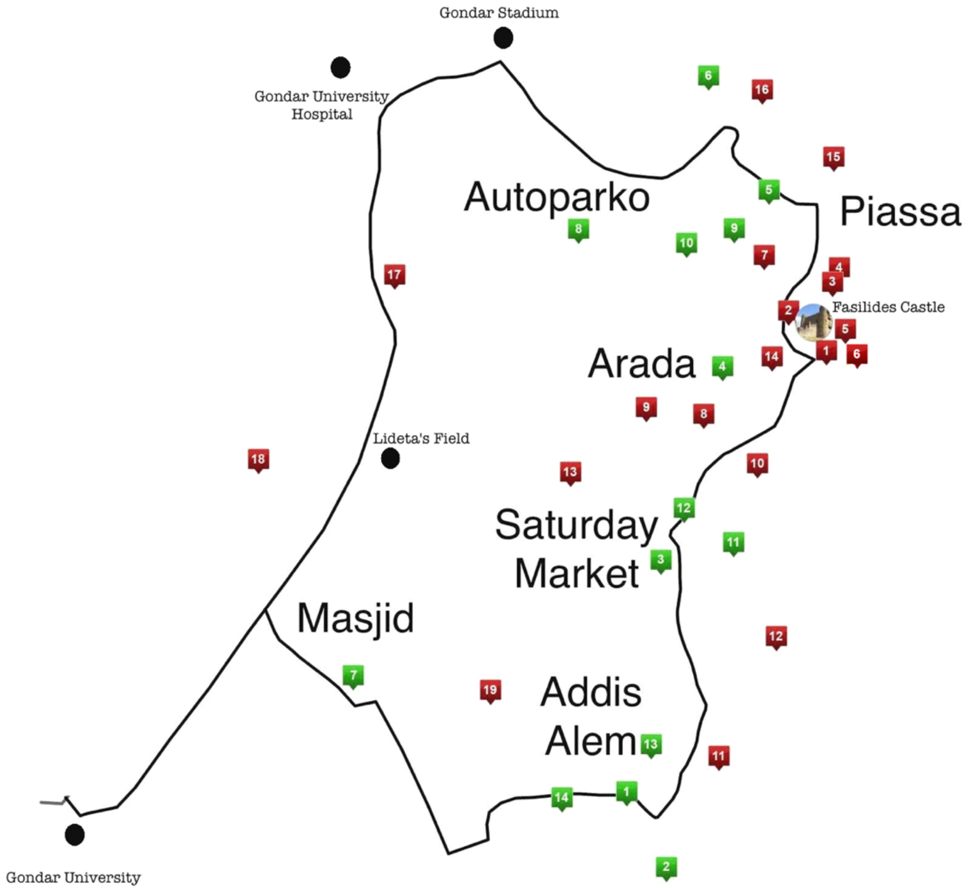
In Chapters 2 and 3, I will provide accounts of Orthodox and Muslim value complexes. In these chapters I will look at the discourses that elaborate Orthodox and Muslim cosmologies and the visions of "the good" they set out to realize (Robbins 2013a). I will also discuss what practices of evaluation, collective actions, and labor expenditure says about respective Muslim and Orthodox value-complexes and the importance of territory to value realization. Another way I will draw on Munn (1986) in this chapter is by seeing value-work as pushing against what she calls "negative value," or "value subversion." Negative value threatens to push against, or undoes in some way, the effects of positive value work. To take an example from Munn's ethnography, witches typify a value subversion because they *retain* food and objects, and thus undermine the value of intersubjective expansion through sharing and inter-island exchange. I will distinguish between a value inversion, a figure who embodies an inversion of established values (Basso 1979; Brightman 1993), and a value subversion, an active attempt to undermine positive value (Munn 1986). Value inversions can become value subversions, but one is a characterological type, while the other is an *action*, which often provokes some kind of pushback to counteract its corrosive effects on positive value-work. Gawans push back against witchcraft with exhortation, while in other contexts, including western ones, violent responses to witches have been more common (Levack 1995). In my account of value complexes in Gondar, I pay attention to the value inversion that serve as foil for positive value, as well as instances of active value subversion and methods for pushing back against them in different contexts. Understanding the relationship between positive and negative value in each community is important in the context my treatment of religious conflict because, as I discussed in a previous section, many instances of interreligious violence the world over involve typified demonizations of the other. I show in Chapter 6, in particular, how understanding patterns of discourse and action relating to value subversion in both Muslim and Orthodox value-complexes can help us comprehend the role of religion in instances of interreligious conflict.

In Chapter 4, I turn my attention to the shared space of Muslim-Christian social interaction. I will discuss the values reflected in discourses and practice on the not-so-cosmic scale of everyday social interaction in mixed social space. Then, drawing on neo-Dumontian theory of value hierarchies, I will discuss how Muslims and Christians negotiate the relationship between the transcendent value-work of ritual centers and lower scale value work of quotidian social interaction. In this chapter I will attempt to understand interfaith social relations at “different scales of social life” (Das 2013: 82). In Chapter 6, I will further discuss techniques for negotiating the different value complexes, with a focus on codes of silence that keep negative evaluations of the religious other from showing up on the borderlands between religious communities. Here I show that, in terms of normative social practice, whatever negative evaluations of the religious other that Christians and Muslims produce in homogenous religious company usually remain beneath the surface in mixed faith interactions. Muslims and Orthodox Christians reflexively identified codes of silence as a deliberate strategy for maintaining harmonious relations.

In Chapter 6, I will discuss in detail a set of conflicts between Muslims and Christians that unfolded in 2009. I will base my account on police records and oral histories. One point I want to emphasize in this chapter is that a normative relation of coexistence and ostensible harmony suddenly comes undone when latent or potential conflicts between the imperatives of Muslim and Orthodox value-complexes were *brought to the surface* and explicitly performed. During these events, individuals on both sides acted on the macrocosmic scale and saw violent retaliation as pushing back against, or undoing the effects of, a value subversion. In Chapter 7, I will focus on controversial Islamic reform movements in Gondar and the effects of the state’s anti-terrorism campaign. I will frame this discussion around what I am calling, “ambiguous antagonism,” a mode of relating caught between harmony and antagonism. In this in-between space, some Gondaré Muslims and Christians view each other with suspicion and hostility, in part because of fears of extremism and terrorism; however, *offense*, or value subversion, in these cases are not sufficiently clear and recognizable to provoke open antagonism. I show how the studied use of ambiguity helps forestall open antagonism by preventing offenses from being clearly perceived on the social surface. In general, the ethnographic account that follows will show how Muslims and Orthodox Christians live in the same world *and* different worlds. The next chapter, Chapter 1, will begin exploring these separate worlds by describing how Gondaré Muslims and Orthodox Christians inhabit distinct historical imaginaries.

A paragraph on page 15 was included in a paper titled “Transvaluing ISIS in Orthodox Christian Majority Ethiopia: On the Inhibition of Violence,” which has been accepted for publication by Current Anthropology.

Map of Gondar


Gondar Stadium
Gondar University Hospital
Autoparko
Piassa
Fasilides Castle
Arada
Lideta's Field
Saturday Market
Masjid
Addis Alem
Gondar University

Main Roads	—
Points of Interest	●
Churches	🟥 1
Mosques	🟩 1

Mosques	(Green numbers)	Churches	(Red numbers)
1	al-Kadim *	1	Baal Egzīaber/ Addebaybay Yesus
2	Shėkh Ali Gondarė *	2	Gimchabet Mariam
3	Jamīya al-Kabir (Saturday Market	3	Giorgis
4	Keña Bėt *	4	Aṭaṭamī Mīkael (St. Michael Church)
5	Ergeber *	5	Teklah Haymanot
6	Kebele 14 *	6	Rufeal
7	al-Najashi *	7	Teklah Haymanot
8	al-Nur	8	Fīt Mīkael (St. Michael Church)
9	Shėkh Muhammad Dessei	9	Kidane Meheret (Covenant of Mercy)
10	Amanata Hussein	10	Qirkos
11	Rahman	11	Abo
12	al-Tejani	12	Mariam
13	Tofīk	13	Bata Mariam
14	Hussein Hudra	14	Yohannes (The Apostle John)
		15	Medhani Alem (Savior of the World)
	* Tall highly visible minaret	16	Gabriel
		17	Meṭmequ Yohannes (John the Baptist)
		18	Lideta Mariam
		19	Giorgis

Figure 1 Map of Gondar

Chapter 1

Muslims and Christians in Gondaré Time and Space: Divergent Historical Imaginaries and Spatio-Temporal Valences

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For Bakhtin (1981), the castle served as a basic example of an object of space inextricably bound up in an epoch of time; its appearance in a novel creates an expectation in the reader that they will enter a medieval world, an era unequivocally eclipsed by modernity and irreversibly consigned to the past. In the lived time-space of Gondar, castles loom conspicuously in the area of town known as *Piassa,* or the city center. The castle compound is visible along the main road taken to travel from Piassa to the major market areas of the city, “Arada” and “Ḳidamé Gebeya” (Saturday Market). Located in the heavily trafficked heart of the city, castles comprise an inescapable feature of Gondar’s landscape, serving as a mnemonic of a bygone era, evoking the historical imaginary of the Gondarine kings, as well as, given the castles’ contemporary surrounds, contrasting that history with the present. As Marcus put it, the castles serve, for Orthodox Christians as “a melancholy reminder of what Gondar once was” (2002: 256). Though Gondaré Muslims and Christians both live in the shadow of the castles, they have different orientations to the history of which they testify, appropriating, remembering and valuing that history in such different ways that, I will argue, Orthodox Christian and Muslim Gondarés inhabit different historical imaginaries. Each community brings a distinct historical consciousness to bear on the same events, understanding them in a way that positions their community on the side of “the good,” in both the past of Christian hegemony and in the present era of religious plurality.

This chapter provides key details from Ethiopia’s historical record that will help the reader appreciate the dissertation’s ethnography in its historical context. I also juxtapose historical details with ethnographic accounts of how the past continues to make itself present (cf. Lambek 2002), that is, how the past reproduces itself in a continual nexus wherein Gondar’s spatial topography, historical imaginaries, and the collective projects of contemporary Gondarés intersect. I will start with popular interpretations of Ethiopian and Gondaré history that underpin the idea of Ethiopia as a “Christian country,” and serve as an ideological backdrop for assertions, like that of the Orthodox young man quoted in the introduction, that in Gondar “everyone is Christian”—which may be another way of saying everyone in Gondar *ought* to be Christian, or Gondar *ought* to be homogeneously Christian. Following my initial focus on Christians, I will move on to a discussion of historical events, and corresponding present day imaginaries, that bring religious others into the picture. The different valences Christians and Muslims give to Gondar’s past underpin their conflicting evaluations of Gondar’s increasingly plural present, as well as their different actions and objectives within that present.

Ethiopia as a Chosen Nation and Gondar as its Capital

Most Orthodox Christian Gondaré know the story of the Queen of Sheba, or Queen Makeda, and her son Menelik. A few short passages in the Old Testament give an account of the “Queen of Sheba” visiting King Solomon, showering him with gifts, seeking wisdom, and testing “him with hard questions” (1 Kings 19:1). An Ethiopian holy book dating at least to the 14th century, called the *Kebra Negest* (The Glory of

Kings), elaborates upon this story, giving it an Ethiopian twist, claiming the Queen of Sheba was an Ethiopian queen. It recounts that during the queen's visit, Solomon tricked her into sleeping with him and she conceived a child. On her journey home to Ethiopia, she gave birth to Solomon's child, Menelik, who grew up to rule Ethiopia. In adulthood, Menelik traveled to Jerusalem to visit his father, the King of Israel. Solomon bequeathed Menelik with riches and an entourage to take back with him to Ethiopia; however, some of his new servants were upset about having to leave Jerusalem, so they stole the Ark of the Covenant from the temple without Menelik's knowledge. Upon learning of the Ark's theft, King Solomon sets out to pursue his son, but his efforts are thwarted when Menelik, along with his entourage and the Ark, miraculously shot up in the air and flew back to Ethiopia. This divine intervention indicated that God's favor had passed to Ethiopia (Budge 2000), Ethiopia had superseded Israel as God's covenant people. Ethiopian Orthodox Christians believe that the original Ark of the Covenant rests in a church in Axum, and once a year, on a holiday called *Mariam Ṣion*, Ethiopian Orthodox Christians make pilgrimage to Axum to honor the original Ark. As I observed when I took this pilgrimage with my local parish in 2013, the Ark is fastidiously protected and never taken out of the inner sanctum of the large church that houses it. As the *Kebra Negest* tells us, the Ark has a history of being stolen, and, rumor has it, the Israelis want it back.

Social philosopher Mohammad Girma argues that what he calls "covenant thinking"— that is, thinking of social life in terms a promise between a client, or a group of people, and a powerful, benevolent patron—is "an underlying philosophical matrix behind Ethiopian social intercourse" (2012: xix). Whether or not this "matrix" is as pervasive in Ethiopia's diverse society as Girma claims I cannot say; however, for

Orthodox Christians, the Ark instantiates God’s role as the ultimate benevolent patron of Ethiopia (see also Antohin 2014). Most Orthodox Christians I know believe the Ark has protected Ethiopia from foreign invaders throughout her history. Its presence in Ethiopia explains how it remained independent while surrounding African territories succumbed to European colonialism. Most Orthodox Gondarés know the story of Ethiopia’s defeat of the Italians in the late 19th century at the battle of Adwa. The then emperor, incidentally named Menelik II, brought a holy replica of the original Ark of the Covenant with him to battle. My Orthodox Gondaré informants credit the Ark of covenant, and Menelik II's respect for it, with the Ethiopian victory over the Italians. Moreover, when Ebola outbreaks occurred in Liberia and Nigeria in 2014, my Orthodox informants confidently asserted that Ebola would never spread to Ethiopia because of the Ark. Finally, as ISIS expanded its territory, and allegedly released maps that included Ethiopia among its ambitions, my Orthodox informants once again assured me ISIS would never enter Ethiopia because of the Ark's protection. [8] The Ark's blessing upon its territory, Ethiopia, is general enough that Orthodox Christians can see its influence whenever Ethiopia averts major disaster and in whatever facet the country appears to possess a positive quality not held by its neighbors.

While in the 21st century the story of the Ark of the Covenant continues to inspire national pride and Ethiopian exceptionalism, in the 14th century it legitimated the rule of a new regime, known as the Solomonic Dynasty (Levine 1965; Taddesse 1972). Now, I would like to turn attention briefly to the Solomonic rulers that remained in power in the

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[8] The map caught the attention of the Ethiopian media after ABC news reported on a map tweeted by the German neo-fascist group “third position” alleging to show ISIS’s “five-year expansion plan,” though the claim was later debunked (see Strauss 2014).

Ethiopian highlands from the late 13th century until Haile Selassie was deposed in 1974. Using the Kebra Negest as their mythical charter, the rulers of the Solomonic Dynasty claimed direct descent from King Solomon to justify their claim to the throne.[9] Their rise in the 13th century established a group known as the *Amhara* at the center of imperial power. Today, the Ethiopian government categorizes native speakers of the Amharic language in Gondar and the surrounding regions as belonging to the Amhara ethnic group; however, this use of the term "Amhara" did not come into common currency until the latter half of the 20th century. As opposed to referring to a stable ethnic group, the term Amhara has been used in a variety of other ways over the centuries, such as, to refer to the ruling authorities, and the regions in the northern highlands where Amharic speaking people lived (as opposed to its people) (Chernetsov 1996). The term is also often used as simply coterminous with "Ethiopian" or "Christian" (Levine 2003). Amhara were not so much a self-conscious ethnic group alongside other self-conscious ethnic groups, as they were a population tied together by language, religion and geography that set the standard against which deviations from the Ethiopian ideal were measured, similar to the historical position of whites in Euro-American society—though the Amhara were more porous than race-based status groups in the west (Messay 1999).

Under the Solomonic Dynasty Christianity and politics were closely intertwined. Christianity came to Ethiopia in the 4th century when Emperor Azana of Axum was converted by two shipwrecked Syrian Christians, who were later followed by a group of

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[9] They defeated the Zagwe dynasty in the 13th century, who, incidentally traced their lineage back to Moses.

Syrian missionaries known as the "nine saints."[10] The adoption of Christianity "did not assume the form of a single-occasion…It proceeded gradually and voluntarily" (Kobishchanov 1979: 67). Much as Comaroff and Comaroff (1991) claimed with respect to European colonialism, the spread of the state apparatus to Ethiopia's peripheries and the spread of Christianity went hand in hand. Churches and military settlements were built in concert as the empire acquired territory (Taddesse 1972: 37). Incidentally, when Gondar became the sitting capital of the Solomonic Dynasty in the 17th century, it also became a religious capital—the city's castles and churches were built in concert as the emperors worked to establish Gondar as the center of power in the Christian highlands.

Emperor Fasilides founded Gondar as the capital of Ethiopia in 1630. The Solomonic emperors ruled from Gondar until the 1760s.[11] Once Fasilides took up permanent residence in Gondar, he began a building campaign, breaking ground on a castle compound and building churches right outside the castle walls. His successors added to these building projects, expanding on his initial castle project, as well as building some castles of their own. They also constructed more churches around the castle compound and built many more churches further out from the city center. The kings gave the churches generous land grants, which provided hefty financial support that attracted clergy, talented scholars, and seminary students to Gondar. Because of the political turmoil caused by recent interference from Portuguese Catholic missionaries, Fasilides started the Gondarine period off with a foreign policy of isolation from Europe, which entailed severing diplomatic ties, most trade relations, and even prohibiting Europeans from entering the country.[12] Hence, the intensified development of Ethiopia's Christian tradition, which characterized the Gondarine period, unfolded in isolation from Europe's influence. As Levine notes, Gondar's role as imperial capital was less as a melting pot than as "an agent for the quickened development of the Amhara's own culture" (1965:42). Levine added, "The countryfolk looked on Gondar not as a hotbed of alien custom and immorality, as they often regard Addis Ababa today, but as the most perfect and advanced embodiment of their own traditional values."

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[10] Due to its Syrian influence the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church counts itself among Oriental Orthodox Churches, which includes Egyptian Coptics, Eritrean Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Malankara Orthodox in India, and Armenian Apostolic churches. These churches are distinguished by being pre-Chalcedonian, which means they reject the council of Chalcedon held in 451 AD, which determined that Christ had two natures, human and divine. Instead they see Christ as having one nature containing both humanity and divinity (Binns 2002). By contrast the council of Chalcedon concluded that Christ had "Two natures unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably" (Bindley 1899: 297).

[11] Emperors still sat in Gondar after the 1760s, but he was all but powerless, and Ethiopia was largely ruled by regional lords who were engaged in constant civil war. This was known as the "Era of Princes" (Mordechai 1968).

The legacy of the Gondarine period still looms large in the Orthodox Christian consciousness. For example, I heard a rumor that a prestigious family in Gondar claimed that portions of the castle compound belonged to them because of their descent from King Fasilides. The castles from the Gondarine period facilitate Orthodox Gondarés in stepping into the time-space of the kings and seeing themselves as a continuation of that legacy. In 2015, when ISIS released a film depicting the massacre of dozens of Orthodox Christian migrants in Libya, a group of Orthodox Christians organized a memorial march through Piassa. As they passed the gate of the castle compound, they all kneeled before it, sang a hymn, and recited the Lord's Prayer. I asked my friend Sammy why they stopped at the castle gate, and he told me it was the place people used to go to petition the king. A few days later when the government organized its own event to decry the massacre, a group of Orthodox young people burst onto the scene while the government official was speaking, singing a hymn at the top of their lungs as an indirect protest. They passed the stage on which the government official spoke, knelt and prayed, facing in the direction of a nearby castle ruin, conspicuously turning their backs to the government official (See Dulin In press). These religious gestures to the castle suggest preference and esteem for the old order, a time when religious and political spheres were fused, and, thus, on certain occasions they provide a way to subtly contest the current secular administration.

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[12] The Portuguese helped Ethiopia win a war with Muslim armies from the southern city-state of Adel in the 14th century. Following the victory, Portuguese missionaries converted Emperor Susenyos to Catholicism and attempted, among other things, to change the Orthodox liturgy and calendar to match that Roman Catholicism. This resulted in a popular uprising, followed by the expulsion of the Portuguese (Crummey 1972).

In medieval Ethiopia, peoples and political authorities saw the practice of Christianity and the building of churches as an integral part of maintaining public order and general prosperity and protection.[13] In contemporary Gondar, many Christians maintain a holistic view of the relationship between Christianity, bodily health, and society. Gondaré Christians are very proud of the famous 44 churches built by the Gondarine kings (Marcus 2002). According to my Christian informants, these churches tamed and civilized the surrounding territory, raising Gondar to its later splendor. Before Emperor Fasilides built the first churches in Gondar, some informants told me, wild animals overran the city; lions and tigers killed the king’s soldiers. Others tell me Emperor Fasilides built the first St. Michael Church (Fīt Mīkael) in response to a petition from residents of Gondar whose lives were being ravaged by an epidemic.[14] They had faith that if the king built a church in the name of Michael, he would heal them. As soon as the construction concluded, the archangel did as they expected. St. Michael immediately wiped away the epidemic and restored health to the surrounding communities.

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[13] Hence, the wars that devastated the Christian highland in the 14th century caused many to question their devotion to Ethiopian Orthodoxy, opening them up to the persuasions of Portuguese missionaries (Crummey 1972).

[14] According to some accounts, Fit Michael was built in response to a famine.

Likewise, a well-regarded priest at the famous Selassie Church (Church of the Holy Trinity) told me a history of Gondar in which King Fasilides encountered a series of individual problems and then solved them by constructing an individual church. Wild animals were the first problem, endangering human lives and livestock, but the aggressive animal population disappeared once the king built a church. After that, famine ravaged the land, but the mass scarcity ceased once he built another church. The priest then mentioned a set of administrative problems that also went away when King Fasilides built, once again, another church. The variety of problems that church construction solved in this priest's history of Gondar elucidates the generality of the benefits churches are thought to distill upon the community—church building shows up as a societal cure-all. At the end of this historical overview, the priest also added the following:

> If there were no churches in Gondar, there would be no peace. Disease would come. People would toss aside their peaceful relations with one another. Demons will come to authority. Therefore, the prayer in churches, the Holy Communion, the standing hymns [sung by clergy], provides peace and wellbeing for the people. Here [Gondar], unlike elsewhere, has had no earthquakes, no floods, no storms, up until now. Why? Because there are churches here.

The Amharic word selṭan, which he conjugated into a verb while describing the rise of demons (aganent īselṭanalu), is used by Amharic speakers in other contexts to refer to the authority of government officials. This statement in Amharic suggests that if churches in Gondar were to disappear, the reign of demons would replace God's authoritative reign over the city. This demonic revolution would bring social and bodily breakdown. The churches' power keeps this generalized entropy at bay.

The Christian kings therefore, by building churches, established a paramount “good” in Gondar, a good that is not only remembered in narratives, but indelibly inscribed on the landscape, and renewed in ritual practices that permeate Orthodox Christians’ lives. It is a good that fights the chaotic, destructive forces of demons, and establishes generalized “blessing” through the vivifying reign of God. As the priest’s quote above indicates, Orthodox churches provide a way for the generative blessings of the past to be continually realized in the present. Today, churches remain an inescapable feature of Gondar. If it is the right day, you'll likely hear them before you see them, and hear them from many directions, even wake up to them in the middle of the night. As long as the priests and deacons are performing the liturgy in the church's inner sanctum, everyone in the surrounding neighborhood has to hear the liturgical chants broadcasted over loudspeaker. That is the case if the liturgy starts at 6 AM, or 3 AM or if they go all night, as occurs five days of a week for over a month during the "Arba Ṣom", or "40-day-fast." My first day after arriving in Gondar in 2013, I left my hotel in Piassa at 5 AM and could hear liturgy from all directions. I tried to follow the sounds, but kept getting thrown off course by the multi-directional chorus. The days one can hear liturgical chants resounding throughout the city, one also sees the streets fill up with church goers dressed in the Ethiopian Orthodox version of "Sunday best." White shawls, called *gabi* for men, and *netela* or gabi for women, draped in a symmetrical front crossover called "*mesqel*", which translated into English, means the "lesson of the cross."

If we understand different degrees of territorialization in terms of how different segments of space resonate with one another (Holland 2013; Deleuze and Guattari 1987), then the area around the castle compound should be classified as an intensely territorialized Orthodox space. If you walk on the road around the castle, about 670 meters in diameter, you will pass five different Orthodox churches at relatively even distance from one another. On major Orthodox Holidays, like Epiphany (*Ṭimqet*), the Day of the True Cross (*Mesqel*), and Christmas (*Genna*), the Orthodox throngs clothed in white become so thick the roads running through Piassa close down and it is sometimes difficult to move on foot from one place to another. Moreover, Orthodox Christians comprise the overwhelming majority in the neighborhoods on the east side of the castle compound, where all but one of the five churches surrounding the castle are located. Also, east of the castle there is not a mosque in sight. The density of Christian bodies, dress, jewelry, gestures, sounds, architecture, yearly flows of people, groups of priests and seminary students, the multi-directional liturgical chorus heard throughout the year, and, all of this, surrounding the castle compound built by the Christian kings, resonate with one another as branches of the Orthodox Christian tree. Together, these mutually resonant, redundant echoes create an emergent force pulling Orthodox Christians in, evoking the time-space of the old imperial order, inviting Orthodox Christians to imagine themselves as a continuation of that order, and inducing an experience of, what Marcus (2002) called, “imperial nostalgia” for the old unity. In the 1960s an Orthodox Christian young man described Gondar as “one big monastery” (Levine 1965: 47). [15] Particularly around the castle, that description still captures in large measure the feel of Gondaré space in the 21st century.

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[15] I am taking this quote a little out of context here. The youth in question was referring to the lack of dancehalls in Gondar at the time Levine carried research, but it was included as part of Levine’s general description of the deeply “implanted” “ecclesiastical character” of Gondar at the time (1965: 46-47).

While the constellation of elements around the castle compound marks it as intensely Orthodox territory, it also builds on the legacy of the old order by positioning that Christian territory at the center of Gondar's modern symbols of prestige and power. Besides the obvious symbolic connection of the castle to historical Ethiopian power, the compound is positioned in Piassa, the city center, which is also the location of major government offices like the post office and Ethiotelecomm.[16] Moreover, important government buildings, including the courthouse, tourism office and central police station, as well as some of Gondar's nicer hotels and restaurants, are located in Orthodox areas to the east and northeast of the castle compound. Finally, Orthodox Christianity resonates throughout those government offices because the majority of police officers and government workers/administrators are Orthodox Christians; and in Gondar, they all wear Christian jewelry around their necks, which normally ensures that their Christian identities remain visible in social interaction.

Divergent Religio-Historical Imaginaries: The First *Hijra* and Ahmad Gragn

So far, I have painted a fairly homogenous picture of Gondar's history in an attempt to convey the history of Orthodox hegemony and how that history lives on in Gondar's present. At this point, I will bring Muslims into the picture. Since at least the 10th century, Ethiopia has been surrounded by Muslim polities, and from those polities individual Muslims have trickled into the Christian kingdom, constituting a substantial minority (Ficquet 2015; Trimmingham 1952). As I will show in detail in Chapter 4, Muslims and Christians live integrated lives in Gondar. They regularly interact. They gossip, they grow up together, they eat together, they chew khat together, they attend each other’s weddings and funerals. However, in what follows, I will also show that they live in different historical imaginaries. In other words, Muslims and Christians often have different understandings of key events in Ethiopian history, and/or they imbue the same events with different values. These different interpretations have implications for how much power and recognition Muslims can claim. They also have implications for how much Christians trust Muslims, on a collective level, with power and influence. Finally, they have implications for how justified Christians are in containing the movement of Muslims from their historical place in Gondar’s periphery.

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[16] Ethiotelecomm is the government-run telecommunication operation, which is the only way one can access phone networks and set up internet connections in Ethiopia.

When many of my Gondaré Muslim informants told me the history of Islam, it would start with Allah’s revelation to the prophet Muhammad, but then almost immediately move to an episode known as the first *hijra*. The term “hijra” means “migration” in Arabic, and, when used in an Islamic religious context, it often refers to the migration of the prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in order to escape persecution. Most Ethiopian Muslims know about an earlier hijra, one that preceded Muhammad’s great escape. At the height of the Meccan persecutions, Muhammad sent 17 of his companions to Ethiopia, telling them, ““If you go to Abyssinia, you will find a king under whom none are persecuted” (Trimmingham 1952: 6). The Christian emperor, known in Muslim sources as al-Najashi, not only gave the Muslim refugees asylum, but later sent 16 of them to Medina in a ship he gifted to the prophet to aid in his war with Mecca. In present day Gondar, Muslims and Christians, as well as government officials in public speeches, invoke this episode as an example of Ethiopia’s long tradition of Muslim-Christian coexistence, stretching back to the founding of Islam.

And yet, Muslims and Christians have different views on what happened when the prophet's companions met the king in Abyssinia. According to Muslims, the Christian king converted to Islam and changed his name to al-Najashi. Al-Najashi is an important figure to Gondaré Muslims. There is a large mosque named after him in one of Gondar's recently developed neighborhoods, a neighborhood that, incidentally, is colloquially known as "masjid," meaning "mosque". Muslims in Gondar, and throughout Ethiopia, make a yearly pilgrimage to al-Najashi's tomb in the Tigray region to the north. I have heard Muslims in Gondar cry out to al-Najashi during prayer, asking him to mediate a blessing from Allah on their behalf. Muslims in Gondar often use the narrative of al-Najashi's conversion to legitimate their claim that Ethiopia belongs to Muslims just as much as it belongs to Christians. My friend Mustafa, for example, told me the story of al-Najashi's conversion on a number of occasions. He often brought it up when we were talking about some Christians' view that Ethiopia is a Christian country—or, as this idea is often phrased, that "Ethiopia is an Island of Christianity in a sea of Islam."[17] The story of al-Najashi functions as a charter for Muslim political legitimacy in Ethiopia in a way that is somewhat analogous to how the Queen of Sheba story functions as charter for Ethiopian Orthodox Christians.

By contrast, some Christians interpret the story of the first hijra in a way that rhetorically de-legitimizes Muslim claims that Islam deserves parity with Christianity in Ethiopia. Christians do not accept that al-Najashi converted to Islam. Instead they claim the king had simply showed the Muslim refugees hospitality. Some Orthodox Christians use the claim that the prophet’s companions were simply “guests” in order to assert that Muslims should maintain the humility of outsiders, that Islam does not have equal claim to Ethiopia. As Herzfeld (1987) points out, hospitality creates a hierarchical relationship between guest and host. The host provides generosity to the guest, and thus instills the guest with a sense of indebtedness and obligation toward the host. The guest may receive food and drink, but never power over the host’s domain. About four years prior to my arrival in the field in 2013, Muslims had gained permission to build a mosque on a field many Christians in Gondar believed belonged to the church (See Chapter 6). In early 2009, Christian protesters gathered on the field and, among other things, chanted, “They [Muslims] came here as guests, once we hosted them, they wanted to build a mosque at the door of the church!" Here the hierarchy that characterizes the guest/host relationship—in which the guest is expected to be grateful and recognize the host’s authority over his house—was laminated onto Muslim-Christian relations in 2009. In this framing, Muslims building a mosque in a Christian neighborhood is akin to guests receiving hospitality from a generous host only to later take it upon themselves to build a house on their host’s land.

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[17] This phrase has its origins in a letter Emperor Menelik II wrote to European powers (Desplat and Østebø 2013), and has wide currency among Gondaré Christians. A group of Orthodox Christians wore a shirt with this phrase to a celebration of Epiphany a few years prior to my fieldwork. The government banned it because they thought it would fuel religious tensions between Muslims and Christians.

Historian of Ethiopian Islam Haggai Elrich (2010) argues that the story of the first hijra comprises one of two historical events that continue to inform the ambivalence that characterizes Muslim-Christian relations in Ethiopia. He claims the story of the first hijra positions Ethiopians as friendly to Muslims, as it embeds positive relations between Ethiopian Christians and Muslims within the founding story of Islam. Elrich also notes that Ethiopia’s ongoing regional partnerships with neighboring Muslim countries have reinforced the historical affinity between Muslims and Ethiopian Christians implied in this story. However, another major historical event, the war between Ethiopia and the armies of Ahmad Gragn, represents Muslim-Christian relations as more antagonistic. In 1527, Ahmad ibn Ibrahim al-Ghazi, also known as Ahmad "Gragn" (the left handed), invaded the Christian highlands from the southern city-state of Adel. A series of confrontations between Adel and Ethiopia in 16th century culminated in an invasion, forced conversions of Christians to Islam and the mass destruction of churches (as Hayden would predict). Eventually, the Christian monarch defeated Gragn, but it left the once prosperous, well-integrated Christian kingdom in shambles. The Gondarine period was an attempt to recover what was left of the empire following the war with Gragn's army. Confirming Elrich's analysis, I found that many Gondaré Christians refer to the military campaigns of Ahmad Gragn as a prototypical cautionary tale about the dangers of Muslim power. Most Orthodox Christians can recount stories of the imam's army burning churches and forcing Orthodox Christians to convert to Islam. After over 400 years, Gragn at times still seemed to be on the tip of every Christian's tongue. Ethiopian Orthodox Christians see Ahmad Gragn in news of terror attacks throughout world, the expansion of ISIS, and the violent religious conflicts in the southern Ethiopian city of Jimma in 2006.[18] In the discourses of some Christians, all these global developments realize that same coercive Muslim essence that is thought to have driven Gragn's invasion (See Chapter 5 and 7).

Though circumspect about their views on Gragn, many Muslims have a different take. In interviews with Muslim informants in Gondar, I asked some their opinion of

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[18] Haustein and Østebo explain the that 2006 conflict in Jimma "erupted in connection with the celebration of Ṭimqet in a village outside of Jimma, and gradually spread to the Beghi area. It resulted in casualties on both sides, churches were burned, and unconfirmed reports tell about Christians being forced to convert to Islam" (2011: 19).

Ahmad Gragn. Some claimed he was a “good person,” because of his piety and work to spread Islam, others even said he was “kind.” My Muslim research assistant Fatima hedged a little, saying Ahmad Gragn was good for Islam, but “not good for the country.” In one conversation, Fatima sought to dispel a rumor she heard from her Christian friends that God struck Ahmad Gragn dead when he tried to enter a certain Christian church. She was adamant, saying that contrary to what her Christian friends told her, she learned in school, “according to science,” that Ahmad Gragn died on the battlefield. By making this point, Fatimah showed she felt some investment in protecting Ahmad Gragn’s reputation as one favored by God. Historian Abdussamad Ahmad (1988) expressed a similarly sympathetic attitude about the imam. He argues, essentially, that the campaign of Ahmad Gragn was a defensive action in response to Christian aggressions, the aggressions of which, at one point, he called the “Christian holocaust” of Muslim people in Ethiopia’s southern territories. He writes that Gragn’s “jihad got a ready response from the discontented elements, who were opposed to the expansion of Amhara soldiers from the Christian highlands” (77).

Muslims I knew in Gondar were understandably wary about sharing their ambivalent admiration of Ahmad Gragn. By contrast, Antihon writes that in the Wollo region, to the east of Gondar, many alleged the Islamic authority was planning to erect a statue of the infamous imam (2014: 48). Needless to say, the outcry from the Christian residents prevented any such plans from materializing. It is not terribly surprising that some Muslims would admire a man who engaged in acts of religious coercion that the vast majority of Ethiopian Muslims would not endorse today. Numerous Christian emperors, including the idolized Emperor Tewodros, also pursued campaigns of forced conversion against Muslims. Despite the actions of their heroes, I have never heard a Christian or Muslim suggest that the religious other should be forced to convert. Overall, Christians often alternated between viewing Muslims as friends, and as an authentic part of the Ethiopian landscape, particularly on the micro level, and seeing them as a potential threat on the macro level, especially when foreign Muslims were taken into account (Haustein and Østebø 2011: 767). Ahmad Gragn narratives play a role in informing that sense of threat and a tendency to see threats in ostensibly a-political religious activities, like Muslim masses gathering for a holiday or Muslim attempts to build a mosque. Muslims, on the other hand, have a hero that Christians see as an unabashed villain. Any articulation of Gragn's virtues must but done very quietly. Generally speaking, different ways of interpreting the first hijra and Gragn's invasion present different maps for how to interpret and react to the legacy of Muslim marginalization that, locally, has its roots in the Gondarine period.

Gondaré Muslims in the Gondarine Period:

Ahmad Gragn was defeated in 1543, 87 years before Fasilides founded Gondar as Ethiopia's capital. The activities of the Gondarine period centered on rebuilding the empire, recovering from the devastation wrought by the war with Ahmad Gragn. Muslims held a sizable presence in Gondar's heyday. They worked as merchants, craftsmen and masons. Most of those who worked on Fasilides Castle in the 17th and 18th century were Beta Israel (Ethiopian Jews), but many Muslims also had a hand in building the castle (Ahmad 2000).[19] Contemporary Gondaré Muslims know of Muslim involvement in the castle’s construction. In 2014, I was walking to the tomb of an esteemed *walī* (Friend of Allah), Shékh Abdul Basset. His tomb is located outside of the sub-city of Azezo, about a 15-minute drive from Piassa. [20] I was walking with a steady flow of Gondaré Muslims heading out to the tomb to honor the Shékh on his yearly festival. On the way, a Muslim man in his 30s told me that Abdul Basset was one of the masons recruited from Egypt to help build Fasilides Castle. He told me that while the Shékh worked on the castle, a group of Orthodox priests approached him and asked for his assistance in converting all the Muslims residents of Gondar to Christianity. The Shékh answered that he would give them a box that would bestow upon them power to convert all of Gondar’s Muslim residents to Christianity. Later Abdul Basset received the box from heaven. It descended from the sky “like a helicopter.” The Shékh gave the box to the priests with instructions not to open it until he told them to. The priests were so anxious to learn the box’s contents, they ignored the Shékh’s instructions and opened it hastily only to be struck blind. From that point on, my Muslim informant told me, Christians in Gondar no longer tried to convert Muslims to Christianity. This story is notable because it re-codes a monument of Christian political and religious dominance in Muslim terms. It not only depicts an important Gondaré Walī as one of the builders of Fasilides Castle, it ties the castle to a story in which God intervenes on the Muslim community’s behalf. God stands in the way of Christian imperatives and protects the imperatives of Islam. It is perhaps also notable that it was a *box* from heaven that blinded

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[19] Beta Israel, or house of Israel, was the self descriptor of the now famous Ethiopian Jews. In Ethiopia they were known as Falasha, which means "foreigner" or "stranger." They were not allowed to own land, so were forced to engage in stigmatized trades such as blacksmithing, weaving and masonry (Kaplan 1992).

Beta Israel lived in the Gondar region for centuries, but now almost all of them have migrated to Israel under right of return (Seeman 2009).

[20] The term awalīyya/walī (friend of Allah) is used among Sufi Muslims to designate Muslims of exemplary piety who continue to mediate between the faithful and Allah after their death. Their tombs often become pilgrimage sites (see Ernst 2011). I will discuss current day practices in Gondar pertaining to the awalīyya in Chapter 3.

the priests, which is reminiscent of the box in which the Ark of the Covenant is kept. In the story of Abdul Basset, Allah gave Muslims their own heavenly box to protect them from the Christian majority, analogous to the way the Ark protects Christian Ethiopia.

From this tale alone we could gather that Gondarine Christian kings left Muslims undisturbed throughout their reign. However, no Gondaré Muslim or Christian can forget that despite their role in helping build Gondar, Muslims were on the receiving end of harsh measures of discrimination from Fasilides' successor, Emperor Yohannes. Solomon writes that Yohannes "seems to have been irritated by the existence of a sizable Muslim population next to his palace" (2003: 91). He called a church council in 1668 and decreed that Muslims could not live in Gondar town with Christians (see also Ahmad 2000). Their residence would be limited to a southern quarter outside the city, a neighborhood that came to be known as "Bét al-Islam" (House of Islam) and, later, "Addis Alem" ("New World"). Today, some hard line Orthodox Christians in Gondar think it was appropriate that Muslims, or at least conspicuous Muslim religious expression, be confined to Addis Alem. Such individuals consider Addis Alem a gift the kings had bestowed on the Muslim community, as one Christian young man told me, "Muslims are guests. We gave them Addis Alem."

While doing fieldwork in Gondar, I spent a lot of time in Addis Alem, what many affectionately call "the first Muslim village." Whatever Addis Alem was like when all of Gondar's Muslims were forced to live there, today it carries a distinct air of marginality. The neighborhood consists of clusters of small houses of relatively humble construction of mud and tin sheets along a windy road down the slope. The lack of nicer homes indicates that wealthier Muslims move out when they get the chance. It bears few signs of development, except for the main paved road that runs through it to connect the market area to newer neighborhoods near the university. There are no cafes. Narrow dirt paths run in between many of the residences. The shops are limited to a few kiosks run out of people's homes. There is a conspicuous mosque along the main road known as the al-Kadim Masjid. The sign at the door of this mosque makes reference to Yohannas' edict of religious segregation, describing in Amharic that the al-Kadim mosque was founded by Emperor Yohannes in 1668. One does not have to walk very far from the main mosque to find three smaller mosques. In contrast to the large number of mosques, there is not a Christian church in sight. In addition, right outside the neighborhoods to the south one finds the tomb of Shékh Ali Gondaré, the most highly esteemed awalyia in Gondar. Muslims make regular trips to the tomb to pray and honor the skaykh. Moreover, Muslims visit Addis Alem in droves on Shékh Ali Gondaré's yearly festival.

The vast majority of Addis Alem's residents are Muslims, though some Christians have moved there because of the cheap rent. Also, some countryfolk have moved in from the surrounding countryside and built houses without a government permit. These houses have to be demolished occasionally, which can lead to violent confrontations between government officials and residents. That these "interlopers" are often able to finish their houses to completion before the government intervenes, speaks to the neighborhood's marginality. The ridges to the south of the neighborhood overlook large empty fields leading to an apparently endless wilderness.[21] I would describe Addis Alem as highly territorialized Muslim space because, similar to the castle compound, "Islam" resonates throughout and echoes itself in a redundant fashion in the form of mosques, crescents on random houses, Muslim persons in Muslim dress, and prayer calls. Yet, whereas the Orthodox territory of the castle compound relates to Gondar as its center, the Muslim territory of Addis Alem relates to Gondar as its periphery. It is spatially removed from symbols of political power and bears few signs of development. Most Muslims I knew who resided in Piassa and Arada had family in Addis Alem. This gave them reason to visit regularly. So, while many Gondaré Muslims have moved beyond this peripheral Muslim territory, they remain connected to it and see it as an important part of their Muslim heritage.

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[21] There is also a small recently developed neighborhood (Genfo Quch) in the distance to the west, but there is nothing to the east.

I have argued thus far that the Muslim territory of Addis Alem indexes Islam's historically marginal position with respect to centers of political power in Gondar. Nevertheless, despite being constantly reminded of their historical place on the margins, when Muslims tell their own history, Islam often emerges as the *hidden*, unappreciated source of Gondar's blessing. Those who have researched the Amhara region note that its residents approach social life with an acute sense of the distinction between external appearance and the really real truth that lie beneath the surface (Grima 2012; Levine 1965). In line with this dualistic mode of thought, in Muslim narratives Christians constitute the *apparent* builders of Gondar, the *apparent* source of its blessing and divine power, whereas Muslims operate as the *true* locus of divine power and authority behind the scenes. We see this in a mundane way in Muslim stories about Shékh Abdul Basset helping build Fasilides Castle. One imam also told me Abdul Basset named Gondar's sub-city of Azezo, where he lived and was buried, and that his blessing is the source of the healing power of a particular holy water spring now claimed by the church of St. Michael in Azezo. Perhaps what drives this idea home the most is that many Muslims in Gondar told me it was actually the blessing of Gondar’s three major awalīyya, not the churches per se, that have kept Gondar free of wild animals. This was not elaborated much, but it is significant because it places Muslim authorities in the same structural position in relation to “the good” in Gondar that Christian authorities claim for themselves—that is, both position themselves as the source of Gondar’s protection and blessing, but Muslims, in this case, are claiming original authorship of that blessing, while implying Christians are simply taking credit for Muslims’ benevolent acts of divine mediation. Finally, the story of Shékh Ali Gondaré provides another striking message that Islam is the true source of God’s power and blessing in Gondar. To discuss the story of Shékh Ali Gondaré we need to move forward in history, beyond the reigns of Fasilides, Yohannes and their many successors, to the reign of the last Gondarine king, Emperor Tewodros.

The Legacy of Emperor Tewodros for Muslims and Christians

Gondaré Orthodox Christians trumpet their kinship with Tewodros, who historians credit with ending centuries of civil war that riddled the country from the 1760s until 1855. Tewodros is honored as a national hero all over Ethiopia. Though his reign was fraught with problems and failures, and his life ended tragically in suicide, he is considered the father of modern Ethiopia because he attempted a number of reforms in military, foreign policy and church administration that inspired his successors.[22] A statue of Tewodros stands in the circular intersection at the heart of Gondar’s Piassa. Many Orthodox Gondaré I know claimed to be related to Tewodros. All over Ethiopia, Gondarés are known to brag about their connections to him. For example, a resident of Addis Ababa told me about a time he was arguing with his Gondaré roommate and the roommate tried to boost his own authority by saying, “I am related to Tewodros, so you should listen to me.” Though Tewodros moved his capital away from Gondar during his lifetime, Christian Gondaré feel a stronger connection to Tewodros than later emperors in part because he was the last emperor whose mother and father were both from the Gondar region.

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[22] See Rubenson (1966) for a biography of Tewodros.

I regularly asked Orthodox Christians to tell me about Tewodros. In response, they would tell me that he was “brave,” a “hero” and that he was very “clever.” The character traits of being brave and heroic represent a Gondaré ideal. Gondaré young men are known to go on and on about the bravery and heroism of Gondarés. A deacon told me that Tewodros was christened in the *Kidane Mehret* church in Arada, and added that the infant Tewodros had the gall to urinate during his Christening.[23] There is something in this that captures both the idea of Tewodros as an exemplar of a Christian ruler and promoter of Christianity, while also capturing his audacity in bringing church and state under his centralized control, and making both priests and regional lords bend to his will. He took his role as head of the church seriously. He pushed reforms that limited the number of priests that could work in a church, and reduced the land grants given to parishes. Some Gondarés I spoke with who are familiar with this history see these as positive policies because they helped rid the church of waste, laziness and gluttony. Later in his career, Tewodros suspected Gondar’s residents of sedition, and pillaged Gondar, looting and burning its churches. Most Orthodox Christians I knew had erased this episode from their memory of him, but Orthodox Christians familiar with it tell me that he was right to pillage Gondar because Gondaré clergy were in fact conspiring against the king. They even tried to poison him when he took communion.

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[23] Kidane Mehret means “Covenant of Mercy.” According to the important Ethiopian Orthodox text “Miracles of Mary,” Jesus made a covenant with his mother to empower her to make intercession on behalf of humanity. Among other things, Christ said to Mary, “And whosoever shall give an offering for thy name’s sake I will remit to him his sins, and I will make him to inherit the kingdom of heaven” (Budge 1900: 20). Covenant of mercy is one of 55 feasts dedicated to the Virgin Mary in the Ethiopian Orthodox Calendar (one of five major Marian feasts), and is one of 55 names that can be given to churches built in Mary’s name (Fritsch 2001:62-63).

Generally, Gondaré I knew remember the age of Tewodros as one of Ethiopian unity. Historically, he did aggressively seek to bring the church and state under one administration. He saw religious unity as essential to political unity. Consequently, he also acted aggressively against his Muslim population, attempting to implement a policy of forced conversion. While national unity was much more an aspiration of his than an achievement, some Gondarés told me they “yearn for the time of Tewodros” (*yeTewodros zemen īnafeqal*) because it was a time “Ethiopia was united.” They contrast this imagined national unity with the condition of Ethiopia under the current secular administration, which, at least on paper, recognizes different ethnicities and different religions as having equal legal footing. Some Gondarés think this policy pits other ethnicities against the Amhara and may ultimately lead civil war, like the war that led to Eritrea’s secession. Tewodros by contrast, worked to keep Ethiopia together under Amhara Christian hegemony.

Muslims maintain among themselves a counter-narrative that ties Gondaré Muslims to Tewodros’ legacy, while also claiming divine recognition over and against the Christian King that Gondaré Christians are so proud of. Oral history relating to Shékh Ali Musa, nicknamed Shékh Ali Gondaré, effects a striking inversion of Orthodox conceptions of divinely anointed kingship vis-à-vis the Muslim minority. A pamphlet passed out during Shékh Ali’s yearly holiday celebration in 2010 claims Shékh Ali lived in Addis Alem during the reign of Tewodros. Many Muslims in Gondar know Shékh Ali as a wise teacher and a world traveler with miraculous abilities beyond his education. My friend Mustafa, for example, told me he was a master cartographer who created a map of the world. Though the Shékh never studied cartography, he told me, he gained an aptitude for mapmaking as a blessing from Allah. He traveled the world performing wonders, teaching Islam and building mosques. The pamphlet tells how he visited England and assisted "Queen Elizabeth," who was searching for a man who could aid her in locating the place her father had buried "gold and other riches." To assist the queen, Shékh Ali performed Du'a (petitionary prayer) and Allah revealed the treasure's location. The pamphlet says, "Queen Elizabeth, because of her happiness and admiration, bestowed upon him different kinds of gifts." Shékh Ali used the same divine powers to find buried treasure while traveling in India. He gave these riches "to the king of India" (Adam and Saleh 2010).

These stories drive home the message that Shékh Ali had a special connection to Allah that he used to bless the world's rulers. The scope of his influence is global and his favored status in the eyes of Allah positions him as a mediator between the most powerful people on earth and the creator. He spent his final days in Gondar, living in the old "Muslim village" of Addis Alem. There he served in the Addis Alem mosque and taught Muslims in Gondar about Sufism. The pamphlet adds that Shékh Ali was a renowned diplomat who aided Emperor Tewodros in resolving conflicts. It gets specific in detailing his diplomatic efforts, saying that he prevented a war between Emperor Tewodros and Ras Ali Alula in 1852. Correspondences from the period corroborate this account (Rubenson 1987). Historian Sven Rubenson describes Ali Musa as a man who "exercised considerable political influence" and "acted as a mediator between warring factions" (2003: 202).

In addition, oral histories I gathered from Muslims in Gondar detail another episode in the relationship between Shékh Ali and Tewodros that never made it into the pamphlet. The story goes that Emperor Tewodros and Shékh Ali were once good friends. Then one day a man aroused Tewodros' suspicions, telling him that Shékh Ali was the "true king" because of his great influence and many followers. Convinced by the suggestion of sedition, Tewodros gathered soldiers and set out to go to battle with Shékh Ali Gondaré. Knowing of Tewodros' advance, Shékh Ali prayed for Allah to take his life rather than let him suffer death at the hands of the king. True to form, Allah complied with Shékh Ali's request and his life was quietly brought to an end. On the third day after Shékh Ali's passing, Tewodros demanded to see his body and had his tomb pulled out of its burial spot. To the king's shock, the tomb was empty. A guard with whom I spoke at the Shékh Ali Gondaré mosque added some colorful details to this narrative. He said that while Tewodros examined the hole in disbelief, one of the Shékh's followers, Anesharif Adulazi, teased the king, asking "Does Hajj Ali seem like a rat to you, that he would be found in a hole?" The guard then went on to tell me how the postmortem Shékh Ali (perhaps his spirit, ghost or resurrected body) haunted Tewodros, "He spent the night terrorizing him, with knives, with spears…" Perplexed and disturbed in his waking hours, Tewodros went around asking, "If the flesh of a person of the Lord is clearly buried, do you believe they then rise up and go about?"[24] In another conversation I had about Sheik

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[24] I asked the man who keeps all of Shékh Ali's records in Gondar if this story could be found among them. He assured me it was there. I could not check them myself because all of Shékh Ali's writings were in Arabic.

Ali, Habib, a Muslim young man, added that after this miraculous event, “Tewodros lost his influence in the church.”

In this story, we see a structural opposition between Tewodros and Shékh Ali Gondaré that bears the features of symmetrical schismogenesis (see Bateson 1972). Symmetrical schismogenesis refers to a process of group differentiation in which opposing groups attempt to prove they are “equal to and better than, the same as and different from” the other (Sahlins 2004: 9). This can result in narratives and practices that mirror each other in certain ways, while carrying small differences that mark one side as supervening the other. In this narrative, Shékh Ali is positioned as *like* Tewodros in some ways so as to undo, or supervene, the king’s heralded virtues. That is, the Shékh is “equal to and better than” than Tewodros. Shékh Ali helped Tewodros resolve conflicts and hence is shown to have had a hand in helping the king overcome the divisions that plagued the country when he came to power. However, when Tewodros turned against Shékh Ali, Allah preempted the king’s attack by giving the Shékh a dignified, divinely-willed death. Here we see a clear parallel with Tewodros, who, according to the historical record, committed suicide with a shot to the head after being cornered by the British army. Because Orthodox Christians condemn suicide as a sin, my Orthodox informants looked upon the final act of their hero with ambivalence. When defending Tewodros’ actions my informants portray it as an act of bravery: Tewodros preferred to die rather than suffer the shame of being captured by foreigners. In sparing his own shame, he also spared the nation of shame.

Shékh Ali also chose to die when put in a similar situation, but he did not commit suicide. He passed away via divine agency, made possible because of his status as a friend of Allah. Then even in death, Shékh Ali gets the best of Tewodros. The King, who Orthodox Gondarés extoll for his bravery, is "terrorized" by an ambiguously postmortem Shékh Ali. These encounters leave the king overcome by fear and confusion. According to Habib, following these events even his effectiveness as a ruler receded. Tewodros, as a Solomonic king, was the official head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. In order to unite the country, he needed to enact church reforms, overcome theological controversies, and unite regional clerics under his rule. However, in Habib's telling, his influence in the church, to which he was the head by right, declined after he went against the Muslim Shékh. Finally, beyond Shékh Ali's parallel with Tewodros, there is also a clear parallel with Christ—not only in his resurrection, but in the claim that the king discovered the empty tomb on the third day. Tewodros was the authoritative head of the official system of mediation between humans and the Christian God, the God who died and rose on the third day. Shékh Ali appears equal to Orthodoxy's Egzīyaber, and exhibits some of his authority in driving a wedge between the king and the church, compromising his supposed role as the head of the institutional nexus of God's power.

As an outgrowth of schismogenesis this story is pretty standard fare. One group's hero is shown to be more connected to God, more powerful, and more virtuous than the hero of another group. Shékh Ali has the status of a "Muslim Tewodros," or the "Muslim better-than-Tewodros." As I stated earlier, Orthodox Gondaré have a reputation all over Ethiopia for boasting about their connection to Tewodros. As an icebreaker, I often would ask Orthodox Christians in Gondar the question, "Are you of Tewodros?", (*Ante yeTewodros neh*?). To be "of" a person can entail blood relation, emulation, shared heritage and commitments, or a combination of these things. Virtually all Orthodox

Christians in Gondar responded to the question "Are you of Tewodros?" with a large smile and an enthusiastic "Yes!" Over time I began asking Muslims the same question. A few responded with a hesitant, uncertain "yes." Others responded negatively. Some did not respond at all. A few would say, "No. I am of Shékh Ali Gondaré." After a while, I changed my line of questioning. First I would ask Muslims, "Are you of Tewodros?", and would wait for the typical negative response or unenthusiastic positive response. Then I would follow up, "Are you of Shékh Ali Gondaré?", upon which I received that large smile, and enthusiastic "Yes!"—the same kind of affective and verbal affirmation by which Christians expressed their allegiance to Tewodros.

Not all Muslims know about Shékh Ali's victory over Tewodros, though enough know it that I think it is safe to say the tale has wide circulation. Even if this story is not universally known, the majority of Gondaré Muslims have a sense that they are connected to a powerful Shékh who made an indelible mark on the world in general and on Gondar in particular. "He is the father of Islam in Gondar" one 40-year-old male visitor to the tomb told me. He then explained that after Shékh Ali came to Gondar the Muslim community grew in number and in their knowledge of Islam. I found that Shékh Ali Gondar grounded Muslims' historical consciousness, not just as Muslims, but as Gondaré Muslims. In a city where Christian identity is paramount, and semiotically overwhelming, the stories of the awalīyya present a history in which Muslims also contributed Gondar's splendor. Behind the scenes, Muslims, and their God, helped make Gondar what it is today. Tewodros' statue may stand in the center of town, and Shékh Ali Gondaré's empty tomb may sit on the margins, but Muslims can find satisfaction in knowing that their man beat Tewodros at his own game.

Gondar in the 20th and 21st Century

The events in the latter half of the 19th century reduced Gondar to ruins. Tewodros refused to live in Gondar and, as discussed earlier, pillaged it in 1868. His successor, Yohannes IV, destroyed the mosque in Addis Alem, causing many Muslims to flee in 1881. In 1888 and 1889, Sudanese Mahdists invaded Gondar, destroyed what was left of the churches, and killed droves of Christians and Muslims (Elrich 2010). After the capital had moved several times, in 1891 Addis Ababa, a city far to the south of Gondar, had been founded as Ethiopia’s capital. By the early 20th century, Gondar had a population of 1,000. A German traveler described it as “a dead city that belongs totally to the past” (Quirin 2003: 841). However, following the invasion in 1936, Italian troops occupied Gondar and established it as a regional capital of the colony they were calling the “Africa Orientale Italiana.” They built most of commercial buildings that constitute Piassa, and the government buildings to the northeast (Rifkind 2011). The Italians employed a divide and rule strategy, attempting to win over Ethiopia’s Muslim by giving them permission to build mosques and providing generous pilgrimage grants. Under the Italian occupation, Muslims began to move out of Addis Alem, taking residence around the Saturday market area to the north. With Italian permission, they broke ground on the Jamīya al-Kabir Masjid that sits right next to the Saturday market (see also Ahmad 2000; Solomon 2004). Jamīya al-Kabir is the largest mosque in Gondar and functions as the central mosque for major holidays and Friday prayers. In contemporary Gondar, some Muslims have a positive view of the Italian occupation. I visited an elderly Muslim man in Addis Alem whose father was a regional Muslim leader over Gondar when the Italians occupied it. He told me his father laid the foundational stone of the big Jamīya al-Kabir Masjid with an

Italian general. He kept insisting enthusiastically that Italians were “very good for the people.” As for Orthodox Gondaré, I never sensed bitterness toward the Italians, however, they liked to talk about the heroism of Ethiopian patriots, who they said successfully fought the occupiers with nothing but “rocks and swords.”

The Italian occupation ended in 1941 and Gondar remained the regional capital. Emperor Haile Selassie returned to power, and reigned as Ethiopia’s last Solomonic emperor. During his reign, Haile Selassie used modern technology and administrative practices to centralize all corners of Ethiopia under his autocratic authority (Donham 1999). Orthodox Gondaré remember Haile Selassie fondly, though he is not ranked as highly as Tewodros. At the time of Haile-Selassie’s reign, Gondarés were known to be dismissive of non-Gondaré emperors, calling them “Galla,” a pejorative term for southern Oromo speaking people (Levine 1965; Salole 1979). Now they see him as one of the last champions of Orthodox hegemony and Ethiopian unity. At the very least, he did not permit Islam and Pentecostalism to expand as it has today. Reflecting the persistence of Orthodox hegemony under Haile Selassie, Levine documents that a town council of clergy still had a major role in governing Gondar at that time (1965: 46).[25] My Muslim informants remember the Haile Selassie period as a time when they were more restricted in their public religious expression that they were under later regimes. However, throughout the 20th century, Muslims continued to spread slowly throughout the market areas.

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[25] Haile Selassie established Ethiopia’s first medical college in Gondar in 1953. It was also a period of modest infrastructural and economic development. Haile Sellasie also made numerous attempts to shape Gondaré loyalty towards the capital, such as having a street named after him, and making sure the major Orthodox holiday Mesqel was celebrated in Haile Selassie square (now Mesqel Square), instead of at the gate of the castle (See Solomon 2004; Levine 1965).

In 1974, the Marxist energy of student movements in Addis Ababa (Bahru 2014) and discontent with Haile Selassie—following a series of grueling, poorly managed famines and years of abuse from the king's noblemen—helped fuel a *coup d'etat*. The revolutionaries ousted Haile Selassie and the installed the Derg regime. [26] This put a decisive end to the Solomonic Dynasty. The Derg subscribed to Leninist Scientific socialism, as well as standard Marxist view of religion as the "opiate of the masses" (Clapham 1988). The Derg administration saw it as unrealistic to eradicate religion, though they worked to contain it, and implemented policies, such as mandatory attendance at government meetings, to persuade hearts and minds to embrace the state's ideology. Many Gondaré remember the Derg's cruelty, which they avoided discussing in detail. Gondar was known as a hotbed of resistance, so it was a prime target when the Derg carried out the mass execution of dissidents known as the red terror (Clapham 2002: 16). One of the Derg's major policies was land redistribution. The government confiscated much of the church's land in Gondar and redistributed it, though sometimes redistribution worked in the church's favor.[27] Generally, land distribution "impoverished the church" (Marcus 2002: 250). As for the Muslim side, Abdul, a lay member of the board of a major mosque, claimed that "Compared to Haile Selassie, the Derg period was good for Muslims." He related how during the Derg regime many mosques were built and/expanded. Muslims were given permission to pray together in Gondar's amphitheater, named "Revolutionary Square," for their observance of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Arafa. Despite its heavy handedness, many Orthodox and Muslim Gondaré evaluate the Derg positively when they think about how the current government's policy on religious freedom has, in their view, led to division and fragmentation in their communities.

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[26] Derg means "committee" in Amharic and is short for the Coordinating Committee of the Armed Forces.

[27] One Orthodox Priest, Abba Gabriel Yohannes, I interviewed had lived through the Haile Selassie and Derg period. He remembered the Derg regime enabling the church to recover land that had been claimed by the landlords (nobility) under Haile Selassie.

In 1991, a coalition known as the Ethiopian People's Liberation Front (EPRDF) defeated the Derg and established a regime. The EPRDF took an overtly pluralistic approach to governance. Their constitution, ratified in 1994, divided the provinces according to ethnicity and put each ethnicity on equal legal footing. The EPRDF's "Ethnic Federalism" recognized each ethnicity as a semi-autonomous "nation" or "nationality" with some limited rights to self-governance. Convincing ethnic pluralism required religious pluralism as well, because the hegemony of Orthodoxy went hand in hand with Amhara dominance (Haustein and Østebø 2011). Islam and Protestantism had been adopted by ethnic minorities to the south in part as a form of resistance against their Amhara overlords (Braukamper 2004; Eid 2000). Therefore, along with Ethnic Federalism, the 1994 constitution provided explicit provisions for religious freedom.

Hence the rise of the EPRDF, more so than the rise of the Derg, marked a sudden rupture with Orthodox hegemony, and Sufi hegemony among Muslims, inaugurating a new era of religious plurality and competition. Under the Derg, the government systematically persecuted Protestants (Eid 2000; Tebebe 2009). They considered Protestants enemies of the state and CIA surrogates. The Derg had also at some point banned Muslim pilgrimage and the importation of Muslim literature. This stifled the emergence of Islamic reform movements that now cause much consternation for Muslims who wish to preserve Muslim unity under their longstanding Sufi tradition. Abdul said, "Because of freedom, different teachings have come [to Gondar]. Under the Derg if you organized [into a new religious movement] they would kill you immediately.” Moreover, once Protestantism was decriminalized Gondar saw a notable increase in the size and visibility of Pentecostalism, which had been secretly practiced and, according to some accounts, spread covertly in Gondar under the Derg regime. In reaction to this sudden burst of religious plurality, a charismatic monk-priest Am’ha Eyesus, began preaching publicly against Pentecostals and the EPRDF. He preached over loudspeaker at the Baal Egzīyaber church, a large church adjacent to the castle on the south side, located along the main road running through Piassa.

The events surrounding Abba Am’ha Eyesus are important in the Orthodox Gondaré imagination, as they mark a decisive shift toward a policy of religious pluralism that is enforced from the top-down. The following account came from an interview Abba Gabriel Yohannes, who was a friend of Abba Am’ha Eyesus during the period in question. According to his account, Am’ha Eyesus was involved primarily in opposing the spread of Pentecostals, who he called menafek’ (heretics). The priest and his associates concluded there was a government conspiracy to expand Pentecostalism in Gondar and accused the mayor of Gondar of secretly converting. In response to this accusation, the government accused the Priest and his followers of associating with “Moa Ambassa,” an illegal Ethiopian political movement seeking to reinstate the monarchy. Eventually, the followers of Abba Am’ha clashed with the federal police. According to Abba Gabriel’s account, the police entered the churches with their shoes on (a kind of desecration) looking for Abba Am’ha. They also, in this telling, at one point opened fire on unarmed youth singing hymns and carrying an icon of the Virgin Mary. A woman asked the police officers what they were up to, and one answered, “We are looking for the followers of Haile Selassie." By the time the state had completed its intervention, 40 youth were killed and Abba Am'ha was given a seven-year prison sentence. My Orthodox research assistant Diborah told me the rebellious priest was released early because he had miraculously escaped from his shackles while in prison. In her account, his escape struck fear into his captors, who took it as a sign from God that he should be released. Following Abba Am'ha's release, the then head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Abuna Paulos, pardoned him and asked that he start preaching again. Abba Am'ha responded, "I will not preach a single day under the EPRDF government."[28]

The rupture with the old unity enacted by the rise of the EPRDF was not a revolutionary rupture, as much as it may have seemed at the time. It did not break down old unities all at once. From the perspective of some Orthodox Christians, it was more like opening the floodgate on a slowly rising tide. Since that floodgate opened, Muslims and Pentecostals have gradually expanded, and, from some Orthodox Christians' perspective, slowly eroded Orthodoxy's status as the dominant faith. Most Gondaré Orthodox Christians know about Abba Am'ha Yesus' open confrontation with the EPRDF's system of religious pluralism. Many have painful memories of this confrontation. Most Orthodox Christians did not want to talk about it. In effect, Am'ha Yesus attempted to close the floodgate of religious pluralism and this left forty pious Orthodox youth dead. The deaths sent a clear message that closing the floodgate is not an option for those discontented with increased religious plurality. Instead, now many Orthodox Christians work to stem the tide of pluralism at every advance. Among these efforts, they oppose mosque construction, especially mosques with minarets in Orthodox neighborhoods. Many Orthodox Christians see each new mosque as one more step toward an eventual flood of Muslim power. In addition, Orthodox Christians have reacted to increased pluralism by attempting to strengthen their own communities. Gondar and elsewhere has seen a surge of Orthodox Christian revitalization focused on religious education, church building, and involvement in church associations (Marcus 2002).

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[28] This quote is from the account of Abba Gabriel Yohannes, however, other informants told me a ban was imposed on his preaching activities as a condition of his release.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that, despite their historical place at the periphery of power and influence, Muslims have long held a solid sense of their moral worth as a community and their importance in Gondar in particular. Even when they were not allowed to seek recognition for that worth publicly, they have told stories to themselves about themselves that affirmed their worth against the backdrop of Christian marginalization. Throughout the 20th century, and into the 21st, Muslims have forged stronger connections with the global Islamic community and pushed back against continued restrictions and interference from the state (Ahmed 2006). Through protests and public letters to the government, they have asked for the right to build mosques when needed, and to manage their communities without interference (Ficquet 2015). For its part, the government has used the global war on terror, terrorist attacks in Ethiopia, and other events, as justification to interfere with Muslim leadership, to surveil the Muslim community and arrest Muslim leaders who they accuse of encouraging terrorism (Østebø 2013b). The government has met some public protests from the Muslim community with police violence. Most of the major clashes between the government and the Muslim community took place outside of Gondar, yet Gondaré know about and identify with the struggles of Muslims in Addis and elsewhere (see Chapter 7). Moreover, the current regime has allegedly listed Gondar as the fourth highest risk region for Muslim extremism in Ethiopia (ESAT News 2013), so Muslims in Gondar are begrudgingly aware that they remain under the EPRDF's watchful eye.

All this said, in Gondar and elsewhere in Ethiopia, Muslims *are* granted permission to build mosques. The state recognizes Muslim holidays, *Mawlid*, *Eid al-fitr* and *Eid al-Arafa* as national holidays. Generally speaking, from the Muslim perspective, things are much better than they used to be but the government has not yet fully made good on its promise of religious freedom. There is a mismatch between expectation and reality. That is, there is a mismatch between gains made, and a persistent experience of marginalization—of not receiving the trust, recognition, and autonomy Muslims believe they deserve. From the perspective of many Gondaré Muslims, their community has been preserved as a hidden blessing on the Ethiopian landscape for centuries. Now they're ready to come into their own. The castle represents a weight from the past that still bears down on Muslims, but also something they have appropriated and moved beyond. It is clear to anyone who has been to Arada and the Saturday Market that the highly territorialized Muslim space of Addis Alem has extended itself into the city's centers of market activity. Two visible mosques stand, almost side by side, next to the Saturday market. Also, the minaret of the Keña Bét Masjid towers over Arada and can be seen from afar. Prayer calls sound five times a day, and bodies with Muslim attire inundate the streets of the market. A drive from Addis Alem to Piassa provides a tour of Islam's chronological progression from the margins toward the center. To Muslims this emerging landscape represents progress. It represents the Muslim community's heroic forward march to claim the national recognition that began with the conversion of al-Najashi. By contrast, to many (but not all) Gondaré Christians, it represents a creeping threat, a new Ahmad Gragn invasion in slow motion, a rising tide that may eventually turn into a flood.

A paragraph on pages 47-48 was included in a paper titled “Transvaluing ISIS in Orthodox Christian Majority Ethiopia: On the Inhibition of Violence,” which has been accepted for publication by Current Anthropology.

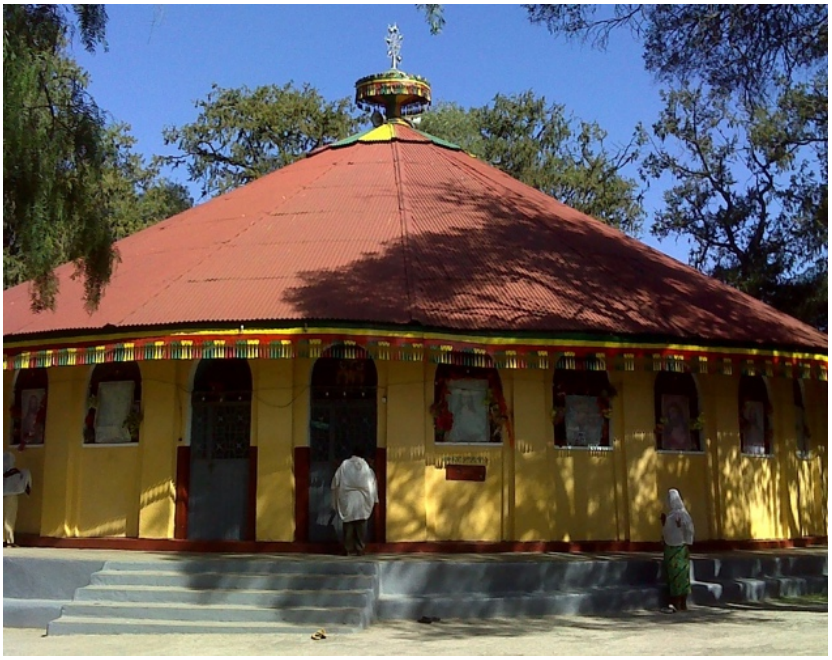

Figure 2 Medhani Alem Church 2015

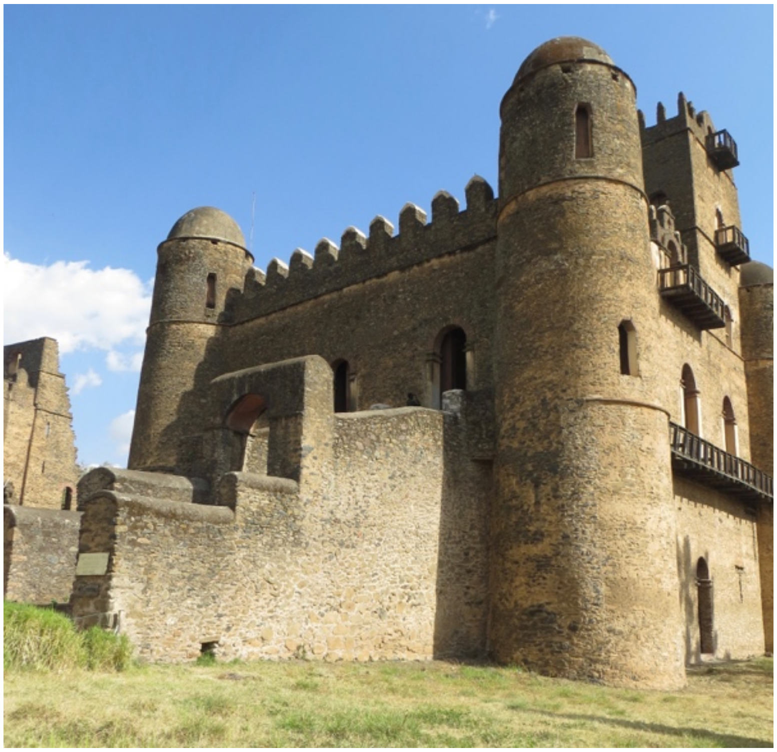

Figure 3 Fasilides Castle 2013

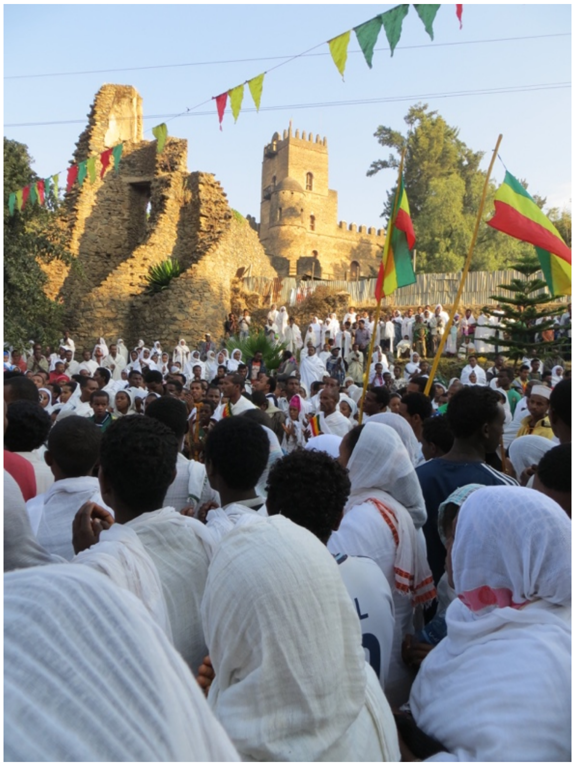

Figure 4 Christmas Day in Piassa 2014

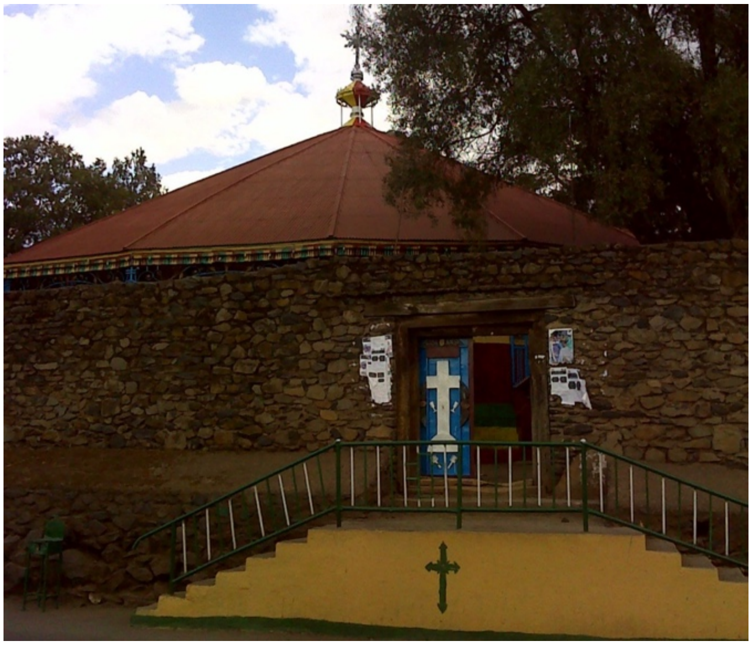

Figure 5 Gimchabét Mariam Church as seen from the Main Road in Piassa 2015

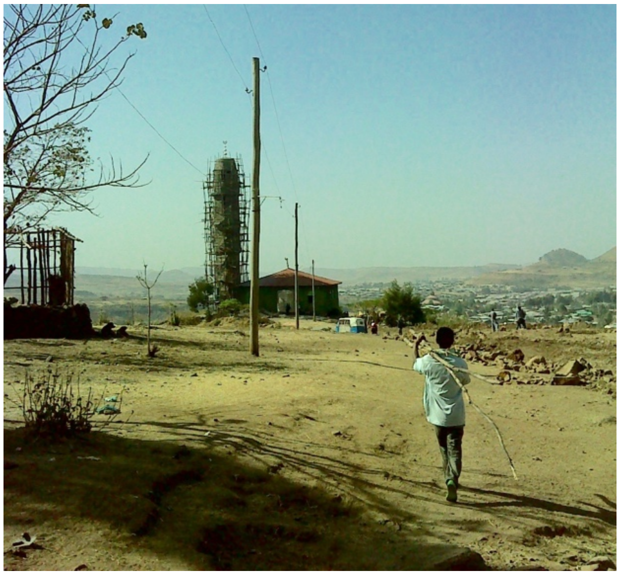

Figure 6 Shékh Ali Gondaré Masjid 2015

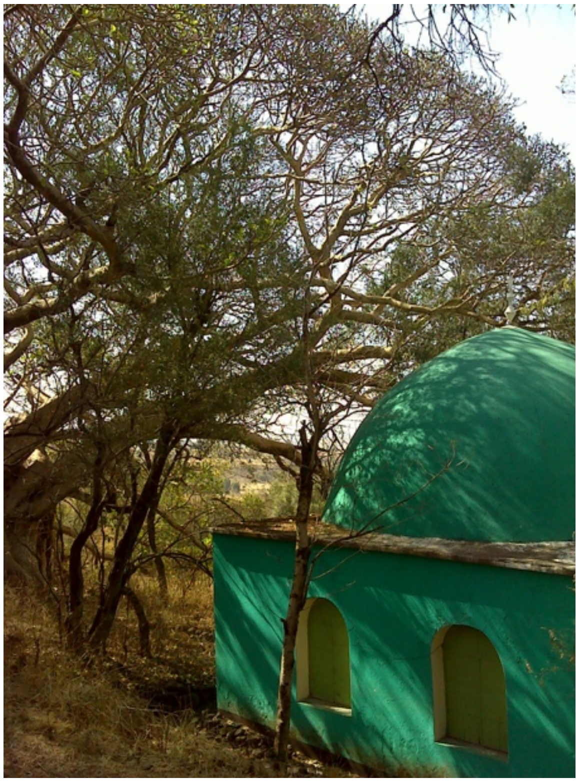

Figure 7 Shékh Ali Gondaré Tomb 2015

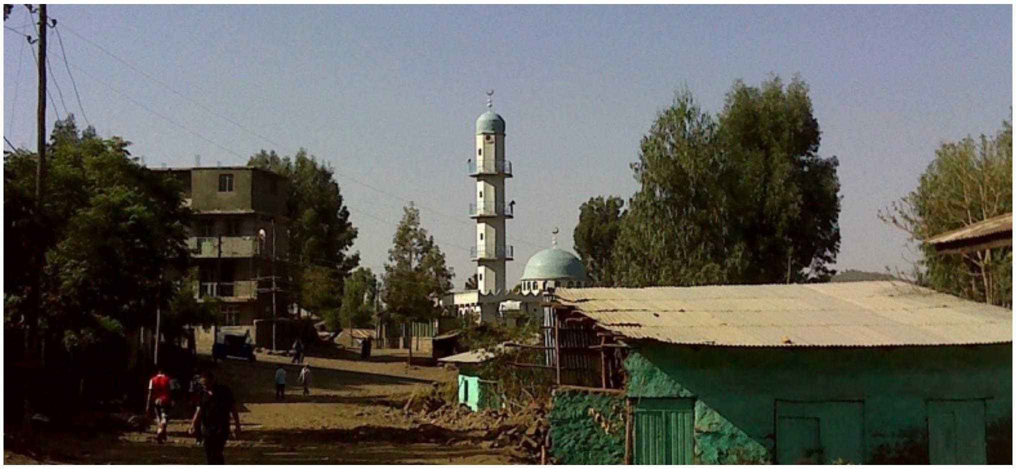

Figure 8 Addis Alem and al-Kadim Masjid 2015

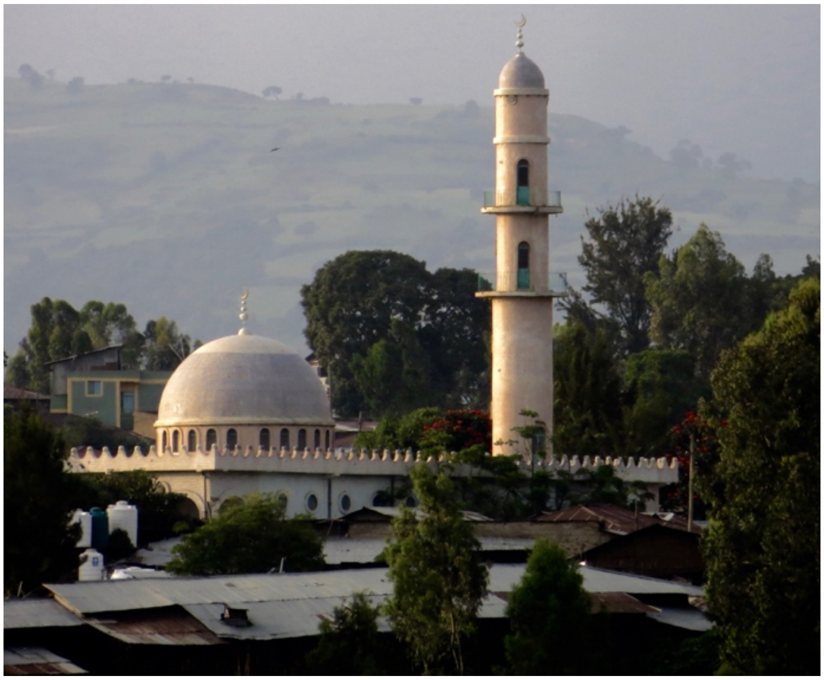

Figure 9 Keña Bét Masjid in Arada 2015

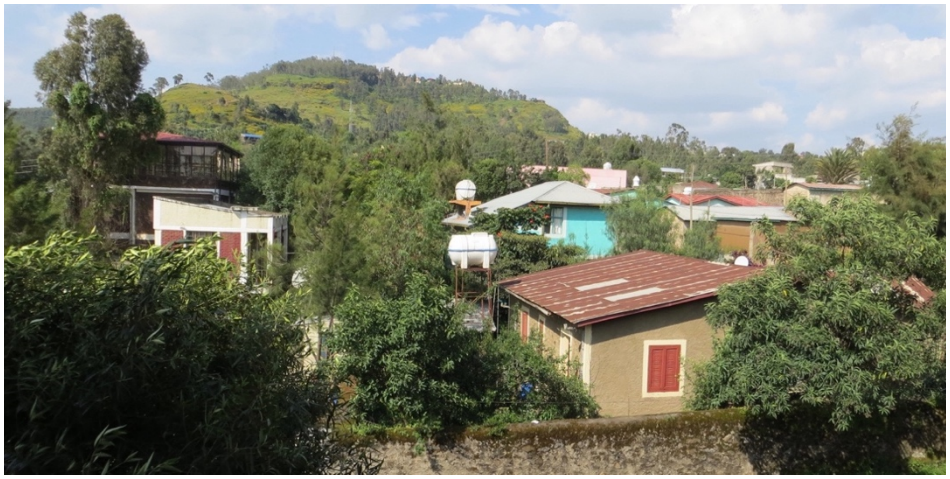

Figure 10 Autoparko 2013

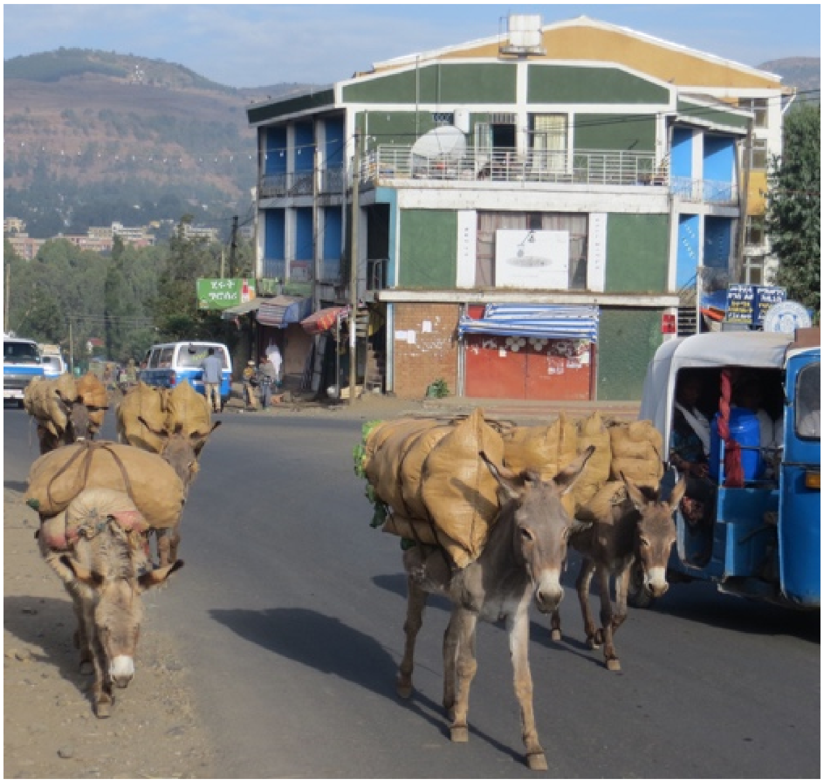

Figure 11 Main Road Passing Autoparko 2014

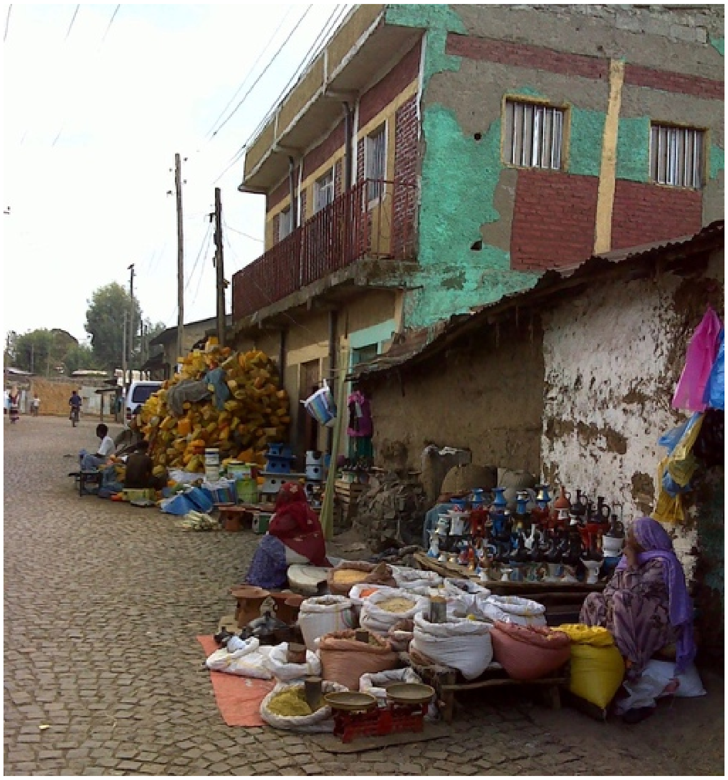

Figure 13 Shops at Saturday Market 2015

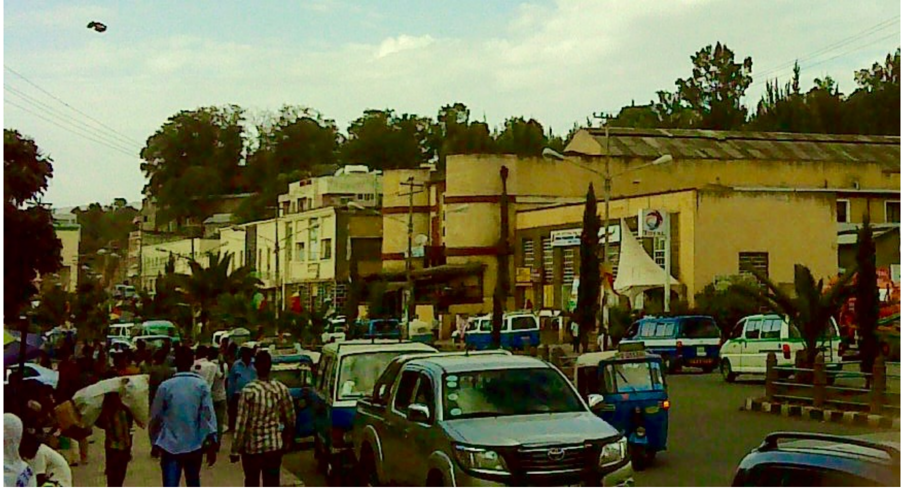

Figure 12 Piassa 2015

Chapter 2

Redemptive Ritual Centers, Orthodox Branches and Religious Others

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The previous chapter's account of divergences in Gondaré Muslim and Christian historical imaginaries may leave one with the impression that mutual opposition (and perhaps antipathy) defines their relationship. Admittedly, Chapters 1-3 focus on dimensions of Orthodoxy and Islam in Gondar that place them in opposition to one another, in part because it will give context to the accounts of coexistence I will provide in Chapter 4. That is, it shows the tensions and potential antipathies that the project of Muslim/Christian coexistence must overcome if it is to succeed. However, one might also say that the oppositional dimension of Muslim-Christian relations in Ethiopia more easily comes to the fore in an historical account because historical imaginaries operate on a macro-scale—in other words, they conceive of the here-now in the context of distant events that unfold upon, and are relevant to, large stretches of time and space. In this vein, Haustein and Østebø write that in Ethiopia "Christian-Muslim relations on the micro-level have been of a seemingly harmonic character, yet relations on the macro-level have in contrast been more antagonistic, shaped by recurrent conflicts in the past" (2011: 19). The previous chapter has given an account of some "recurrent conflicts in the past" that could shape contemporary antagonisms. However, I have also shown that some historical antagonisms have a way of fading over time, like the antagonisms between Gondarés and other historical nemeses, such as the Italians, Tewodros, and even the

Derg. Historical events alone do not explain why certain events would be foregrounded over others to make sense of the present (Connerton 1989).

Through the course of this dissertation, I will argue that the historical imaginaries of interreligious conflict at times comprise elements within a larger complex of religious value-work. This is not to say these historical imaginaries are not also elements of "political work," economic competition, or imported geopolitical imaginaries, but that they cohere with and sometimes feed into religious value-work in a way that helps sustain their ongoing relevance in defining the religious other. This latter point will not be fully fleshed out until the end of the dissertation. Here, I will focus on giving an account of Gondaré Orthodox Christian value-work. As I said in the introduction, I define value-work as activities, and energy expenditures focused on realizing a particular vision of the good and desirable, that is, actions focused on turning an *ought* into an *is*—or, perhaps, in cases of cultural reproduction, *maintaining* an ought as an is. As I discussed in the introduction, I conceptualize religious rituals as both highly territorialized centers of value-work (Robbins 2015) and semiotically-dense microcosms of a larger macrocosmic order (Stasch 2011). Rituals instantiate a connection between the here-now of human participation and a larger macrocosm. They also function as centers of value-work because, by stepping onto a macrocosmic plane, one has the opportunity to realize, "to touch," ultimate values, as well as confront and fight hypostatic evils. Hence, paying attention to ritual sites of value-work will help us understand how macro imaginaries remain a regular part of Orthodox Christians' lived worlds.

In Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, as in most Christian denominations, God is the ultimate, cosmic source of good in a fallen world (Messay 1999). In this chapter, I will argue that a major strain of Orthodox value-work in Gondar focuses on creating redemptive bubbles of blessing (Sloterdijk 2011) that protect one from the dangers of sin, death, sickness and devils, or in other words, negative value. [29] These redemptive bubbles are created through acts of deference and submission to God, often via his intermediaries like saints and angels, in the manner prescribed by the church's formal ritual system of human-divine mediation (see Bandak and Boylston 2014). I will first provide an account of these ritual centers of value-work; later, I will discuss how they relate to quotidian life in surrounding Gondaré neighborhoods. Towards the end, I will also discuss some of the implications of Orthodox values for Christians' evaluations of, and hence, relations with, religious others.

Orthodox Christian Ritual Centers of Value-work in Gondar

The Ethiopian Orthodox liturgy, or *qīdassé*, consists of a combination of prayers of praise, petitions for blessing, passages from holy texts, including the Psalms and the Gospels.[30] The priest or deacon who animates these texts alternates between melodic chants and quick monotone recitations, and between Amharic and Ge'ez languages.[31] Ge'ez is the ancient language that precedes Amharic. Today Ge'ez is Ethiopian Orthodoxy's liturgical language, used in prayers, religious poetry, and liturgical chants, somewhat analogous to the use of Latin in Roman Catholic liturgy. The prayers of the liturgy tend to focus on divine transcendence, evoking a sense of awe and modeling a posture of obeisance, with forms of address like "O Lord our God, the Good one," "who art higher than the angels and archangels, the dominions and authorities, cherubim and seraphim, Who was before all creatures" [sic] (Daud and Hazen 2006 [1959]: 14). As I mentioned in the last chapter, on certain days, liturgical sounds can be heard in all directions. The Orthodox soundscape claims surrounding territory by reaching every corner within a certain distance (cf Bandak 2014), drawing a steady flow of the Orthodox faithful into the church compound. All who attend bow, prostrate, stand straight, and chant at designated times during the liturgy, always making sure to bow with a full incline when the liturgical chant mentions the name of the Virgin Mary.

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[29] In broad sense, I use the word "bubble" to denote a sense of shared insideness in relation to an outside (see Sloterdijk 2011). In this case the "outside" is the sinful, fallen, unencompassed world and the "inside" is the redemptive Orthodox ritual regime.

[30] Liturgical prayers and chants have a historical pedigree, with some parts going back the early Christian fathers and the nine saints who came from Syria in the 4th century to evangelize Ethiopia (Yesehaq 2006).

[31] The congregants also participate by reciting prayers and chants at certain junctures.

That bow to show respect, that deference to an entity that is above, apart from the transient world—close to God, yet active as a mediator between humans and God—captures a common value that ties together the different elements of Ethiopian Orthodox value-work. Orthodoxy presents the faithful with a host of human-divine mediators for them to honor and form relationships with. Most of them are human Saints, who lived lives of exemplary piety and now dwell in heaven forever in God's glory (Bandak 2015). Above the Saints are archangels, Gabriel and Michael being the most popular, and then above them the Virgin Mary who, in a theological sense, acquires her exalted status in large part from being the mother of God.[32] Jesus Christ, *Yesus Kristos,* or Savior of the World, *Medhani Alem,* rests at the top, mysteriously intermingled with the Father and the Holy Spirit as a person of the Holy Trinity. Because of the "radical disjuncture in status," "in authority" between God and the humans, mediators are required to enable us to

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[32] In Ethiopian Orthodox theology Mary was also foreordained to be the mother of God because of her purity and holiness. The Orthodox holy book, Miracles of Mary says, for example, "Our honorable mother, Mary lived in the heart and mind of God before the world was created" (Chapter 1:6), and "Our mother Mary's face is like God's face, she resembles God. Because of her purity she made it so God would reside in her womb" (1:26-27). [The translation is my own from the Amharic] (EOTC Unknown).

"legitimately approach him [God] in our abjection" (Boylston nd: 6).[33] Orthodox practice provides a host of ways to honor divine mediators, and these mediators, in turn, help the faithful who honor them (Kaplan 1986; cf. Pina-Cabral 1986; Stewart 1991). I see Orthodox ritual interactions with saints as a way to link the here-now to a wider macrocosm that includes heaven, God, and his mediators.

The direct give and take of Saint-Christian relations assumes its most self-conscious and business-like form in a practice called *selet* (Eng: vow). In this practice, Orthodox Christians make a request to a specific saint along with a conditional promise. They might ask the saint to help a relative recover from an illness, to grant their children a visa so they can migrate to the United States, or to help them find employment. The petitioner promises to return the favor, so to speak. That is, if the saint grants the petitioner's request, the petitioner promises to perform a specific act to honor the saint, namely, giving a gift to a church that bears the saint's name. While transactional aspects of selet make it look like little more than a dyadic quid-pro-quo between human and saint, Diego Malara pointed out that the gifts offered to the church, like candles, money and ritual umbrellas, ensure that "the clergy can continue to perform the ritual work from whom everyone will benefit," adding, "you produce more blessing in this world by enhancing those who have the know-how to tap into it" (Personal communication 2016; see also Malara n.d). The selet practice, then, is one example of how individual and community contributions to the deference-blessing economy blend into one another, with blessings to one often extending to the whole and vice-versa.

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[33] The importance of disjuncture in status, as opposed to disjuncture in nature, is important because of more general practices status and hierarchy in Ethiopia. I will talk about this later in the chapter.

Similarly, Orthodox Christians in Gondar tend to understand the activity of building and/or renovating a church as a major way for the community to honor the Saint in whose name it is built, and thus win blessings both for individual contributors and the surrounding community. As I mentioned previously, after the fall of the Derg, Gondar has seen a surge in church construction and, mostly, renovation, which was necessary because conflicts in Gondar in the 19th century left its churches in ruins (Marcus 2002). Most of the destroyed churches were replaced by flimsy low-cost structures. The church of St. Gabriel, my neighborhood parish, had recently been rebuilt "by the people" (*behezboch*), as my Orthodox informants would tell me. This means neighborhood residents, and others who desire to honor Gabriel, funded the reconstruction through small and large monetary donations ranging from a few cents to hundreds of dollars (or thousands of Ethiopian birr). I asked Sousenu, a married middle aged Orthodox Christian, why people contributed their resources to church construction. She could have explained the community functions the churches serve, which are many, such as weddings, Christenings, preaching, Sunday school, church association meetings, but she answered pithily, as if the answer was obvious, "It's for Gabriel…an angel of God," "LeGabriel now...yeEgzīyaber melak." This answer was common, especially among those who are not used to giving detailed explanations of their religious conceptions. It got to the heart of the matter, justifying the activity in terms of a basic axiom of Orthodox praxis: it is *good* to honor God and his mediators.[34]

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[34] I should note that, while most Orthodox laypersons see church construction as an act of piety and a gesture of respect for divine mediators, I interviewed a member of a conservative Orthodox education movement called Mahaber Kidusan (Congregations of the Saints), who diminished church construction, saying it is more about neighborhood pride than piety. This was not a common view among most with whom I carried out fieldwork.

In the last chapter, I quoted a priest who explained how churches in Gondar, and the rituals performed therein, prevent general social breakdown by keeping demons out of power, preventing natural disasters like earthquakes, keeping people from dying early deaths and ensuring that predatory animals do not overrun Gondar. When I asked lay Orthodox Christians about this statement, I found very few who disagreed. Some would mention one or two of these effects in casual conversations about the benefits of churches, for example, one Orthodox neighbor said "We see building churches as a way to fight the devil." The priest's statement articulates the range of blessings and protections churches provide in popular Orthodox Christian imaginaries, as well the way many Orthodox Christians see churches as having a fundamental role in keeping total chaos and calamity at bay.

It is not the sanctity of the building structure itself that creates this generative power. Also, while the priestly sacraments and liturgical performances are key to the church's sacred potency, they alone are not sufficient to turn a building into a proper church. The efficacy of a church as an Orthodox ritual center is contingent on the presence of a single holy object that rests at their core: the Ark or *tabot*. Every Ethiopian Orthodox church has its own Ark, physically modeled after the original Ark of the Covenant. The Ark that is housed inside an Ethiopian Orthodox church is "a rectangular tablet of wood or stone" upon which is engraved the "name of the saint to which it is dedicated" and the "Ethiopic version of the ten commandments" (Heldman 1992: 223). It sits in a chest, called the "throne" (*manber*). A bishop must consecrate an Ark before it can assume its ritual functions, and, once consecrated, these replicas of Ark of Covenant gain at least a portion of the original Ark's power. Without an Ark, there is no church.

Moreover, wherever the Ark goes, its surrounds assume the inviolability of a church. If the Ark is in a tent, that tent becomes a church. If the Ark is in a renovated castle ruin, where eight Arks rest overnight for Gondar's yearly Ṭimqet celebration, that ruin becomes a temporary church, with all its powers and functions.

In the Old Testament, the Ark of the Covenant consisted of a wooden box, plated with gold that contained, among other things, the tablets upon which Moses wrote the Ten Commandments. The Ark was kept at the center of the tabernacle, in the holy of holies behind a curtain. Old Testament verses often associate the Ark with the divine presence.[35] Similarly, Ethiopian Orthodox literature describes the Ark as "the dwelling place of divinity" (Lee 2011: 99). I found that lay Orthodox Christians in Gondar take the association of the Ark with the divine presence very seriously and often use language that suggests interchangeability between the Ark and the divine authority it makes present. I asked my neighbor Hirut, an Orthodox Christian who was waiting for word on her daughters' American visas, if she had performed a selet request on their behalf. I assumed she would have petitioned *one* mediator: I guessed maybe Gabriel or Mary. She answered, "Yes, I asked all the Arks", which is the same as saying she asked all the mediators who have Arks consecrated in their name. "Are the Arks the same as God?", I asked. She responded, "*Awo and aynet now,*" "Yes, they are of the same kind." In interviews I asked Orthodox Christians the question "What is the Ark?" Some of the answers expressed close identity between the Ark and God, with statements such as "The Ark is our God, our Father. For us it is everything." Some of them answered that the Ark was a “revelation” or “manifestation” (*megeleçha*) of God, with some also adding that the Ark is the “resting place” of God.[36] One said, “It reminds us to submit to God,” while another said, “If we have faith in it, it will heal/save us.”

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[35] See for example, Exodus 30:6 "And thou shalt put it before the veil that is by the Ark of the Testimony, before the mercy seat that is over the Testimony, where I will meet with thee." Some scholars see the emphasis on and practices pertaining to the Ark in Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity as evidence of early pre-Christian Jewish influence on Ethiopian culture (Ulendorff 1968).

As a more theologically educated Orthodox Christian, my research assistant Diborah took issue with answers that suggested the Ark *was* literally *Our God* because she is sensitive to accusations of idolatry from Protestants. I never heard a priest describe the Ark as “our God” in such a straightforward way, though they did talk about God and the Ark as if there was a strong metaphysical link between them. One well respected, highly learned priest told me that Jesus Christ and the Ark were *Tewahedo*, or “fused”—a Ge’ez word Ethiopian Orthodox Christian theologians use to describe the fusion of divinity and humanity in the person of Christ.[37] As an outsider, it makes sense that, if I see an object as the “dwelling place” of God, I would treat it as if it were God, and could even talk about it as if it *was* God, without necessarily seeing it as constituting *extent* of God. The difference between the popular and elite theological descriptions is likely more an indicator of different levels of refinement in theological language than an indicator of vastly different sensibilities about the Ark. Some of the statements that the more educated might regard as theologically crude at least indicate that the conception of the Ark as “the dwelling place of God” is not just a mystery contained in Ge’ez literature, only accessible to educated religious elites, but comprises a linchpin of popular Orthodox Christian imaginaries. For most Orthodox laypersons, the Ark is clearly recognizable as the physical nexus of the divine on earth.

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[36] One used the Amharic word maderīya, which means a place to stay to night, while another used the word marefīya, which literally means “resting place.”

[37] This fusion between humanity and divinity in the incarnation is so important to Ethiopian Orthodox theology that reference to it is found in the full name of the church, The Ethiopian Orthodox *Tewahedo* Church (EOTC). According to the church’s website, “the Church of Ethiopia, with the other Oriental Orthodox Churches, affirms that Jesus Christ is not two natures, but one incarnate nature of God the Word” (Samuel 1970).

On annual Saint Festivals, the Ark comes out of the inner sanctum of the church into the church courtyard. This sets annual saint festivals apart from monthly festivals, and marks the former as more important. Every day of the month in the Ethiopian Orthodox liturgical calendar commemorates a saint. I attended the Fit Michael Church on the monthly commemoration of St. Michael, which falls on the 12th of each month (see Fritsch 2001). They always had a liturgy on the 12th of the month at Fit Michael, no matter what day of the week it fell on. When I attended, a priest from the church gave a sermon focused on Michael's deeds, one of which involved his role parting the red sea for Moses and company. I also attended the Fit Michael Church for the yearly commemoration of St. Michael, which falls once a year on the 12th of the Ethiopian month of *Sené* (mid-June).[38] Like all yearly holidays, at the yearly St. Michael commemoration, a head-priest brought the St. Michael Ark out from the inner sanctum, covered with a cloth so none could see it, and, paraded it around the church with an entourage of priests and deacons. On the front and back of the clerical procession, which created a buffer around the Ark, lay Sunday school students and other enthusiastic laypersons sang hymns of praise, and danced with the express purpose of showing the Ark respect. After the Ark circled around the church, the archbishop of Gondar, Papas Elsa, gave a sermon, while the members of the Ark procession stood behind him, one standing with the Ark resting on his shoulders. While monthly commemorations were better attended than your everyday Sabbath, yearly Saint Commemorations filled church compounds to the brim, bringing in the faithful from all over Gondar.

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[38] Like the Coptic church, the EOTC and the Ethiopian state follows the Julian Calendar as opposed to the Gregorian calendar that most other states use. The Ethiopian calendar is seven years behind the Gregorian calendar and consists of 12, 30-day months, plus a five-day period called "Pagme," which is derived from a Greek word, Epagomenai hemerai, meaning "supplementary days" (Fritsch 2001:23).

Some of my Orthodox neighbors often invited me to go with them to church. If they invited me to attend church on a yearly Saint commemoration, they would be sure to tell me that "The Ark will come out," to persuade me of the importance of attending that particular church on that particular day. The higher value given to annual saint days over monthly saint days also has an affective component, as Hirut told me, "When we do the liturgy, it is joyful, but when the Ark comes out it is *very* joyful." While speaking the latter clause (i.e. "very joyful" "*beṭam destilal*"), her smile and eyes widened, the volume and pitch of her voice increased to indicate an intensification of feeling. Beyond the affective rewards of being in the presence of the Ark, it was important to go to the appropriate church on a saint day in order to "respect" (makber) the saint in question. Respect given to an Ark is also respect given to a saint. That is, in going to the church when a particular saint's Ark exits the church, one enters a "controlled" ritual space that enables one to respect the saint directly. Dancing and singing during the Ark procession is a stereotyped way to show the Ark respect, but I have also seen Orthodox Christians spontaneously prostrate as the Ark passed their vista, even when observing from about 20 feet away. As much as Orthodox Christians venerate the Ark, few are anxious to get close to it. I often asked Orthodox Christians on yearly Saint Days if they would like to get close to the Ark, and they would give a resolute "no," often adding that to do so would be dangerous.

As discussed earlier, Orthodox Christians tend to focus on forming relationships with divine mediators because the idea of approaching God without the buffer of intermediaries feels disrespectful and presumptuous, given the radical disjuncture in status between human and divine. Similarly, many lay Orthodox Christians maintain a spatial buffer between themselves and the Ark, honoring it and showing it respect from afar, because to do otherwise would be disrespectful. Maintaining distance from the Ark, then, is itself also a way of showing it respect. Similarly, the spatial arrangements of regular church services indicate that many lay Orthodox Christians also feel the need to maintain a spatial buffer between themselves and the church's core, the meqedes, or "holy of holies." The holy of holies is where the Ark rests and where the clergy prepares the Eucharist, which is understood as literally the body and blood of Christ. Reflecting the close metaphysical association between Christ and the Ark, the priest prepares body and blood of Christ over it, using the tablets as the altar (see Boylston 2013a). Only ordained priests and deacons, who comply with a high standard of purity by remaining virgins prior to marriage, may enter the holy of holies. In the second chamber, the qedist, "the holy," clergy performs the liturgy and lay Christians who comply with established standards of purity enter to receive communion.[39] The final chamber, the *mahalet*, literally "hymns of praise," is where deacons and seminary students perform standing hymns of praise during the liturgy.

Not just any layperson comes into the *qedist* ("holy"/second chamber) to receive communion. Mostly those of a non-sexual age, such as children or the elderly, dare take communion. While priests claim that anyone who confesses their sins and repents can participate, most Orthodox Christians I knew consider themselves unworthy to partake.

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[39] See Hannig (2013) for an account of purity and the body in Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity and descriptions of times the clergy exercises flexibility when enforcing Ethiopian Orthodox purity requirements.

According to one popular understanding among the laity, one is worthy to take communion only if one has remained a virgin prior to marriage and/or contracted a church marriage prior to engaging in sexual relations. Moreover, many lay Orthodox Christians also believe that one cannot have a church marriage unless one has remained a virgin. However, priests I have spoken with insist that an Orthodox Christian can take communion and contract a church marriage if they confess their sins and perform an act of penance, such as fasting beyond the prescribed days or performing a specific number of prostrations. Some Orthodox informants told me that sometimes even virgins opt out of a church marriage because they fear divine repercussion for taking communion in a state of sinful desire and religious imperfection (one must take communion to seal a church marriage). Church marriages are also indissoluble, which surely causes many to hesitate entering into them. The majority of Orthodox Christians contract non-church marriages and thus remain outside of that upper tier of Orthodox believers who take regular communion.

At any given service, most Orthodox Christians worship in the church courtyard, standing attentively and responding with stereotypical gestures to the different phases of the liturgy. Many also read silently or under their breath from a book of Psalms or a Virgin Mary prayer book. After the liturgy and the priest's sermon, lay volunteers disperse what's called “Sabbath flatbread” *senbet kīta* and holy water, *ṣebel*. Like the wine and wafer of communion, the clergy bless these bits of food and drink (outside the church building in the courtyard), but these blessed foods contain a lower level of holiness, and thus have a wider range of consumption. They function as maybe something like a second-tier communion, or at least they trope upon, or metaphorically extend, the logic of communion (cf. Agha 2007; Wagner 1986). All Orthodox Christians can consume this blessed bread and water as long as they are fasting.

Outside the wall of the courtyard, another group of Orthodox worshipers stand facing the wall during the liturgy. Some of these do not enter the courtyard because they are waiting for an appropriate time to enter, as it is disrespectful and a little dangerous to enter in the courtyard while the priest performs certain sections of the over two-hour long string of liturgical chants. Some have time constraints, and only plan to stay briefly. A few Orthodox Christians told me some of those standing outside the church dare not enter the courtyard because they feel impure or unworthy in some way. There are a number of purity standards for entering the church that they may fail to meet. Maybe they recently committed a major sin, ejaculated the evening before, ate breakfast, are menstruating (see also Boylston 2013a; Hannig 2013), or maybe they want to stay only a little while and remain outside so they can exit inconspicuously. While there is no official purity injunction against entering the courtyard, some exercise a higher degree of caution. Generally, to position oneself appropriately in relation to the church's sacred center is one way to demonstrate one's respect for the divine hierarchy, like a child staying a respectful distance from an adult. Moreover, to position oneself properly insures one's contact with the holy brings blessing not harm. I once, upon invitation, entered the second tiered chamber (the holy) of the St. Gabriel Church to watch people receive communion after I attended a Christening. Later, at the Christening feast, my neighbors found out I had eaten breakfast before I entered. They told me, half joking, that Gabriel would punish me. A few assured me that, because I did not know the rule, Gabriel would have mercy on me.

This tongue-in-cheek warning, and the caution Orthodox laypeople practice, suggests that entering the church, nearing the Ark without proper preparation can be dangerous. The Arks bless those who show them respect, but can be mercurial in repelling those who dare approach them unworthily. Even for priests, handling the Ark can, on rare occasion, be fraught with peril. I was told that worthy priests have been struck down with supernatural power after approaching certain volatile Arks to carry out their duties. According to Abba Yohannes, one Ark at St. Gabriel Church had to be buried in an underground chamber because it kept killing apparently worthy priests. One can see also this notion, that you do not simply approach those above you in a hierarchy, reflected in non-religious spheres as well. For example, when a child stood near adults in conversation, I sometimes saw an adult strike the child for approaching the adult so boldly. I even saw a priest once strike a young seminary student with his large wooden cross for standing near me as the priest and I engaged in conversation. A similar incident occurred in relation to the Ark on Gabriel's yearly saint’s day in 2014. When an un-ordained seminary student (maybe 12 or 13 years old) came a little too close to the Ark during a procession, the church's security guard beat him with a horn: a horn which, prior to the beating, the security guard was blowing to honor the Ark. The beating stopped and the joyful horn blowing resumed once the student moved a sufficient distance from the holy object.

Sin, Demons and the Deference-Blessing Ritual Complex

So far, I have covered the dimension of Orthodox value-work that involves movements from profane spaces to the ritual centers of the church. Another dimension of Orthodox value-work I will cover in this section involves the sacred hierarchy extending itself onto into profane domains, enveloping and transforming profane entities. This movement of the sacred into other spheres extends blessing, as well as repels, contains, and protects against evil. One obvious example of this is the practice of individuals calling on clergy to bless their places of business. I once saw a priest in the restaurant of the Quara Hotel in Piassa sprinkling holy water all around the restaurant and pronouncing blessings upon it. A quite prolific example of the extension of the sacred into the profane is the thread necklace (*mateb*) Orthodox Christians wear around their necks at all times. At Christening the priest ties the mateb around the child's neck, which they are expected to wear throughout their lives (Fritsch and Zanetti 2003). For Ethiopian Orthodox Christians, the act of cutting one's mateb is equated with abandoning one's faith. The mateb not only indexes one's entrance into the purview of Orthodoxy's sacred hierarchy, according to many, it protects Christians from attacks of evil spirits and malevolent magic. It is one of many ways Orthodox value-work creates protective shields of blessing around the faithful in an evil world.

In the Ethiopian Orthodox cosmos, "two realms vie for the control of humankind…in a dualistic struggle thought to take place between the forces of goodness and evil" (Vecchiato 1993: 182-183; cf. Stewart 1991). Orthodox value-work often acts so to confront, push against, contain, or in other ways counteract these forces of evil. In their public sermons, priests regularly talk about the fall of Adam and Eve and identify obedience to church strictures as a means to secure divine intervention in a world of sin and suffering. The activities of Orthodox value-work enact something of a redemptive bubble in which the Orthodox sacred hierarchy encompasses its "contrary," (Dumont

1980: 239) and transforms it. [40] The redemptive dynamic of the deference/blessing economy assumes one of its more exemplary forms when a layperson kisses the cross of priest she passes on the road. In these interactions, the lay person walks up to the priest and says, “Father absolve me” “*Abbat īftuñ*.”[41] The priest takes out the cross, and the Christian kisses it as the priest says, “Let God absolve you” “*Egzīer īfta*.”[42] When priests walk down the street in Gondar wearing their clerical vestments, passersby constantly approach them and request absolution in this way. In addition, holy water offers another clear example of Orthodox encompassment and transformation.

Orthodox Christians and Muslims often approach rivers and lakes with caution, taking special care not to go near a river at certain times of the day because rivers expose one to demonic attacks. These attacks can deform your face, if the demon punches you, or they can cause insanity, if you become possessed. A local water preserve called *Angareb* is known to be demon infested. *[43]* I was cautioned strongly against visiting this body of water because many have drowned in it due to demon attacks. The government built a fence around the preserve, many told me, in order to protect people from the water demons. Water in rivers and lakes are in their natural state, out of reach of the Orthodox hierarchy, and it appears to be a sort of ideal environment for demons. In consecrating holy water, church rituals envelope a substance that in the wild can act as an abode and conductor of the demonic and turns it into a vessel of sacred power.[44] Most churches have what is called a ṣebel bota, "holy water place" or a holy water spring, associated with them. Many holy water springs have showers with curtains. Men enter one side and women enter the other. Participants take off all their clothes and drench themselves in holy water, letting it pour over their heads, and all over their bodies. Sometimes the priest stands over them on a platform, pronouncing blessings upon them with a large cross in hand. Another priest stands to the side, reading in quick monotone from a holy book in Ge'ez. Orthodox Christians call this a form of baptism (meṭmeq). Of course, Orthodox Christians distinguish between the initiatory sacrament and the optional healing and exorcism practices associated with holy water, however, they metaphorically extend the original sacrament in conceiving of holy water as a way to renew one's encompassment by the sacred. Orthodox Christians I knew in Gondar tended to expect the holy water to heal them from all kinds of medical maladies, including AIDSs, diabetes, joint pain, and mental illness.

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[40] Dumont’s (1980) theory of encompassment was in part an intervention into structuralism at the time, which identified symbolic binaries, like sun/moon, light/dark, man/woman, but tended to conceptualize them on the same plane. Dumont argued that two parts in the binary are sometimes ranked hierarchically, like man, for example, is often understood in western discourse to represent the whole of “mankind” and thus encompasses, and is ranked higher than, “woman.” This is slightly different than what I am talking about here with the Orthodox hierarchy encompassing its opposite and transforming it—in effect, redeeming it.

[41] The word īftuñ literally means, “release me” or “loosen me,” but in context I thought it made more sense to render the meaning, “Absolve me.”

[42] Egzīer is a variant of Egzīaber (meaning, “God”) that my informants associated with priests and the countryside.

[43] This was named after the Angareb River that also runs through Gondar.

Prior to coming, all those who shower in the *ṣebel bota* know that they could have unknowingly been possessed by demons. Upon being baptized, demons often use the mouth and vocal cords of the baptized to scream out in pain and anger. The agonized demonic vocalizations have a distinct guttural sound, which a neighbor of mine compared to the sounds zombies make on the TV show "The Walking Dead." The demon talk is referred to as meleflef, which means literally "to talk excessively." What is important for the argument here is that *the words and actions of the demons typify a value inversion by performing the opposite of deference* (cf. Munn 1986). The demons speak words of insult to the priest. They mock divine things. They swat away the cross the priest is attempting to bless them with and perform secular dances on church grounds. Hirut told me that one time she went to a ṣebel bota and demon talk poured out of her. She had no consciousness of her demon speak, and did not remember it, but her friends told her afterwards the demon had revealed itself using her voice with anguished cries and insults. This is good because once the demon identifies itself, one can get to work on getting it to leave the body.[45] Once the demon is expelled, sometimes after several baptism sessions, whatever ill-effect it was having, such as depression, illness, fatigue, will cease. The main point of all this for understanding Orthodox sacred encompassment is that once the water is blessed it burns the demons. That is why they cry out. That is why they exit the person's body. A substance, namely water, which in the wild can, at times, function as an especially habitable abode for demon-kind, turns to demon acid once encompassed by the Orthodox sacred hierarchy. [46] So, the Orthodox hierarchy does not simply encompass its opposite. Orthodoxy’s sacred hierarchy transforms its opposite into something that operates according to different principals. It transforms it into something that works as an agent of the church's redemptive core, making the broken whole and bringing order to chaos, while expelling that which degrades and is harmful.

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[44] The transformation occurs when a priest reads sacred words over the water. They tend to read from books called dersan, which provide stories of the lives of the saints. They also often read from the Orthodox sacred book *Tamra Mariam* "The Miracles of Mary." Any number of Orthodox holy books could work as long as a priest is the one who reads them over them water.

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[45] However, one relatively pious Orthodox informant told me he was afraid to visit the holy water spring because he thought it might reveal that he had demons. He did not want to know, and did not want others to know.

[46] Orthodox Christians do not display ambivalence about water in domestic spaces, and do not see it as a fundamentally demonic substance per se. It is essential for life and is viewed positively. My point here is that the same substance, water, has an inverted effect on demons in the different contexts. In the wild, water offers an environment demons are thought to live, but same substance expels them once run through the church’s ritual regime, or, that is, once made into a branch of the Orthodox tree.

The encompassing power of Orthodox mediation has comprehensive reach. Boylston's (nd.) ethnography of Amhara in the semi-rural Zege Peninsula explores the comprehensiveness of the Orthodox ritual system, showing how it regulates bodily flows, time, space, sex, and food, stretching into nearly every corner of social life, bringing people into simultaneous relation with each other and God. The example of food in particular, I think, drives home just how comprehensive Orthodox rituals are in the lives of Christian Zegenyas. Orthodox practices pertaining to food also provides a further illustration of the ways Orthodox encompassment transforms something associated with sin and dangerous desire into a medium through which one honors God and his mediators and attains a blessing from them. Food sharing and feasts are central to social life in northwest Ethiopia, however, the Orthodox calendar sets clear boundaries around food in the form of fast days. Wednesdays and Fridays are weekly fast days, and Orthodox Christian should not eat until 3 PM on these days. At the very least, throughout the day an Orthodox Christian cannot eat animal products; namely, meat, dairy and eggs. One priest explained to me that God commands Christians to abstain from animal products on fasting days in order to make their consumptive habits resemble those in Eden.[47] Before the fall, Adam and Eve only ate fruits and vegetables, no animal products. So, in this view, unrestricted consumption is particularly characteristic of fallen humanity, and fasting offers a partial redemption from it, a momentary return to the edenic state.

Beyond the weekly Monday and Wednesday fast, the Orthodox calendar also prescribes longer fast periods, the most important being the Lenten fast. In Gondar, the Lenten fast counts itself among a base-set of practices required by those who claim

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[47] This not the reason laypersons give for fasting, this is a theologically elite, and perhaps minority, justification, but it also coheres with popular understanding of fasts.

Orthodox commitments. Even Gondarés in anathema professions like prostitution, or men who are known womanizers, will not dare admit they do not practice the Lenten fast.[48] By contrast, Orthodox Christians in Gondar practice the lesser fasts more unevenly, like the Christmas fast. I asked a 60-year-old Orthodox woman why some people do not practice the Christmas fast. She answered with a disapproving look, "They love their stomachs" "Hod īwedalu." Orthodox Christians repeat this evaluation regularly; to eat gluttonously, without boundaries, causes one to forget God, it is the opposite of spirituality, and it brings one closer to animality. In a Sunday sermon, a famous priest at the Medhani Alem Church exhorted Orthodox laypeople: "Don't be animals!", "ensesa *athonu*!", like, he explained, those who do not fast and who have illicit sex. In Amhara culture generally, too much *ṭīgab,* or “satisfaction,” is thought to bring about a person’s downfall (Messay 1999: 211-213).

Despite Orthodox ambivalence about culinary appetites, food consumption comprises an important part of many Orthodox rituals. Orthodox Christians have regular gatherings in houses and in churches, where they consume food and alcoholic drinks, considered holy because of the blessing they receive. A priest eating at a person’s home may pass food out to other guests off his own plate after blessing it with his large cross. Even if the priest had coughed half-chewed morsels over the food before distributing it, all recipients receive it with quiet gratitude; though many confide to me that they secretly hate that sort of thing. Orthodox Christians almost always bless food before eating. The blessing is called "besme ab." It involves forming their index and middle finger in the form of a cross, making the motion of the cross, and saying in Ge'ez, "In the name of the

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[48] Bandak and Boylston note that Ethiopian Orthodox Christians of ill-repute often fast harder than typical Christians in an attempt to compensate, or make penance, for their sins (2014: 34) see also Malara (nd.).

Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, one God Amen” (*Besme Ab weWeld weMenfes Qedus ehadu Amlak amen*). Gondaré Orthodox are adept at performing this blessing very quickly, saying the words under their breath. This is the bare minimum of ritual action required for proper food consumption (with at least one exception; see Chapter 4). I was told, after complaining about food poisoning to a group of Orthodox Christians, that I could have avoided it if I did the Orthodox blessing, "Besme Ab," over the food. Performing this blessing, they told me, “kills the bacteria.” [49]

Therefore, eating, an activity generally fraught with moral peril, becomes quasi-sacramental when funneled through the Orthodox hierarchy. Different levels of encompassment transform the act of consumption in accordance with their place on a sacral gradient. "Besmi Ab" from an everyday believer at least eliminates danger. The priest’s blessing on bread, meat, beer, and vegetables in a home meal, especially the one’s prepared to honor a saint on their monthly or annual holidays, called *zikkir,* assumes a higher level of holiness, giving the food an undefined generative potential as an offering to a divine mediator. The kīta and holy water consumed at the church occupies a still higher level on the sacral gradient and requires one to be fasting in order to consume it. The Eucharist stands at the top, blessed over the Ark by a select priest and dangerous if consumed by the unworthy. The food hierarchy elucidates the general principle of graded sacred dispersal that underpins much of Orthodox practice. The sacred hierarchy, as an emergent force embodied in ritual centers, encompasses its surrounds through presence and deference, its power is absorbed by consumption and contact. Its encompassment expels demons; it redeems and transforms food and drink, bodies and ecologies, neighborhoods and polities into branches of the Orthodox tree.

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[49] Not all Orthodox Christians believe this, though it is a popular idea in Gondar.

Social Life, Orthodox Value and Evaluation

Now, I would briefly like to move out of "slowed down," controlled ritual microcosms to explore a bit how the Orthodox value complex shapes and territorializes everyday social life. As discussed already, the Orthodox system of mediation brings people into a simultaneous relationship with each other and God, often via an intermediary. The coextension of parish and neighborhood provides one example of this simultaneity. The neighborhood I lived in during the first half of my fieldwork was known as Autoparko; however, it was also referred to as "*yeGabriel sefer*," (Gabriel's neighborhood) because it fell under the jurisdiction of Gabriel's parish. One's neighborhood parish and Ark functions as an emblem of neighborhood identity. Researchers on Ethiopia have noted that, for the Amhara, geographic proximity provides a key basis for sodalities (Hoben 1973). Regional and neighborhood sodalities sometimes take priority over higher scale imagined communities like ethnicity and nationality (Levine 1974: 118). In Gondar, neighbors would introduce me to other individuals as "*yesefer lij*," a "child of the neighborhood." Similarly, it was common for people to introduce neighbors to me as their *wendem* (brother) or *ehet* (sister). These were surely metaphorical, but they were often unqualified to the extent that sometimes I would interact with individuals in the homes of their alleged kin for months after their initial introduction before I understood their status as non-kin. People would often talk about how they "grow up together," ("*abran enadegalen*") with their neighbors, and this long history of co-sociality gives "children of the neighborhood" a status distinct from those outside the neighborhood. As I will talk about in Chapter 4, longevity of co-presence is important to forging relationships.

Overall, because of proximity, one has frequent contact with neighbors. These neighbors are linked to other neighbors in an interconnected web that allows each individual to be vetted over time. You *know* your neighbors. This creates a degree of trust that contrasts sharply with Amhara's notorious mistrust of outsiders. Though to be clear, neighbors are also in a position to hurt you, gossip about you, and often neighborhoods are rife with ongoing conflicts, but at least with neighbors you have an idea of whom you can trust and whom you must treat with suspicion. Neighbors are those you can rely on most in a difficult situation to offer material support, and are those who lend labor to assist with preparations for weddings, funerals and graduation parties, as well as lend a hand in the day-to-day needs of childcare. Some of my neighbors had this ready-to-hand availability in mind when they shared with me the proverb, "A close neighbor is better than a faraway family member" (*Qerb gorobét keruq bétaseb īshalal*).

Everyday activities of neighborhood life consist of frequent greetings, home visits, drinking coffee together, small talk in the street, and perhaps most importantly, sharing food (see Chapter 4). Moreover, Orthodox Christian ritual mediations of time, space and food consumption punctuate this rhythm of neighborhood life with macrocosmic entailments. In addition to meeting for coffee, neighbors walk together to the church and prostrate together in the courtyard. Members of what are called "senbet mahaber" (Sabbath associations) regularly gather to eat together in the church compound, where on Sunday mornings they eat sanctified bread and drink sanctified beer in a room along the compound wall.[50] One is often part of these associations with members of your parish/neighborhood. Moreover, zikkir gatherings, i.e. saint commemoration meals, in people’s homes guests eat a blessed feast in the name of a saint. More pious individuals make frequent trips to the church together. Moreover, holidays, like annual Saints festivals, occasion ubiquitous movements from neighborhood to church—the throngs of which include pious, semi-pious and impious alike. Just as visiting a person’s house shows respect, quickly visiting the church on Saints' days, and kissing the church gates, demonstrates a base level of respect to the Saint that the church/Ark is named after (and by extension, to God). [51] Overall, on saint days, Orthodox neighbors visit, and thus honor, each other, and simultaneously visit and honor the saint. Finally, major holidays like Mesqel, Ṭimqet, Easter, Pagmé, and sometimes, Christmas have major neighborhood-level components. For example, during the holiday of Mesqel (The Day of the True Cross) a large cross, called a *demera*, is burned in the center of town, however each neighborhood also burns their own demeras. [52] On the morning of the 2014 Mesqel, my family and I sat with a group of neighbors and burned our large neighborhood demera. It provided me with an occasion to get to know them better. It also seemed to create a sense of mutual recognition and belonging between us as members of the same neighborhood. The overarching religious dimension of neighborhood sodalities is one thing at stake in struggles over shifting religious demographics.

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[50] Most established Orthodox Christians in Gondar tend to be members of “senbet mahaber” or “sabbath associations,” which require a membership dues and can sometimes offer different kinds of aid to members in times of need, for example at a meeting a member might take up a collection of funds for a member who is in the hospital. The most common activities are the regular morning meals on Sunday, to which members are expected to regularly contribute (Marcus 2002). They can occur once every two weeks or once a month depending on the rules of the association.

[51] Kissing is a conventional way to show respect in non-religious spheres as well. I regularly saw children kissing the knees of high status adults to show them respect.

[52] Both contemporary and ancient commentators on the practice of burning the cross have noted that it is intended to “illuminate” the cross (Boylston 2012: 74; Kaplan 2008: 449). Ullendorf (1988) notes that some see the burning cross as symbolizing the erasure of sins and the cloud of smoke that formed over the tabernacle for the children of Israel (114).

Just as neighborhoods provide a context for mutual monitoring and vetting, the Orthodox Christian value-complex provides a metric for evaluation. Gondaré Orthodox Christians have a reputation for judging each other harshly for not demonstrating at least a bare minimum of deference to the church. I knew some Orthodox Christians from Addis Ababa who worked at Gondar University who did not wear a mateb. They told me it is common for Christians in Addis Ababa to wear silver necklaces with a cross, or not wear jewelry at all. They also told me in Gondar they get scrutinized much more than they do in Addis for not wearing a mateb. The same goes for fast observance. I only knew one Gondaré who would admit to not following the Lenten fast, and he was a person who generally showed disregard for his reputation. I once talked to a young man from nearby Gojjam who told me he "hated" Gondar because they are all "extremists," "*akrarī.*" His Gondaré extended family, he told me, pester him and bother him for not fasting or not obeying this or that rule; far more than they do in Gojjam.[53] I also spoke to a student at Gondar University from Addis Ababa who confided in me that he does not observe the Lenten fast, but he would never tell any of his Gondaré friends or neighbors. When people asked if I fasted, some Christian friends, looking to protect my reputation, would rush to answer for me. They told them that I do indeed fast, even though they knew I did not. On the flipside, if a person has a reputation for piety, it earns them high regard and praise—especially if the pious person is a man because women are expected to be more observant. I had a conflict with a young man renting a room in my compound over my children’s behavior. This issue came up while talking to some older Christian women in the neighborhood, whom I regularly sat and conversed with for afternoon coffee. Even though they had not interacted with him much personally, because he was not originally from Autoparko, they assured me he was a “very good person” because they regularly saw him dressed in white, walking to the church.

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[53] This was surprising to me because Gojjam has its own reputation for piety. At least in addition to having a reputation for the evil eye, Gondarés would tell me Gojjamis were strong Christians.

While Christians must remain aware of Christian evaluators in their midst, many also have awareness that heavenly evaluators are looking on—and certain events can foreground the gaze of heavenly evaluators (Dulin In press). One day an extraordinary swarm of grasshoppers flew over Gondar. It was a display Gondarés told me they had never seen before. The grasshopper swarm was so massive and dense that, as it flew over Piassa, insect excrement rained down from the sky and everyone ran for cover. Throughout the day Orthodox Christians told me that grasshoppers were sent by God (or Satan) as a warning. God was trying to warn Gondaré to repent, to stop sinning, to stop their illicit sex, to respect their religious holidays properly. The grasshoppers had come too early to affect the upcoming harvest, but their passing was a sign of what could happen if Christian Gondarés do not get their act together. In addition, priests, in their role as intermediaries of God, have a duty to warn parishioners of God’s judgment. At a Christmas feast in 2015 I was having a conversation with a priest about the role of a father confessor. At some point in our interaction, the priest pivoted from explaining the role of father confessors to acting as *my* father confessor. In this role, he asked me if I ever slept with women who were not my wife. I told him I did not. He asked me to explain why. I told him that if were to sleep with other women it would hurt my wife and I did not want to do that. He did not seem satisfied, so I added “the book [the Bible] forbids it." He gave a slight, unimpressed nod, and then went on to give me the real answer. He said that I should not commit adultery because "God will punish you" (*Egzīyaber īqeṭehal*). A Christian layperson later explained to me the kind of punishment he was referring to might include such misfortunes as a car accident or an illness. I saw an example of this kind of thinking when Hirut hurt her ankle walking up some stairs. She interpreted this injury as a punishment from Gabriel for forgetting to attend church on his monthly saint day. She gave money to beggars as penance for her failure to display an adequate level of respect to her neighborhood saint. Through this act of penance, she hoped to restore Gabriel's blessing and protection.

As a further illustration, Teddy and I were walking in Arada one day near the *Kidane Mehret* Church (Covenant of Mercy, dedicated to the Virgin Mary) where we saw two Orthodox women furiously arguing in the street. One accused the other of insulting her behind her back, while the other adamantly denied it. The denials were met with firm skepticism from the accuser, that is until the accused declared she would walk up to the church gate at that very moment, place her hand on it and swear before God. At this point, doubt fell upon the accuser's face. Teddy told me that no one would offer to swear on the church unless they were telling the truth, because otherwise God would surely punish them. The accuser was more apt to trust the denials of her adversary once she offered to swear on the church because of their mutual knowledge of the immanence and surety of God's judgment—remember at the core of the church is an Ark, a material instantiation of both God and, in this case, Mary, the mother of God. In part through this economy of blessing and punishment, the Orthodox system of human-divine mediation maintains the moral order.

In all this we see that the Orthodox tree, including its authority, and its ultimate values, territorializes Gondaré neighborhoods both by running its deference/blessing modality through most major dimensions of social life; and by shaping the evaluations Orthodox Christians regularly face from individuals in social interaction. These branches resonate with, or echo, the deference/blessing dynamic that has its most perfect expression in Orthodox ritual centers. I have shown in previous examples that people may concern themselves with the evaluations of neighbors, priests, saints, the Ark, and God himself, however, each of these are nodes in the same value-complex which holds deference to God, through his mediators, as an ultimate good. Evaluations, prayers, rituals, collective holidays, and clothing accessories resonate with and echo each other as branches of the Orthodox tree. Even the Orthodox tree's tiniest branches—such as the mateb, the vegetable dish on fasting day, the quiet, yet palpable disapproval of a minor transgression—help maintain the micro-macrocosmic link between neighborhood, church and cosmos. This multi-stranded linkage helps underpin a sense of immanence that makes Orthodox Christians certain the cosmic sovereign may at any time may send down punishments in response to a lie, an affair, and even a memory lapse; as well as blessings in response to a small monetary donation, a kiss to the gate of the church, or words pronounced over food.

Value Inversion and the Religious Others

Up to this point, I discussed how Orthodox values operate among those who fall under the purview of the Orthodox sacred hierarchy. Now I will talk a little about how they relate to people who call fall outside of it. In an abstract sense, those entities and domains that remain untransformed, unencompassed by the Orthodox sacred hierarchy, are seen as external to the cosmic moral order. Wilderness spaces and, as we saw, bodies of water, are examples of this. Besides rivers and lakes, my Orthodox informants agreed that one is particularly vulnerable to demon attacks while traveling in the desert alone. I discussed earlier how demons typify value inversion and threaten to subvert Orthodox values by refusing to defer, attacking Christians, undoing divine blessing, and, therefore, degrading body and mind. As I have also described, holy water, by contrast, re-encompasses the possessed, burns and expels their demons, restoring their Christian blessing to them. Generally speaking, in its ideal typical conception, the Orthodox sacred hierarchy should encompass and transform all human communities in its path. However, especially after the rise of the EPRDF, the church now shares its domain with other religions with different values. While much of this dissertation will be dedicated to explicating how the Orthodox value-complex relates to religious others, I am going to end this chapter with a brief note on how religious alterity sometimes looks *from inside* Orthodox ritual imaginaries, and how the activities of religious others can sometimes be typified as subverting Orthodox value-work (Munn 1986).

Before I discuss religious others, I am going to discuss some value inversions at work in Gondaré social life and how they laminate onto social relations. Understanding Orthodox value inversions in relation to religious others will give background to help us understand the part value inversions and subversions play in intergroup coexistence. I see the rebellious, mocking, defiant demon that comes out in Orthodox exorcisms as a prototype for value subversion in Orthodox imaginaries. Orthodox Christians trope upon this prototype in different ways in their evaluations of others (see Agha 2007), and no one is immune from typification as demonic, or quasi-demonic. For example, some priests and deacons are suspected of being secret devil worshipers and drawing on the power of the devil to practice black magic, cursing individuals for payment, preparing love potions, and walking across the sky (see Boylston 2012; nd.; Malara nd.; Young 1975). These corrupt priests are called *debtera,* a complex term with various uses I will not get into here.[54] In Gondar, oftentimes seminary dropouts were suspected of being debtera, but in some of my informant's accounts, a debtera performs their duties as a priest or deacon, publicly claiming to serve God while secretly worshiping the devil and harnessing demonic powers to his own benefit (though there are a variety of views concerning whether or not this is "devil worship," see last footnote). When clergy engage in behaviors thought inappropriate for a priest or deacon, some might suspect them of being debtera. For example, Hirut once suggested that a deacon friend of mine, who we'll call Deacon Matias, might be a Debtera because she often sees him flirting and laughing with girls in our neighborhood internet café. Of course, she acknowledged, he has to marry eventually, but he should not be thinking about girls in the meantime, he should only pray in the church and trust that God would bring him a wife.[55] The combination of his impious behavior *and* his special access to the Eucharist, the Ark, and religious knowledge, makes him come off, to Hirut and her daughters at least, less as a typification of the pious ideals required to perform the liturgy, and more as a typified mockery of the sacred.

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[54] In official Orthodox discourse, debteras are choristers that help perform church hymns. They have clerical training, but do not need to be ordained (Chaillott 2002). In Gondar, the term tended to be applied to ordained priests and deacons suspected of black magic, as well as seminary drop outs suspected of black magic, as well as some semi-public magicians with clerical training, the category is applied in many different ways. Also, there were different evaluations of the same magical acts, as some Orthodox Christians explain the priestly practice of magic as enabled by the control and enslavement of devils, which is accomplished through a priest's spiritual powers. Boylston wrote about those who openly practice as debteras that they "are marginal figures, both feared and respected, and usually operating at a remove from general sociality" (nd.:163). Generally, church education, and particularly knowledge of Ge'ez is believed to give one access to mystical powers—I often heard stories of deacons slipping women love potions in order to snag a bride.

[55] Most deacons in Gondar move to the city from the surrounding countryside where western style dating, as opposed to marriages arranged through intermediaries, is less of a norm, especially for clergy. Deacon Matias was an urban deacon, born and raised in Gondar town, and so his behavior, even his manner of speaking, but especially his way of openly flirting with the opposite sex, seemed disturbingly incongruous with the ideals of clerical piety.

To turn to another example, in northwest Ethiopia, some individuals develop a reputation for being *buda*, or having the “evil eye,” which means you can make someone ill or even kill them, by the looking at them or their food (See Boylston 2012; Lyons and Freeman 2009; Seeman 2009; Salamon 1999; Rodinson 1967). Buda is sometimes understood to pass from parent to child, so entire families acquire the reputation for being “the seed of buda,” which can create high social and financial costs. Meqedes told me of a family who owned an internet café in the outskirts of Gondar in Azezo, but, because they had a reputation for being buda, everyone was afraid to go there out of fear of becoming ill, so they went out of business. One time I was talking with an Orthodox woman in Piassa near the Quara Hotel, when, she suddenly ran away in the middle of our conversation, taking shelter in a nearby internet café. I tracked her down and asked why she ran. She told me a tour guide from Gojjam just arrived who she suspected of being buda; she ran to avoid being attacked. In contrast to these examples, I knew quite a few young men in their mid-twenties who had friends who were known buda. They even ate with their buda friends, which is a particularly vulnerable situation if general typifications were one’s only reference point. Boylston (2012; nd.), who worked in Gojjam, a place with a reputation for being rife with buda, also reports that some alleged buda are able to maintain normal friendships despite their stigmatized status. So, even when unfortunate individuals become linked to highly stigmatizing, and even dangerous, typifications, the particularities of shared history can overshadow them. Long relationships based on face-to-face interaction between individuals are comprised of experiences of shared duration over time. These understandings often approximate, to some degree, one's understanding of the self in terms of detail and specificity—at least more so than one's understanding of anonymous others, which tends to rely on general types (Schutz 1967: 163-172).

I have addressed some accounts of buda and debtera in Gondar to show that, even though we can describe general types, whether morally exemplary, like priests and deacons, or value inversions, like buda, they do not always laminate onto social life in ways the general type predicts. A value inversion like buda, a type of person said to "eat people," can be a trusted friend when shared histories overshadow general types, while increased knowledge about the personal life of a clergy member can invert the typification of moral exemplarity at work in a ritual setting, turning a mediator of God into a mediator of the devil. In anonymous settings, like a Eucharist service with unfamiliar clergy, or a chance meeting with a reputed buda in Piassa, one would likely revert to conventional models—which would tend to evoke respect in the case of clergy, and fear and revulsion (and a desire to run for cover) in the case of buda.

In everyday life, Orthodox Christians and Muslims tend to understand one another with reference to ongoing, regular contact, which also means that they tend to understand Muslim and Christian others as *like them* in some basic ways: they all have similar problems, eat similar cuisines and foods (with some exceptions, see Chapter 4) and have the same everyday social ethics. When asked if Muslims visited her on Christmas, one Orthodox Christian woman said, "Why do you say Muslim and Christian? We grew up together. We don't see any difference between us." Moreover, as I talked about in the introduction, Orthodox Christians and Muslims also produce a narrative that transvalues amicable everyday relationships into a major meta-narrative of Ethiopian tolerance, underpinning an imagined community of coexistence (cf. Bowman 2012), centered on the understanding that Muslims and Christians have lived together for, as my informants say, "a long time." The divergent historical imaginaries discussed in the last chapter, which sometimes represent relations as antagonistic, often have little role in shaping everyday relations, especially since Muslims and Christians adhere to a "code of silence," avoiding talk about religion, especially topics that might provoke conflict (see Chapter 5).

While overall Muslims and Christians often see each other as mutually commensurate, from the vantage point of the value hierarchy (or sacral hierarchy) expressed in the Orthodox ritual center, Muslims find themselves at the outer stretches, never having entered into the purview of the Orthodox system of redemption. If I ask Christians about the difference between Muslims and Christians, they might say something like, "They [Muslims] do not have a mateb" (see Zeleke 2014). [56] As discussed earlier, Orthodox Christian are supposed to wear their matebs throughout their lives as an index of their original initiation into the Orthodox ritual system of redemption. Upon meeting someone new in Gondar, I often found myself looking at their neck to try to figure out if they were Muslim or Christian. The reference to the absence of mateb—as oppose to say pointing Muslim practices on Ramadan, donning of the hijab, Friday worship, their belief in the call of Muhammad—reflects a tendency among Orthodox Christians of defining Islam as an absence of Christianity.

Consistent with this tendency, Orthodox Christians insisted that every baby is born a Muslim, and remains a Muslim until the day they are baptized (40 days after their birth if a boy, or 80 days after birth if a girl). Moreover, Gondaré Christians, and Amhara Christians in general, label recently postpartum women as Muslims. They call them this in part because they are unable to fast or visit the church (Hannig 2014). I asked Hirut, "Did you become a Muslim right after you gave birth?" She answered, "Yes because I wasn't Christian." I also asked Mek'edes about this claim and she affirmed that the baby is Muslim at birth because "they have no religion." Hannig writes concerning this practice among Amhara Christians that "it makes sense [to Orthodox Amhara] to think of the term 'Muslim' in the negative, meaning not being properly Christian" or to think about it as "a general signifier of religious alterity" (2014: 307). Even so, I would suggest that this willingness to identify with Muslims during a liminal period suggests that Muslims represents a kind of alterity that has a degree of moral acceptability. Muslims are perhaps on the low end of the hierarchical value-gradient expressed in Orthodox ritual practice because they fall outside of its purview, but are not subversive of positive Christian value per se.

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[56] They would also point to the different blessings each bestow upon meat, but I will talk about that in Chapter 5.

We could contrast the more benign alterity of Muslims with popular typifications of Pentecostals. When I asked Orthodox Christians the question, "What is a Penté?" a common answer was, "They do not respect Mary." This description hones in on an aspect of Pentecostal discourse and practice Orthodox Christians find most offensive because it transgresses the value of respect for divine mediators.[57] In addition, the non-deferential style of Pentecostal practices also lends itself to Orthodox typifications as a value inversion. Pentecostals claim to address God directly through seemingly irreverent, unintelligible speech and uncontrolled gestures, that, to Orthodox Christians, resembles demon-speak. They also actively subvert Orthodox value-work through the practice of “witnessing” (*mesker*), in which they try to pull individual Orthodox Christians out of the protective purview of the Orthodox sacred hierarchy and inculcate them with what Orthodox see as disrespectful attitudes towards Mary, the saints and the Ark. In fact, in their discourse about Pentecostals, Orthodox Christians often posit a direct relationship between Pentecostal conversion and demonic possession. I heard Orthodox Christians tell stories to each other about individuals who converted to Pentecostalism only to later go insane and die an early death. When Pentecostalism first sprouted up in Gondar, an elderly Pentecostal woman told me, many Orthodox Christians were certain the Pentés' days were numbered because the 44 Arks would "chop them down." This expectation that the Arks would expel Pentecostals from Gondar is reminiscent of the role of holy water in expelling demons.

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[57] Pentecostals would say that they respect Mary, and many are at pains to emphasize how much they respect her. However, they are also at pains to assert that it is wrong and idolatrous to invoke her as a mediator.

Pentecostals also manage to maintain friendships with Orthodox Christians, but the popular typifications of them as directly subversive to Orthodoxy, gives them an extra hurdle to overcome. There is a common notion that if an Orthodox Christian maintains positive relations with a Pentecostal friend or family member it is just a matter of time before that person converts. By contrast, the boundary between Muslims and Christians is seen as rather solid, and there is little or no effort to break it down. The way both honor the religious boundary between Muslims and Christians is taken as a form of mutual respect (see Chapter 5), in contradistinction to the disrespect of Pentecostals who regularly try to break it down. Because of Orthodox Christians’ long history of living together with Muslims, as opposed to Pentecostals’ recent arrival, and practices that communicate mutual respect (see Chapter 4-5), Teddy could tell me "We [Orthodox Christians] love Muslims, but we hate Pentés" (See Poluha 2004).

All this said, in some contexts the usually benign status of Muslims as an absence-of-Christianity can typified as a value subversion. For example, one time I was listening to an Orthodox priest give an entire sermon on the importance of Christians wearing their matebs. He criticized the practice of Christian bridesmaids removing their matebs for wedding pictures, and then added, "this started with Gragn," evoking the Muslim imam who forced Christians to convert to Islam en masse. By failing to wear their matebs, he implied, Christians are completing the work Gragn began with his project of forced conversions. Applying the same historical imaginary to the present, Teddy often would switch between extolling the Ethiopian practice of tolerance and portending a disastrous future if Muslims became a majority and gained political power in Ethiopia, imagining that Christians would be forced to convert and there would be endless chaos and fighting like in the days of Gragn. The invocation of the Gragn imaginary in this context colors shifting religious demographics with a dangerous hue.

For Orthodox Christians like Teddy, Islam becomes a distinct problem when it appears to be seeking to replace or rival the Orthodox sacred hierarchy. In some accounts, the prospect of Muslim dominance portends social chaos similar to what the priest in Chapter 1 associated with the disappearance of churches and the reign of demons. Moreover, when Muslims seek to build a large mosque with a minaret in a historically Orthodox neighborhood, many Orthodox Christians see it as a signal that Muslims are in ascendency. In connection to the problems Orthodox Christian have with mosque construction, Boylston notes that "churches have not traditionally been built to dominate space; they are supposed to be sheltered, in line with their role as refuges" (nd.:170). In Ethiopia, people often signify deference in a hierarchical relationship with a bow of the head and a lowering of the body in the direction of their superordinate, who remains upright. Similarly, the high, upright minaret seems to put on display a subversion of the Orthodox Christian value of deference to the Ark/God, because, visually, the mosque appears high than, and thus hierarchically superordinate to, the church.[58] As we will see in some of the chapters that follow, it creates a scene many Orthodox Christians find offensive because it presents as an iconic representation of Muslim preeminence. Small inconspicuous mosques without minarets, on the other hand, present few problems. A discreet Islam is a properly encompassed Islam, one that does not challenge Christian definitions of Islam as an absence (see Chapter 6).

Conclusion

Malara and Boylston note that "The scholarly consensus on Amhara society suggests that most models for social relationships are vertical - that is, involving asymmetries of power and/or status" (In press: 3; see also Teferi 2012; Messay 1999; Levine 1965). However, they then go on to argue that hierarchy, as such, should not be considered an Amhara value. Sometimes Amhara see hierarchy as a value, as a social good, and sometimes they see it as "an injustice and an imposition." A vertical relationship is only considered "good," Boylston and Malara argue, if it is characterized by love and care between subordinate and superordinate persons. Ethnographies of Amhara society depict the fluid movements of individuals seeking the protection and benevolence of patrons, or, if they are lucky and/or particularly clever, becoming a patron themselves (Hoben 1973; Levine 1965; Messay 1999). Differently situated individuals defer to different patrons—be they landlords, fathers and mothers, employers, and government officials—however, God and his mediators on heaven and earth demand the deference of all. God sits at the top of the cosmic hierarchy, “before all creatures” (Daud and Hazen 2006 [1959]: 14). He bestows care and love upon those who defer and rightly punishes those who rebel. This chapter has been dedicated to showing how deference to God and his mediators—and thus positioning of self, society, food and neighborhoods within the redemptive sphere of the Orthodox tree—is the ultimate cosmic good of the Orthodox value complex.

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[58] Boylston (nd.) notes that in response to the towering minarets of many mosques, Orthodox Christians in other parts of Ethiopia have broken with the traditional Orthodox pattern of church building, and started building their churches higher and more conspicuously. We could see this as action intended to counteract a value subversion.

In the last section of this chapter I also argued that religious others are sometimes, but not always, typified as subverting this value. Certain displays on the surface, such Pentecostal worship, witnessing, and Muslim minarets, can evoke typifications of religious other’s activities as value subversions. I will discuss the contexts under which Muslims or Orthodox Christians see each other’s actions as subverting their values in Chapters 4-7. In the next chapter, I will explore the Muslim value-complex in Gondar to lay the groundwork for understanding the macrocosmic and moral terrains both sides must navigate as they work to live together. What makes Muslim-Orthodox relations in Ethiopia, and perhaps elsewhere, a problem worth investigating is that an activity that one side sees as value realization, mosque building, the other sees as value subversion. This dialectic between value subversion and value realization helps keep tension and competition alive, which makes the question of how the two groups coexist all the more pressing.

A sentence on page 117 was included in a paper titled “Transvaluing ISIS in Orthodox Christian Majority Ethiopia: On the Inhibition of Violence,” which has been accepted for publication by Current Anthropology.

Chapter 3

The Blessings and Discontents of the Sufi Tree

According to Munn (1986), the positive value-work of Melanesian Gawans and the negative value-work of subversive forces were distinguished by spatial modalities. One seeks expansion and the other retraction. In this chapter, I will show, by contrast, that Muslims and Orthodox Christians have similar spatial modalities: they both work to establish ritual centers of value-work that territorialize surrounding neighborhoods. In addition, Muslim value-work in Gondar, like Christian value-work, involves a deference-blessing economy that, for a large number of Muslims at least, involves human participation within a hierarchy of human-divine mediators. Some might say, then, that, in the abstract, Muslims and Orthodox Christians in Gondar have the same values. In practice, however, deference, as well as value-work, as Munn showed, is not realized in the abstract, but entails an indexically-situated, directionality in lived time/space (cf. Silverstein 1976). In this context, for deference to be intersubjectively recognizable as "good" within a religious value-framework, it often must be situated in relation to a spatiotemporal microcosm of a macrocosm that—all those working within that value complex can agree—has God at the center, or, perhaps better said, has God at the top. Gondaré Muslim and Christian value-work, in a sense, aim their deference at different microcosms. They defer within different worlds of imagined time and space and with different material sites of micro-macrocosmic connection. This may seem like a trivial distinction, but it has real implications for how human groups are evaluated and thus how they relate to one another. Moreover, I will show that it also has implications for what counts as a positive value and what counts as a negative value potential—as well as what counts as a value subversion that value-work must push back against.

Muslim Ritual Centers of Value-work

The Muslims I knew in Gondar were preoccupied with similar issues as Muslims worldwide: correct knowledge of the divine will and correct application of it in practice (Bowen 2012; Deeb 2006; Cook 2000; Hirschkind 2006; Mahmood 2005). These issues came up regularly in public discourses. For example, at a major mosque in the market area, an imam began his Jumma (Friday) sermon, "Can we forget what is in the Quran yet remain within Islam? It is not possible because it takes us out of Islam, it is our duty [to know the Quran]." He went on to talk about the Sharia laws of inheritance. On another occasion, an Islamic teacher said, "Islamic knowledge [*ilm*] teaches us the path to paradise and how to protect ourselves from the path to fire. [59] When we learn about Islam we can protect ourselves and our children from the fire." He then elaborated upon the subject of knowledge, explaining that when Muhammad engaged in petitionary prayer "du'a" (optional prayer), he did not pray for "wealth" or "power," but for "knowledge." Here, he counter-poses the desire for knowledge to more common, mundane desires, classing knowledge among the highest values one could realize in a privileged give and take with heaven. He then went on to tell a story of when one of the companions of the Muhammad went to a mosque to learn from the Prophet. The Prophet Muhammad told his disciple to perform *salat* (mandatory prayer/prostrations). Once he completed his prostrations, the prophet told him to perform them again, then again and again. Finally, after numerous repeated salat prostrations, the prophet told him he could stop. Someone asked the prophet why he commanded the man to prostrate so many times. Muhammad answered, “He did not have slowness, he prostrated too quickly.”[60] In the teacher’s telling, the prophet then admonished those present to pray with correct knowledge, otherwise, their prayers will be “ruined” (Amh: *ībeleshal*).

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[59] Ilm is Arabic for knowledge. Amharic speaking Ethiopian Muslim often codeswitch to Arabic. In this case, he used the Arabic word ilm to refer specifically to Islamic knowledge.

Throughout the lesson, the teacher gave different examples of Muslims trying to do right, but having their efforts “ruined” by acting without knowledge. He took his audience on a journey through various episodes in the life of the prophet and his companions, then, at certain points in this journey, he brought the audience back to Gondaré time-space, suggesting concrete actions Gondaré Muslims could take to increase their Islamic knowledge:

> Here in Gondar there are mosques where they teach you to read the Quran, where you learn *tawhīd* [oneness]. There are places for all those who want to learn. In district 12, close to here, there is **Muhammad Dessei**, in [district] 17 there is **Nur Masjid**, in [district] 18 there is **al-Najashi**. If we go out from there, there is even **Des Aleyn Mubarak Masjid.** They are everywhere. There is what is called **Wedaj Salam.** They all provide Islamic knowledge [mosque names in bold].

In the above excerpt, he identifies the ubiquity and geographic proliferation of mosques as a felicitous condition that provides Muslims with the opportunity to learn *tawhīd* (oneness). The Islamic concept of tawhīd is “the defining doctrine of Islam” and has a dual meaning. First, it “declares absolute monotheism—the unity and uniqueness of God as creator and sustainer of the universe” (Esposito 2014c). Moreover, when Muslims talk about learning *tawhīd*, they often refer to those techniques and practices through which Muslims show their recognition of divine unity, aligning themselves and society with the oneness of Allah. As the Gondaré teacher explains, a Muslim realizes the ideals of tawhīd by knowing the divine will in detail and submitting to it with precision. The way mosques set the conditions for realizing the ideals of *tawhīd*, and ultimately paradise, marks the act of proliferating mosques as unequivocally “good.” In the days of the prophet, it was *in mosques* that Muhammad taught his companions the path to paradise. Mosques in Gondar allow for a replication of that archetypical scenario for Gondaré Muslims.

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[60] This combination of practice and pedagogy is reminiscent of Islamic practices observed elsewhere (Mahmood 2005).

Any of the Muslims present for that lesson would likely have known about the mosques the teacher listed, especially if they lived in those neighborhoods. So, this part of the lesson did not have a clear purpose in conveying information. Perhaps presenting opportunities for learning as abundant in Gondar had a rhetorical function. Maybe, for example, he intended to induce a dose of shame in the audience for not taking the abundant opportunities available. However, I also think listing off the mosques in Gondar, and emphasizing that they are “everywhere,” provided a certain pleasure in itself. Gondaré Muslims took pride in their mosques. In the office of Gondar’s large central mosque, a poster hung on the wall with pictures of every mosque in Gondar. Beside each picture was written the name of the mosque and the district in which it was located. The poster’s conspicuous placement near the door brought the number of mosques, and their geographic reach in Gondar, to the attention of all who entered.

Though mosques can be categorized as a microcosms of a macrocosm—due to their connection to the origins of Islam, the global ummah, and rituals that perform cosmic submission (see Mahmutćehajić 2006)—unlike Orthodox churches, mosques do not house any material embodiment of the divine that generates sacred potency in its own right. The high status of mosques stem from their role as sites of pedagogy, and as sites of focused, "slowed down" religious practice and discipline. In mosques, Muslims belonging to a specific territory become trained and molded into the proper members of the global ummah and, thus, become, as the preacher above stated, deserving recipients of paradise. I once visited the (then under construction) Losa Mariam church with Addisu, my Orthodox Christian neighbor, and his Muslim friend, Ali. Losa Mariam is outside of the city, which required us to walk a few kilometers in the countryside on foot. I asked Ali if there were any mosques that were, like Losa Mariam, far out in sparsely populated areas. He told me there were no such mosques because the purpose of mosques is to serve neighborhoods. Mosques would have little importance if they were disconnected from that practical function.

Over the course of my fieldwork, I had a firsthand glimpse of how mosques fit into the course of neighborhood social life. During the month of Ramadan in 2014, I attended my local neighborhood mosque, al-Nur, on a number of occasions. Sitting in the compound, I found opportunities to chat with many individuals from my neighborhood as they sat and performed wudu ablutions[61]—opportunities I did not have outside of mosque attendance. Young men walked together to the mosque, gossiped, engaged in horseplay and teased each other as they thoroughly washed their feet, arms and ears in preparation for prayer. Following prayer, I walked home with groups of men from the neighborhood and the casual social engagement continued. During the month of Ramadan, men young and old gather in mosques and performed du'a all night long, chewing khat, leaves with stimulant effects, to stay awake, thanking Allah for blessings, and begging for blessings on behalf of individuals, families and the nation. My first week in Gondar, I happened upon a mosque right before the dawn salat (*fajr*) and was invited to join with the worshipers. After prostrations, the small group of about ten neighborhood residents gathered in a circle, recited the Quran together, while drinking coffee and eating loaves of bread. By facilitating these kinds of practices, mosques in Gondar allow easy movement between, and fusion of, quotidian social relations and numinous envelopment—between eating, gossiping, and horseplay on the one hand, and joint submission to, and alignment with, the single transcendent source of being on the other. Thus, mosques facilitate links between neighborhood life and macrocosmos in a way similar to the function of churches for Orthodox Christians.

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[61] Wudu ablutions are "Obligatory cleansing rituals performed in order to render the believer ritually pure. Required prior to prayer for both men and women. Consists of washing the hands, mouth, face, arms up to the elbows, and feet. Water is usually poured over the top of the head as well" (Esposito 2014d).

In addition to mosques' function as sites where relatively horizontal[62] interaction with neighbors and vertical interaction with Allah become intertwined, local neighborhood mosques, like churches, function as emblems of the neighborhood-level sodalities that emerge from these interactions. As with churches, mosques provide the idiom through which Muslims of different neighborhoods are understood in relation to one another. At the opening of the joint prayer in Gondar stadium on Eid al-Arafa in 2014, the speaker recognized the presence of members of each of Gondar's mosques, noting each one by name. The physical movement from the neighborhood to the stadium is understood as a kind of mini-pilgrimage—especially on Eid al-Arafa, the commemoration of Abraham's pilgrimage to the Kabba to sacrifice his son Ishmael. Muslims often gather at their neighborhood mosque and make the trip to the stadium together. Moreover, it is common for young people from the same neighborhood to form a procession, holding banners with passages from the Quran, singing hymns of praise in Arabic, chanting Allahu Akbar (God is the greatest); sometimes a young man leads the chant shouting into a microphone. Walking amidst the Eid al-Fitr crowd in 2014 with a couple of Muslim young men, I learned that these clusters of youth represent their neighborhood mosque in a way that is recognizable to other Gondaré Muslims. As we walked, a Muslim young man pointed to each group and identified them by the name of their mosque, saying, "That's Ergeber," then to another, "That's Keña Bét." In vernacular spatial references in Gondar, mosque names and neighborhood names sometimes merge. For example, the big mosque in town, officially named Jamīya al-Kabir, is generally referred to as the "Saturday Market Mosque" (*Qidamé Gebeya Masjid*), because it is in the same neighborhood as the Saturday market.[63]

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[62] I say "relatively horizontal" because Amhara social life is generally imbued with hierarchy, just none as asymmetrical and permanent as that between creator and creation (see Messay 1999:179-242).

The minaret is a visual correlate of the call for prayer, as Mustafa told me, the sight of the minaret works upon the Muslim's heart, creating a craving, a longing for prayer. Many also say that the "minaret shows there are Muslims here." As I discussed in the introduction, most Muslims I asked about mosques in Gondar told me that a neighborhood mosque is essential to enable the ideal of performing salat in a mosque five times a day. As I noted in the introduction, many Gondaré Muslims were familiar with the saying from the hadith that a salat performed in the mosque had 25 times more value than salat performed in mundane spaces (Khan 1993). More Gondaré Muslims perform Jumma salat on Fridays than fulfill the ideal of praying five times a day in a mosque; however, neighborhood mosques at least create conditions for the ideal to be realized. Without a neighborhood mosque, it would be very challenging to meet the ideal even if you wanted to.

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[63] The mosque popularly referred to as the "*Kebele 14 Masjid*" (District 14 mosque), allegedly used to be known as "Aṭiq Masjid." It now has a minaret, though I'm told it used to function as a house mosque. I only know the original name of that Mosque because I have a list of mosques published in a local magazine in the year 2000 and it lists it as located in Kebele 14, but I could not find anyone who remembered that name. When I showed Muslims the list and asked them where the Aṭiq masjid was they referred me to the "Kebele 14 Masjid." The neighborhood the al-Najashi Masjid is located in is now referred to by Christians and Muslims as "Masjid," maybe because it is the only mosque in the general area of Kebele 18 and thus it defines the neighborhood.

Sufism is considered the normative form of Islam in Gondar and Ethiopia more generally (see Østebø 2012; Trimingham 1952). Both Christians and Muslims refers to Sufis as "normal Muslims" (English cognate "normal"), "*tekekeleña* Muslims" ("proper Muslims") or, simply, Muslims. As a general Islamic tradition, Sufism is distinguished by esoteric, ecstatic practices that seek mystical "joining" [64] with the divine, as well as their invocation of Muslim Saints as mediators, which includes their practice of pilgrimage to the gravesites of venerated Muslim saints,[65] or "friends of Allah" (see Sirriyeh 1999). Though I have no quantitative data, based on my experience in Gondar I assume the majority of Muslims in Gondar are nominal Sufis. Therefore, most of my discussion of Gondaré Muslim value-work in Gondar will focus on Sufi discourse and practice. I will discuss Islamic reformism a little toward the end of this chapter.

Sufism, Mediators and Blessing

When I asked Muslims in Gondar about the meaning of the term "Islam", they virtually always answered "peace," "*salam*," as opposed to "submission,"

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[64] Baldick (2012) notes that though Sufism is often associated with practices that realize "unitive fusion" with God, Islamic mystics would condemn this notion, instead better translations of terms denoting unity could include "'togetherness', 'joining', 'arriving', 'conjunction', and 'the realization of God's uniqueness'" (2012 [1989]: 2).

[65] British anthropologists studying Sufism, like Gellner (1969), were among those who designated awayliya, and other Sufi leaders as "saints." Baldick criticizes this use as an importation of Christian terminology, since awalīyya are not "canonized." They translate as "saint" terms that, she asserts, should be rendered "'elder', 'guide', 'noble'" (2012 [1989]): 8).

"*tenkeberkenet*."[66] This may in part be a sort of apologetic in response to Christian and EPRDF fears of extremism, as well as a result of ready-to-hand etymology provided by the phonetic similarity between the Amharic "salam" and "Islam." There are also signs that the Christian and government ideal of a "good Muslim," the peaceful, tolerant, apolitical kind of Muslim, is also part of many Gondaré Muslims' self-understanding. A pamphlet passed out at the popular Keña Bét Masjid in Arada gave a description of "Sufi Characteristics" (see Sufism Pamphlet, unknown date). It begins talking about the "great ulama, awalīyya and Shékhs" who led their people according to "the Quran and Hadith" and "worked hard night and day […] for peace, for development and for good deeds." In this statement, the pamphlet echoes a message I heard repeatedly when government officials spoke to Muslims when they gathered for prayer in the stadium for *Eid-al-fitr* (Ramadan) and *Eid-al-Arafa* (Pilgrimage). On both of these occasions, government officials implored the Muslim communities to celebrate the holiday peacefully for the sake of "our development." This suggests that Sufis in this pamphlet are trying to present themselves as stereotypically good "Ethiopian Muslims," the kinds of Muslims that the predominantly Christian government would recognize as "good." Later in the pamphlet, its author provides a "list" of "true Sufi behavior," or "*haqīqa*[67]*yesufīya baherīyat*." According to this list, a Sufi is "exceedingly kind and generous," they "respect people regardless of color, religion or language" and they "do not spend their strength in order to gain power, but work in love and wisdom.” A section on the history of Sufism in Ethiopia makes general statements about the wisdom of Shékhs, ulama and awalīyya, in expanding and sustaining the Muslim community through “ups and downs” and “difficulties” and “made it possible [for Muslims] to live with the followers of other religions in peace and love.” It ends with the statement that 90% of Muslims in Ethiopia are Sufis. Because of Ethiopia’s high number of Sufis, “unlike other countries, the problems of terrorism and violent conflict will not increase and spread in our country. The plans [of terrorists] cannot be achieved.”

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[66] The Oxford dictionary of Islam states, "The term *Islam* is derived from the Arabic root **s-l-m**, which means "submission" or "peace." Muslims are those who surrender to God's will or law, rendering them at peace with themselves and with God" (Esposito 2014b)

[67] The term haqiqa in Sufi discourse evokes a sense of the really real, "the logos, or prototype of creation in God's knowledge; "the Breath of the All-Merciful" (nafas al-rahman), which is the divine utterance that gives rise to creation; "the First Intellect" (al-aql al-awwal), which is the first thing created by God; and "the perfect human being" (al-insan al-kamil), who is the origin and goal of the universe" (Esposito 2014b).

In this pamphlet, there is little talk of the mysticism and ecstatic practices widely understood to distinguish Sufism from other forms of Islam, nor of the practices pertaining to awalīyya shrines. Rather the pamphlet seemed most concerned with distinguishing Sufis from the dangerous, threatening image of Islam held by some Christians and the Ethiopian government. I will discuss this issue in detail in Chapter 7. In this section, I would like to focus on the main actors in the pamphlet’s story, the Shékhs, ulama and awalīyya who were said to embody Sufi ideals and were presented as the vector through which Allah sustained the Muslim community as a force for good in Ethiopia through “ups and downs.”

Older men who achieve a high degree of learning and proficiency in practice are known by the honorific title “Shékh” or, if they are a worship leader, “Imam.” As the sermon discussed earlier suggests, knowledgeable Shékh’s who teach Muslims proper Islamic knowledge and embody it in practice go hand in hand with mosques. In connection to the value placed on correct knowledge and practice, there is a strong value placed on assuming stance of respect and deference toward those elderly scholars who exemplify these ideals. I met with the de-facto Muslim historian in Gondar and he showed me some of his archives. Among them, he kept a photo album with pictures and names of all the prominent Islamic scholars in Gondar, Wollo and Gojjam. My neighbor Yosef spoke reverently of the prominent Shékh in Autoparko. He told me Shékh Ahmed has interest in little else besides prayer and Quran study, all he does is read the Quran and pray all day. Virtually every Muslim I knew attended a madrasa (Islamic school) growing up. They were often taught by an elderly Islamic scholar. At the very least, this scholar would have taught them to recite the Quran in Arabic (if not understand it), write Arabic characters and sing Muslim hymns, most of which praise Allah and Muhammad, his messenger.

In practice, the displays of respect and deference due to Allah also get extended to the “friends of Allah,” (*awalīyya*) chief of which is the Prophet Muhammad. The Muslim holiday *Mawlid al-Nabi* (“Birthday of the prophet”) honors Muhammad by commemorating his birth. It is controversial throughout the Muslim world, and criticized by Muslim reformers, because there is no instruction to observe it in the Quran or Suna (Schielke 2012); however, in Ethiopia it is considered a normative Islamic festival, as evidenced by its status as a national holiday—in 2014 I received a text message from Ethiotelecom that wished “All the followers of Islam” a happy Mawlid. In 2015, a pamphlet about Mawlid was circulated at Saturday Market Mosque. It quoted several verses from the Quran describing the glory and honor due to the prophet Muhammad, then adds, “for this reason it is necessary to celebrate the prophet’s, peace be upon him, birthday” (Mawlid Pamphlet 2014) In short, Mawlid is important because it is a way to demonstrate one’s deference and respect for the prophet; it is a practice that expresses, and realizes, the value of not only of giving one’s respect towards God, but also extending it to holy men who embody the divine will.

I attended the Mawlid celebration in the Saturday Market Mosque in 2014 and 2015. The celebration began with musical performances from madrassa students. They mostly sang hymns to honor the prophet Muhammad and praise God. After the performance, everyone entered the mosque, listened to imams tell episodes from the life of the prophet while they (both audience and imams) chewed khat. The majority of Muslims chew khat during these prayers to enhance their focus and endurance during du’a. At times, the young men sang songs, and sometimes danced more and more raucously until an imam rebuked them. Around 12:30, everyone performed the noon salat (*Zuhr*), prostrating together in very closed quarters. After prayer, lamb dishes were passed around, all ate together from large plates shared between five people before returning to their homes. In addition to the major Mawlid observance at the central mosque, every mosque in Gondar had its own neighborhood-level observance of Mawlid. These smaller scale practices occur on different days within a few weeks before and after the main event in the big Saturday Market Mosque. So, like many Orthodox holidays, Mawlid observance includes neighborhood-level practices and the neighborhood mosque formed an integral part of these practices.

Some Muslim men who lived exemplary lives of piety can be revered alongside Muhammad as “friends of God” (awalīyya). As briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, awalīyya can function as mediators between common Muslims and Allah. A kind of patron-client relationship forms, wherein a Muslim makes demonstrations of respect and deference to “friends of Allah,” they in turn beg Allah for blessing on their behalf. The practices surrounding awalīyya illustrate how the deference/blessing dynamic operates in the Muslim community. In accordance with a common global Sufi practice, Sufis in and around Gondar visit the shrines and tombs of esteemed awalīyya or, as they are also called in Gondar, Shékhs. Gondaré Muslims observe festivals or commemorations for three major awalīyya, each of whom are associated with specific sites located north, south and east of Gondar town.[68] As discussed in Chapter 1, the most important walī in Gondar is Shékh Ali Musa, known colloquially as Shékh Ali Gondaré (or Shékh Ali the Gondaré), whose tomb rests on a hill right outside of Addis Alem. I spent a good deal of time at this tomb and noticed ritual elements that have parallels with Orthodox practice in the way Muslims seek divine blessing through appeal to human mediators.

When Muslims visit Shékh Ali Gondaré's grave site they usually begin their petition by lighting an incense stick and placing it near the tomb. They then recite verses from the Quran, and include their own petitions, which may entail requests for a job, recovery from an illness, marriage, or a visa for entrance to Europe or the United States. Though the practice is contested due to the influence of Islamic reform movements in Gondar, it is common, perhaps even normative, to petition Shékh Ali Gondar directly when visiting the tomb, with an expectation that he will take the petition to Allah. One Muslim woman compared it to writing a letter to Allah and giving it to Shékh Ali Gondaré, who then delivers it. Others described Shékh Ali as a "bridge to Allah." Justification for appealing to Shékh Ali Gondaré as a mediator mirror Orthodox justifications for mediation. For example, they might point out how Allah loves Shékh Ali Gondar more than your everyday Muslim, so he will listen to his appeals. Or, they might justify asking him because he has mastered the “correct procedures” for approaching Allah. These justifications bear direct parallel to Orthodox explanations for why they petition Mary and other saints. For example, one of Malara’s Orthodox informants in Addis Ababa explained “Who do you love more, me or your mother? You love your mother more. So if I am not very close to you, I will talk to your mother and ask her to beg you to do what I want from you. And you will do it because of the love that you have for your mother” (Malara and Boylston In press: 10).

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[68] I already discussed two of these awalīyya, Abdul Basset and Ali Musa. The third us Abadir Umar ar-Rida, a 13th century Somali who was one of the earlier propagators of Islam in the Islamic holy city of Harer in southern Ethiopia (Michael, Chojnacki, and Pankhurst 1975). According to my Muslim informants in Gondar, Abadir spent some time in Gondar during his life, and the yearly festival is held on the site he used to perform du'a with is followers. I had to travel on foot several kilometers on dirt paths northward outside the city to visit it. There is no shrine, just a forested hill where Muslims go to pray once a year on the same day as the Orthodox Easter holiday.

As the above quote suggests, in Gondar the use of mediation is quite common in mundane affairs as well as spiritual affairs. If you desire a favor from a person with whom you lack a close relationship, you try to find a mutual friend and ask them to act as a go-between on your behalf. For example, in Gondar some young men became friends with me in hopes that I could act as a mediator in their efforts to marry a foreign woman. Often those closer to me would ask me for favors on behalf of a friend. As a further illustration, I once met a young woman in a church courtyard who carried around a letter with a stamp from the parish authority in the neighboring town of Quara. The letter validated the claim that the young woman had been robbed and could make use of some financial assistance. The parish acted as a go-between on behalf of the woman so potential benefactors would believe her story. When explaining their practice of “begging” (*leman*) Shékh Ali Gondar to mediate between humans and Allah, Gondaré Muslims use these mundane social practices as analogues.

One could say Muslim practices are divided between more centripetal and more centrifugal modalities (Bailecki 2011; Bakhtin 1981). Mosques have a primary purpose as sites of vertically directed piety exemplified in *salat* prostrations, a modality of submission that does not so much radiate blessings out as it pulls subjects in; by contrast, tombs function in a way more similar to the church in exuding sacred potency, acting as generative conduits of divine power, transforming surrounding space at varying levels of intensity and in conjunction with relatively flexible prayer performances. Many Orthodox Christians conceive of the union between the Saint and God as so extensive that the Saint is understood as, like the Ark, something of refraction of God. According to some Sufi Muslims, Shékh Ali Gondaré, through a stereotypically Sufi kind of mystical joining with Allah, can take on a similar status, as one regular visitor to Shékh Ali Gondar tomb said to me, "Shékh Ali Gondar and Allah are almost the same" (though any Sufi religious scholar would likely denounce this statement). Some who visit the Shékh Ali Gondaré tomb affirm that, as one Muslim expressed it, "because Shékh Ali Gondar was buried there, it became a holy place", "there are many angels there" and because of its unique character, "whatever you ask for there will happen." Though, in addition to generating blessing, the tomb, like the church, has the power to repel evil. Ahmed, my short term research assistant, often told people that I attended the Shékh Ali Gondaré tomb as way of vouching for my character. He explained to me, "Shékh Ali would not allow a bad person to go there."

One observation illuminated the holy, approaching "wholly other", nature ascribed to the space. I was walking down the steep hill, approaching the tomb, when I passed a boy walking with his father carrying a scoop of dirt up the hill. I asked some men sitting around the tomb why the boy was taking dirt from the tomb. One of them told me that many believe the dirt from the Shékh Ali Gondaré tomb has healing properties. Some put it in their drinks to improve their health or help them recover from an illness. Anyone familiar with northwest Ethiopian attitudes towards dirt would understand that a Gondaré would have to hold the conviction that a major transformation has taken place before they would knowingly ingest dirt. For example, people in Gondar expend significant labor and funds to keep dirt off their shoes. The prolific presence of boys and young men gainfully employed washing and polishing the shoes of passers-by throughout Gondar attests to this. My friend Ephraim once scolded me in a cafe for crossing my legs so to expose the bottom of my foot to a person eating a few tables over, saying they could lose their appetite at the sight of the dirt on my shoe. Haymanot, a girl of ten who had become close friends with my daughters, walked around Gondar with my family on a chilly night refusing to untie her sweater from around her waist, lest she make visible some of the dirt she had acquired on her backside from the day's activities. Just as the power of the Orthodox hierarchy turns water into a burning, acidic demon repellent, so the sacred potency emanating from Shékh Ali Gondaré's grave can transform a typically repulsive element like dirt into a mystical nutritional supplement.[69]

The concentration of blessed potency that finds its nexus in Shékh Ali Gondaré's tomb can also abide, in varying degrees, in the Shékhs that gather at the tomb and perform du'a. I met a Muslim woman on the way to the tomb one day who lives in the majority Muslim market area of Gondar. She visits the tomb three days a week to petition Shékh Ali to heal her son who has been sick for over a year. Upon her invitation, I accompanied her and her friend down the hill to the tomb area, where we lit incense and placed them in crevice on top of a three-foot-high stone wall. The women recited verses from the Quran under their breath, followed by particular petitions. The woman next to me held her hands in front of her face, palms facing inward, elbows resting on the top of the wall. Towards the end of her prayer she put her palms together and lifted her face to the sky while tears ran down her cheeks. The whole session took about 20 minutes or so. On our way up the hill leading to the Shékh Ali Gondaré Masjid, an elderly Shékh asked me to buy him some khat. I declined, but the woman I was with pulled out ten birr and handed it to him. He then pronounced a blessing in a mixture of Amharic and Arabic, waving his hands about. I asked her why she gave him the money. She said that she wanted him to add his du'a to her pleadings for the health of her son. There is a patterned continuity between orientation of petitioners to Shékh Ali and their orientation to the living Shékhs who gather there. Both function as mediators between the petitioner and Allah by virtue of their divinely favored status. As my friend Shékh Salam Muhammad, who often leads group du'a at the Shékh Ali Gondar tomb, told me "If you are transparent [honest], if you obey Allah, and you ask for something, Allah will say, yes." (*ishi īlal*, literally, "He will say 'okay'", meaning, "He will acquiesce").

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[69] Kaplan also notes that Orthodox Christians have historically believed that dust from the graves of saints has healing properties (1986:7).

Around 2010 Gondaré Muslims began construction on a mosque dedicated to Shékh Ali, which at the time of fieldwork, sat with an unfinished minaret at the top of the hill overlooking the tomb.[70] When I was in the field it functioned as the main gathering place for Shékhs to perform Du'a. The Shékh's often performed Du'a on behalf of visitors who offered gifts in exchange for a blessing from Shékh Ali. The circle of Shékhs provide something of an added layer of mediation, as if they were using their special relationship with Shékh Ali to persuade Shékh Ali to intervene on the petitioner's behalf before Allah. A sequence of du'a would begin with chants either from the Quran or from a book of prayer Shékh Ali Gondaré had composed in Arabic. Following a few choruses of melodic chanting in Arabic, one person would begin exuberantly pronouncing blessings in a mixture of Arabic and Amharic. Shékh Salam Muhammad often led the du'a at the Shékh Ali Gondar Masjid. He was known as an eloquent, poetic performer, a "master of du'a", according to one imam. He pronounced blessings sequences such as the following:

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[70] Speaking at Shékh Ali's yearly holiday (Shékh Ali Gondaré Mawlid), a prominent imam explained how they used to perform illicit practices around the tomb, such as men and women performing du'a together in the same group and performing animal sacrifices around the tomb. Now those forbidden practices are done away. One Shékh explained to me that the mosque was built to help end those practices. Now visitors

> May Allah give you a house on the top and a store beneath!
> Amen!
> You will live a long life!
> Amen!
> You will go lifted up like an elevator!
> Amen!
> May Allah restrain the one who creates a conflict with you!
> Amen!

He pronounced these blessings in a rapid tempo, upon which everyone present would shout "Amen!" Shékh Salam Ahmed swiftly swatted the air with his hand in sync with the shouts of Amen, as if pushing the blessing outward, while the others sitting in the

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slaughter animals at the top of the hill, outside the mosque. The mosque provides a solid barrier for separating genders. Men perform du'a inside the mosque, while women gather for du'a right outside of it.

circle held out their hands, palms facing upwards, hands shaking slightly with the rhythm of the du'a. The boisterous shouts of "Amen!" ceased after Shékh Salam Muhammad completed about 15-20 improvised stanzas, upon which everyone present placed both hands over their face and wiped their face slowly from forehead to chin (cf. Webner 2004; Johansen 1996; Evans-Pritchard 1949). My Muslim informants at the tomb told me that holding out hands absorbs the blessing into their palms, after which they apply the blessing to their face, rubbing it in with one slow motion. I saw similar ritual acts in the church. For example, several times I saw an Orthodox worshiper touch an icon[71] and then touch their face with the same hand. In both contexts, touching and rubbing the face with a hand that came into contact with a holy force seemed to achieve a greater measure of sacred absorption.

Often the Shékhs perform du'a practices described above with a person standing in the center of the circle, head slightly bowed, holding his hands out, palms up, facing the du'a leader. This person is often the main target of the blessing. All the times I witnessed this kind of encircling, the person at the center brought a gift, sometimes money, livestock, and sometimes bundles of khat to be distributed among the Shékhs. The intensity of the blessing was often proportional to the size of the gift. For example, one time a man brought a goat to the middle of the circle, upon which large smiles formed on the Shékh's faces, and a uniquely exuberant blessing sequence began. The speed and volume of this du'a set it apart from the previous blessing: the pronouncements, invocations and approving shouts of "Amen!" were louder, the blessing-swatting movements and palm shakes had more force, range and speed. The goat startled at all the commotion and attempted to run out of the mosque. This scene implies that the power of the blessing to bring desired states of affairs into being stems in part from the energy put into the blessing on the part of the Shékhs. Likewise, the energy and investment that the Shékhs put into the blessing itself depends on pleasing the Shékhs with certain gifts.

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[71] These were usually small laminated icons hung outside of the Medhani Alem Church, or held in the hand of worshipers standing in the courtyard. I also witnessed some running their hands over candles burning in and around the church and then rubbing their hands on their faces.

Shékh Salam Muhammad has a serious sense of how his du’a, and even the power of his person as a conduit of blessing, could shape the world around him. One day as we walked together from Addis Alem to Piassa, he said to me, with an expression of delight, “When I go to Addis Alem, it warms up. When I come to Piassa, Addis Alem cools and Piassa warms up.” I thought he was joking, but he insisted he was quite serious. It reflects the kind of power Sufi Muslims in Ethiopia impute to certain Shékhs thought to have favor with Allah. As friends of Allah, Shékhs can become walking nexus of divine power, favored with special protections and favors. In Ethiopia, Shékhs who gain a reputation for divine favor and power can become feared and influential (see Østebø 2012). Fatima told me of a female Shékh who had gained a large following in Gojjam. One day, some men insulted her and brought her to tears. In response, Allah cursed the land with a drought until the men made restitution. I brought up the possibility of going together with her to visit the Shékh. Fatima refused, saying she feared her too much. If the Shékh decided she liked Fatima, she would ask her to stay with her as one of her companions. If Fatima declined, she could face undefined repercussions for disappointing her. I knew of no Shékh in Gondar who garnered this kind of fear and respect, however, as I have shown, Muslim practices in Gondar invokes the aid of mediators, living and dead, under the assumption that they have power as friends of Allah to harness and distribute divine blessing.

Generally speaking, du'a circles are ubiquitous in Gondar. I once went to buy water in a kiosk in Arada and saw two men sitting with an open copy of the Quran, performing rituals of chanting and invocation almost identical to those I observed in the Shékh Ali Gondaré Masjid. Also, a group of Muslim young men I often hung out with at an agricultural supply store in Arada frequently spent the afternoon chewing khat together, during which they moved seamlessly between du'a and casual conversation. Additionally, I was once talking to a Muslim man who was chewing khat in a store near Keña Bét when an older Muslim man came and asked him for a share of his khat. After receiving a few leaves, the older man performed du'a on the younger man's behalf. As stated earlier, khat and du'a intermix in practice to aid in one's concentration while performing prayer. The stimulant properties of khat are particularly useful during the all night du'a sessions that are common in the month of Ramadan.[72] I once spoke to a Muslim friend of mine about buying a sheep as a Ramadan gift for my neighborhood mosque. He insisted that they would much prefer I buy the imams khat to aid them in their night-long du'a sessions. Most (but not all) Sufi Muslim leaders I interviewed evaluate the practice of chewing khat positively in so far as it aids one in concentrating and prolonging du'a, but they criticize its use as a form of recreation, and lament what they see as increases in its use by Muslim youth outside of religious contexts.

Through du'a practices, visible mosques, calls to perform *salat*, Quranic chants, thobes (Muslim tunics) and hijabs, holiday celebrations, and even the density of khat shops in Muslim neighborhoods, the Gondaré Muslim deference/blessing dynamic resonates throughout Muslim neighborhoods, and interweaves itself into, and territorializes, most domains of Muslim life. I have shown that to some degree, the Muslim value-complex in Gondar has a deference-blessing economy that resembles that of Orthodox Christians. However, one major difference between the two is that in Muslim practice, there is a stronger differentiation between the requisite, high rituals of salat and the optional du'a practices that employ intermediaries. That is, in Muslim practice there are rituals that focus more exclusively on unidirectional alignment with transcendent deity (salat), and separate rituals that focus on the optional du'a practices—the latter of which distribute divine blessing more horizontally, transforming spaces into vessels of divine power, and positioning human beings as divine mediators. By contrast, Orthodox Christians' highest, central liturgical rituals and annual holidays invoke human-divine intermediaries and incorporate divinely infused objects, like the Ark, that are thought to transform surrounding space with sacred power. As we will see in the next section, the Sufi ritual division in labor (between direct vertical submission and mediated horizontal blessing) is important for understanding how Islamic reformists in Gondar are able to remain integrated with the Sufi majority. Generally speaking, the value-work that unfolds in mosques disciplines persons with correct Islamic knowledge and trains them to observe correct practice, helping make them into friends of Allah, which then empowers them to distribute divine blessing outward as a vector of Allah's good favor, and act as mediators for those who have not yet aligned themselves sufficiently to the divine will. One final vignette in this section will illustrate how some prominent Gondaré Muslims see this kind of value-work relating to wider scale Ethiopian imaginaries.

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[72] Chewing khat was more common and acceptable in the Muslim community, and it is generally marked as a Muslim habit. It is not considered acceptable for a pious Christian to sell khat (though many do), just as it is forbidden for a Muslim to sell alcohol (Ficquet 2006). However, Muslim and Christian young people often chew khat together and even perform du'a together.

After a year in the field, Shékh Salam Muhammad took me to an old house in Piassa that many Muslims see as historically important. It looked like other houses in the neighborhood and sat hidden behind a stone wall. The men on the other side of the wall told me it was an old mosque called *Chegé Bét* built in the era of Fasilides.[73] Every Wednesday a group of ulama from some of Gondar's central mosques sat in a circle at Chegé Bét, chewed khat and performed du'a. I was permitted to sit with them for one session. After performing a series of du'a sequences, a heavy-set man who was described to me as a "father of du'a", said to his companions, "All Ethiopia needs is du'a. Only du'a." Here I received a glimpse of the story Muslims in Gondar tell themselves about how their religious practices benefit society, about the "good" they generate for Ethiopia at large. As I explained in Chapter 1, in some Gondaré Muslim imaginaries, Muslims in Gondar had a history parallel to that of Christians, one hidden from view, but of consequence. Christianity was there on the surface, with apparent importance, but Muslims were the real vectors of divine blessing behind the scenes—most notably, according to the imams I interviewed, it was the Friends of Allah that secured Gondar's freedom from wild animals, while the role of churches never bore mention. Likewise, on that day in 2014, the ulama sat there in Chegé Bét, that covert Muslim parallel to the churches built by the kings, and continued to uphold the nation, to bless it from behind the scenes.

Evaluation and Value Subversion for Gondaré Muslims

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[73] Many Muslims claimed this was an old mosque, but other Muslims contested this claim, saying it was just a Muslim house that goes back to the time of Fasilides. What many Muslims imagine it to be is more important here than its actual historical function.

Now that I have described some key features of Muslim value-work in Gondar, in this final section I will provide some examples of Gondaré Muslim evaluations of religious outsiders and insiders, as well as an account of how some Muslims identify forces of value subversion in their environment. In one Islamic tradition, Satan was an angel cast out of heaven for refusing to follow Allah's command to bow down before Adam, the first man (Chittick 2006: xii). If submission to Allah is the ideal-typical stance of a "good" person, then disobedience, particularly, blatant rebellion, is the ideal-typical stance of evil. It is therefore not surprising that in Gondar, Muslims and Christians talk about demons in a similar fashion to one another. For Muslims, demons infest rivers and lakes, they possess people, making them crazy and sick. As far as how Muslims counteract demonic forces, I have seen Muslims at Christian holy water springs seeking healing (see Chapter 4), but most Muslims tell me that kind of intermixing is forbidden. Shékh Salam Muhammad once told me that if he recited holy words over bottled water, that water would acquire healing properties that could cure a cold, but I never saw Muslims bathing in and consuming blessed water in groups among themselves like Christians. My informants told me Muslims should rely on acts of piety, particularly recitations from the Quran, to ward off the influence of demons.[74] In addition, because Gondaré Muslims see Islam as the source of social order and peace, they see anything that hinders or fights against Islam and Muslims as a value inversion. Hence, Gondaré Muslims have very strong reactions to news they hear of Israeli soldiers, in their words, "killing Palestinian children," Western interventions in the Middle East that kill Muslims, or news of the Ethiopian government arresting certain Muslim leaders based on what many Muslims see as spurious terrorism charges. From the perspective of many Gondaré Muslims, these are all examples of the forces of evil opposing the forces of good.

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[74] Many Muslims in Ethiopia believe that lack of proper Islamic knowledge and failure to apply it in practice can lead to attacks from evil spirits (see Bruzzi and Zeleke 2015).

Also, similar to Orthodox Christians, when someone shows disrespect toward esteemed figures in Muslim hierarchies, it provokes negative evaluations and sometimes discipline. For the 2015 Shékh Ali Gondaré festival, Shékh Salam Muhammad and I arrived at the Ali Gondaré Masjid and went to dig right into the meat being distributed among the attendees. A high ranking imam stood and castigated us in front of everyone, telling us we needed to first go to the grave site, and perform du'a to honor Shékh Ali Gondaré, only then could we come back and eat. As a further illustration, I once observed a group of Muslim young men in my neighborhood throwing rocks at (not to cause serious injury) and castigating another Muslim young man. I asked them why they did so, and one young man explained "There was a teleq saw [great/big/ highly esteemed person] and he did not respect him."[75]

As with Orthodox Christians, certain religious others can sometimes be typified as a value inversion in Gondaré Muslim discourses. For a great many normative Muslims in Gondar, Muslim reformists, pejoratively called *Wahhabīah*, represent a corrosive influence on Muslim value-work. The major stream of Muslim reformism, known as Salafism (*Salafīya*), [76] has grown significantly in Ethiopia since rise of the EPRDF (Østebø 2012). Painting with broad strokes, the Salafi movement focuses on returning to the original, pure form of Islam practiced by the prophet and his companions (Voll 1999). Among their purifying projects, Salafis often work to eliminate "innovations," called bi'dah, from Muslim worship communities (cf. Brenner 1996). Throughout the movement's history, Salafis have targeted Sufis for critique, particularly the practice of making pilgrimage to the shrines of awalīyya and appealing to them as intermediators (Sirriyeh 1999). I brought up Shékh Ali Gondaré to a Salafi who owned a shop near my office in Arada and he responded forcefully, "That is *shirk*, the Quran says he who commits shirk will go to hell." The Arabic word shirk in the Quran refers to the practice of idolatry or paganism. The points of contention between Salafi and Sufi interpretations of Islam create an arena for evaluation and mutual policing that causes much consternation in the Gondaré Muslim community. In addition to critiquing practices of awalīyya mediation, Salafis also critique the much beloved practice of Mawlid as an un-Islamic cultural accretion. In an interview in 2015 Osman told me that about two years prior the conflict between Sufis and Salafis in Gondar over the practice of Mawlid had become so intense that the two parties arranged a meeting in an elementary school building hoping to resolve their differences. He said that an elderly Sufi Shékh and a young Salafi Shékh engaged in a debate which resulted in the two groups "separating," and the Salafis establishing a separate mosque. In a sermon at the 2014 Shékh Ali Gondaré festival, I heard warnings about false teachers that would lead Muslims on the "wrong path." The chants later on that day broadcast over loudspeaker proclaimed in poetic rhythms that Muslims should simply follow the path of Islam, and "not form groups," which was likely an oblique reference to the diversely named Salafi movements that have taken hold in Ethiopia.[77]

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[75] Important Muslim religious figures are also often described as "big people." Though it is not clear in this case if it was religious status that gave the person in question esteem or not, the disciplinary impulse would have been the same.

[76] The Wahhabi movement was founded by ibn Abd al-Wahhab in the 18th century with the purpose of purifying Islam, and repressing the influence of Sufism. Salafism emerged in the late 19th and early 20th century, and combined purifying imperatives against bi'dah with efforts to modernize and strengthen Islam against western domination (Esposito 2011 [1988]). Most Salafis I knew in Gondar reject association with the Wahhabi movement and prefer the label Salafīya.

In an interview, an imam at one of Gondar's central mosques identified *Wahhabīah* as one of the biggest problems facing Ethiopian Muslims today, describing their approach to Islam as an "artificial religion" (in English). Like Christian characterizations of Penté, Muslim discussions of Wahhabīah focus on how they abnegate hierarchy. I sat with Hana and Said in a shop near Keña Bét in Arada when the subject of Wahhabīah came up. Said became noticeably upset, and declared "They do not love Muhammad! They do not love Shékh Ali Gondaré!" He then made clear he wished to no longer speak of the topic. Many Salafis I knew expressed respect for Shékh Ali as a scholar, and Muhammad, of course, as the messenger of Allah. However, Salafis gained a reputation for rejecting these venerable Islamic authorities because of the rituals they denounce. In the eyes of many Gondaré Muslims, rejecting practices like Mawlid (birthday of the prophet) and the rituals at awalīyya tombs, while claiming to respect the figures they honor, is like claiming to respect an elder or imam while refusing to use honorifics (see Foley 1997: 307-343). Through their abnegation of the practices through which one recognizes Muslim hierarchies, Salafis transgress the value of deference.

Reflecting their age-based hierarchy, at Sufi mosques there is a clear division of labor between young and old—the leaders of mosques are normally of advanced age. Aged Muslim scholars usually have thick, gray beards, while Muslim youth usually have little facial hair. If a youth does grow a beard, they are often accused, sometimes jokingly, of being Wahhabīah. At the Shékh Ali Gondaré Masjid, I once heard an imam implore the youth present to respect the elders, or *shemaglé.* My research assistant Ahmed had a strong Islamic education and led a Sufi Islamic youth organization. I asked him if he could be considered a Shékh, he answered that he was too young. He specifically said he was "too hot" (a reference to youthful intensity and sexuality) to embody the piety necessary to take the title of Shékh, which suggests there is something about the bodily composition of the young that makes them more volatile, less fit to function as a religious leader. The Salafi mosque, on the other hand, was known as "Yeweṭat Masjid," or "The youth mosque," because a seeming majority of those in attendance are under thirty. When I attended a few times, I only saw one grey beard among the dark beards of pious Salafi youth gathered for Jumma prayers. If I asked Salafis about Sufi practices such as chewing khat during prayer, sometimes they would dismiss it by saying it was a practice of "*yedro saw*," or "the people of olden days," which is a way of referring to elderly folks while emphasizing their association with a by-gone era. The discourse of some Salafis, therefore, inverts the gerontocracy at the center of Sufi systems of deference. That is, when Salafis highlight that it is *elderly Muslims* who advocate for and engage in a Sufi practice, it functions to discount it, and underpins Salafis' negative evaluation of the practice. This makes sense given that Salafis generally seek to modernize Islam while eliminating traditions and cultural accretions not revealed to the prophet.

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[77] The two main Salafi groups I heard of in Gondar are al-Suna and the more controversial Takfir Wal-Hijra movement, however, this statement could also reference the al-Habash movement that recently came to Gondar upon the government's invitation (see Chapter 7). For an overview of the diverse Islamic reform movements active in Ethiopia see Østebø (2014; 2008).

Many Muslims, especially elderly Muslims, were convinced that Salafi young men had abandoned Islam altogether. I was walking with Shékh Salam Muhammad to a mosque one Friday when he pointed to a young man with a long beard and short pants, and said, "These are Wahhabīah, they are called 'Benté.' [Sic]" I probed a bit, and he told me these are people who had abandoned Islam for another religion. “They are like Christians,” he added. He undoubtedly learned the mispronounced word "Benté" from Muslim youth who often compare Wahhabīahs to "Pentés" or Pentecostals (Zeleke 2014). On a number of occasions, I observed Muslim young men tease their reformist inclined friends by calling them "Pentés." When I inquired about this, they told me that Wahhabīah, like Pentés, are *teqwamī.* The Amharic word teqwamī can be translated as "protestor," "complainer" or “opponent.” He added, "They complain against Mawlid. They complain against Shékh Ali Gondaré." Teqwamī is also the way many render the word “Protestant” in Amharic. This is one reason I suspect that many of those following Protestant strains of Christianity in Gondar deny being “Protestants,” but instead insist they are simply Christians, or even prefer the pejorative term “Penté.” Through intellectual arguments, labeled “complaints” by some, both Pentés and Wahhabīahs in effect work to deterritorialize branches of Muslim and Orthodox trees, and reattach them to a more individualistic, less hierarchical tree—in which every individual person is understood as a bough connected directly to the trunk, as opposed to a smaller branch connected to the tree through a stronger intermediary branch (cf. Roy 2010).

Now, of course, the relational parallel between Salafis and Pentecostals vis-à-vis their majority counterparts is not exact, in large measure because the boundary separating Sufis from Salafis is more diffuse than the boundary separating Pentecostals from Orthodox Christians. The way Muslim worship is organized allows those with Salafi sympathies to move back and forth between Sufi and Salafi mosques, often staying below the radar in the wider community. The practical separation between standard practices like salat prostrations and practices that appeal to awalīyya, allows Salafis to remain more or less integrated with the wider Muslim community—that is, they can choose to participate in some practices while opting out of others. Orthodox liturgy on the other hand is rife with references to mediators, so Protestants are less able to selectively participate while maintaining their opposition to Orthodox intermediaries. In addition, some Muslim youth only embrace Salafism temporarily or partially (cf. Østebø 2013a; Schielke 2009), while also maintaining nominal links to the wider Sufi community. Overall, the intermingling of Salafi and Sufi communities creates a combination of affinity and antipathy, injecting Muslim social patterns of moral recognition and evaluation with unsettling instability (see Chapter 7).

Concerning the relationship between Muslims and the Orthodox Christian majority, on an everyday basis Gondaré Muslims tend to see Christians as basically the same as them. As one elderly Muslim said it, "We are the same, Muslims and Christians. If Ethiopia goes to war, we fight together." He added that even if Ethiopia went to war with Sudan, a Muslim country, Ethiopian Muslims and Christians would fight and die together. I have also shown that both communities resemble each other in the value they place on respect for hierarchy and mediation, and in their maintenance of a blessing-deference economy. These resemblances give Muslims and Orthodox Christians a degree of mutual intelligibility, which provides a stable basis for negotiating differences (see Chapter 4).[78] All this said, the divergences between the two value-complexes still come out in interreligious evaluations. We could conceptualize the consequential point of difference this way: Christians defer in the direction of the Ark and Muslims defer away from it. This may sound like a simplistic way of parsing out Orthodox-Muslim difference, but, as I will show throughout this dissertation, this point of difference underpins some common interreligious evaluations in Gondar, as well as conflicts that result from them.

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[78] There are also parallels in how Muslims and Orthodox Christians territorialize space around their ritual centers, but this parallel sometimes creates a basis for conflict (See chapter 6).

As we saw in the last chapter, according to a common Orthodox Christian value-hierarchy, Muslims find themselves at the lower end of a multi-tiered sacral continuum because they fall outside the Orthodox ritual system of human-divine mediation. By contrast, many Gondaré Muslims see their religion as superior to Orthodox Christianity for the same reason Orthodox Christians assert their own superiority to Muslims. That is, while Christians understand Islam as a kind of absence, Muslims see Christianity as an excess. “Christians say everyone is born a Muslim right?”, a group of Muslim young men once asked me eagerly. I conceded. They then pointed out that God created everyone a Muslim, it is human beings that change them to a different religion. Here the Muslims took a discursive practice that reduces them to an absence, and turned it into a confirmation that Muslim identity is more real and closer to God. The idea that humans are Muslims right after birth is consistent with foundational Muslim narratives that claim every Abrahamic faith, and their associated texts and prophets, were originally Islamic, but through human corruption lost their original Islamic identity (see Esposito 2011 [1988]).

Along these lines, in articulating their evaluations of Christianity among themselves, and sometimes to me, Sufi Muslims hone in on what they take to be Christianity's human and material excesses. Christians overlay their religious lives with all this extra human-made stuff and wrongly associate it with the creator. The Ark functions as a focal point in these discussions. I was visiting with an elderly madrassa teacher in my neighborhood when the question of whether Christianity or Islam was “better” came up in our conversation. In addressing this issue, he first asked me, “Is the Ark made of wood?” I answered that I have not seen the Ark because Orthodox Christians keep it covered. He then asked, “Do they carry it?” “Yes, they carry it.” He then responded, “How can they carry the creator?” He then followed up with a number of questions, which I answered:

> Who created the sky?
>
> God.
>
> Who created your clothing?
>
> A person.
>
> Who created the earth?
>
> God.
>
> Who created a house?
>
> A person.

In that final question, he considered the lesson complete and said nothing more about the Ark. In the interviews Fatima conducted, a number of Gondaré Muslims repeated this critique of the Ark when asked about the difference between Muslims and Christians, stating the Ark is just “wood.” Dalia, a 38-year-old Muslim housewife, included other Christian excesses in her critique, noting that, not only do Christians believe in the Ark, they believe Jesus is “the Lord” and they believe in icons, (in Amharic “sil,” literally “painting”). Muslims, by contrast, were defined by not “believing” (*mamin)* in any of these things, and definitely not associating the creator with them.

A similar sense of excess comes out in Muslim assessments of the Orthodox Ṭimqet celebration. During the 2015 Ṭimqet, I went around to Muslim shops and asked them what they thought of the festivities. Most responded in the negative. “I hate it,” said one shopkeeper, “Everyone gets drunk and fights.” A Muslim taxi driver complained about all the roads being blocked. He compared the crowds, the drunkenness, rowdiness, and violence that surfaces on Ṭimqet to the calm demeanor of Muslim holiday celebrations (see Chapter 6). He explained that Muslims peacefully go to the stadium, pray to Allah and then go back home to spend time with their families. It is so much better, so much more legitimately pious, than all the chaos of Ṭimqet. The association of Christians with alcohol, and even the sheer majority they hold, was perhaps behind a minority of Muslims’ claims that the Christian community contains a concentration of thieves, and are generally comprised of dishonest, disorderly people. For example, one elderly Muslim once said to me “Christians are bad. They drink alcohol, chew khat, like us, fight and are thieves.”

In describing Muslim and Christian negative evaluations of the other, I do not want to overstate their salience in defining how Muslims and Christians see each other as individuals. As I have said, and will talk about more in the next chapter, Muslims and Christians also talk positively of the other and laud Muslim-Christian unity. However, as we have seen in these last few chapters, both Christians and Muslims often place their own religion in a superordinate position to the other. My informants on both sides indicated their concern for establishing their own religion as superior when they asked me the question, “Which religion is better?” Moreover, the justifications they give for their evaluation of the other as inferior focused on excesses or insufficiencies in the other's ritual microcosm. I will show later that, in certain contexts, these negative evaluations can affect intergroup relations in ways both sides find undesirable.

Overall, even if many Muslims see Christianity as an excess and accretion, it does not necessarily mean Christians automatically subvert Muslim value. Gondaré Muslims tend to only see Orthodox Christians as subverting Muslim value-work when their "accretions" crowd Muslims out, when they keep Muslims at the margins. Just as Muslims see the proliferation of mosques, the influence of the Shékhs, public parity with other religions, and the general autonomy of Muslims, as a positive value, so the actions of Christians, and the mostly Christian government, to constrain Muslim autonomy come to be viewed as a force of negative value that Muslims should push back against in their pursuit of the good—which Ethiopian Muslims have done through a wave of protests in Addis Ababa starting back in late 2011 (see Chapter 7). Muslims' stories of their long struggle on the margins of Ethiopian society, through "ups and downs," carry a hint of a final victory, in which they come out from the margins and no longer bless Ethiopia from behind the scenes, but bless their country openly. Many Gondaré Christians fear the kind of public ascendency the realization of this vision would require, and the kinds of changes it would create in Orthodox Christian majority regions. Nevertheless, even as Muslims pursue and hope for that which many in the Christian majority dread, Muslims and Christians still manage to coexist in routine, everyday life. I will discuss that sphere of shared social life in the following chapter.

Chapter 4

Muslim-Christian Coexistence as a Social Practice

Part of Edmund Leach's (2004 [1959]) major intervention into British Social anthropology in his book *Political Systems of Highland Burma* was to demonstrate that cultural groups anthropologists had tended to treat as different "societies" were actually part of the same society. The different symbols, language and dress of the Kachin and Shan culture groups provided terms for their relationships with one another. Moreover, while each cultural group had rituals within their own communities, they also engaged in shared rituals that represented the different groups as a unified, single society. Additionally, the diverse society of Highland Burma had a history of conflict—which Leach leveraged against equilibrium models of society—but the different communities also came together and performed solidarity, if only momentarily. Finally, individuals within this large, one might say "multi-cultural," society moved in and out of different ideal models of the social order—one hierarchical and autocratic (Shan), one egalitarian (Gumlao), and one a combination of the two (Gumsa).

In Gondar, Muslims and Orthodox Christians relate to one another within a larger urban society as individuals and as collectivities. This society remains stable most of the time, but also has a history of conflict. Gondaré Christians and Muslims consider interreligious coexistence to be an important part of what Gondaré call "*maheberawi nuro*," or "social life." Gondaré mark "social life" as an indispensable good, an important facet of a meaningful life. Gondarés tend to place a surplus on the experience of simple co-presence with other people. For example, my friend Mustafa was forced to reduce the size of his café because the owner of the property wanted to turn half of the space into clothing shops. He reopened after months of renovation, and told me the smaller space actually increased his business because it made it look like there were more people in the café. When Gondaré are deciding which café to patronize, they peek inside and ask themselves, in Mustafa's words, "Are there people?" (*Saw alle*?"). If they do not see crowds of people, they will go find a crowded café to patronize. Europeans and Americans, he told me, are the opposite. If they see a high density of people inside the café they will go somewhere else, or try to find a corner as far away from the crowd as possible. In associations, in civic life, in leisure, and in religious life, a major activity is getting together in large groups and passing time together for hours on end. I occasionally noted to some of my informants that "Gondarés love meetings." This would often provoke laughter and hearty agreement, "Very much so!" By contrast, Gondarés tend to consider being alone a singularly undesirable state of affairs.

Dena Freeman (2015) wrote concerning the Gamo of Southern Ethiopia that they place high value on "peace," which "encompasses the values of togetherness, mutuality, and smooth social relations" (159). This also aptly describes the values that operate the domain Gondaré mark as "social life." A community practicing virtues of peace, mutuality, smooth social relations, and I might add, "love" (*fiqir*) and respect (*keber*), will realize the ideal of *mechachal*. The literal translation of mechachal is "harmony." Some of my bilingual informants also translated the word into English as "balance." It evokes a typified image of a society in which there is horizontal flow of respect and love among equals, and obedience, respect and love between subordinates and superiors. In Gondar, a person who does not properly respect the dignity and autonomy of his or her equals and superiors was called *hayleña*. Hayleña literally means “powerful,” but in most of its casual usage it connotes an illegitimate exercise of power. The hayleña person subverts the value of peace and harmony, by not considering the feelings and interests of others; by trying to force themselves upon others in a way not justified by the norms of their subject position. For example, in a group conversation among friends, it is ideal for there to be a slow, smooth, respectful transition between interlocutors of equal status, so that everyone has a chance to participate. By contrast, a hayleña person will dominate the conversation, put forth their opinions forcefully and become easily angry. Unlike a person who is hayleña, Gondarés would say of a socially competent person, “*Saw yakebral*”, “He respects people.” One could also say, a person is *tegbabī*, which literally means that one is a “good communicator”, but it generally connotes that a person has an affable and friendly disposition. Ethiopians in general, as well as Gondarés, affirm the value of peace every time they greet one another. Greetings normally start with the phrase “*Salam now*,” “There is peace.” The person greeted repeats it back, “Salam now.” If, in an exceptional circumstance, one wishes to express a serious rift or offense, one can respond “Salam *aydelem*,” “There is no peace.” If one gives this response in total seriousness (sometimes it is said as a joke), it can undo the declaration of peace and, in a sense, declare war. I have also heard Gondarés say to a person they see as difficult or conflict prone, “You have no peace” (“Salam *yelehem”*). An individual known to start conflicts without a good reason will soon see his or her reputation suffer. He or she will be labeled hayleña or *eschegarī saw*, a difficult person.

The value on social hierarchy in some ways coheres and in some ways can conflict with the ideal of “harmony” and “social life.” Deference to a superior, and care and discipline of one’s inferiors, is consistent with Gondaré social ideals. Major works on Amhara society note that relationships of subordination are thought to keep the sinful and insatiable desires of human beings in check (Messay 1999; Donham 1986; Hoben 1973; cf Bauer 1989). However, Amhara hierarchies are also fluid and, in many cases, there are theoretically limitless possibilities for social advancement (Messay 1999: 125-178).[79] A nineteenth century traveler to the Amhara region wrote, “Each man considers himself born to great destinies, and the smallest spark sets fire to this ambition” (Donham 1986: 7). My time in Gondar left me with the impression that this still describes the approach many Gondarés take to their lives. The ideal way to gain esteem is through building positive alliances within your social network, outmaneuvering enemies, making displays of intelligence, ability, and benevolence.[80] Normally, maintaining relationships based on love and respect aids ambition, so there is not necessarily a contradiction between seeking to advance in the social hierarchy and the ideals of social peace and harmony. However, the assumption that others are ambitious comes with a suspicion that beneath many displays of respect, piety and restraint are hearts full of sinful desire and hostility. Beneath the smooth performance of peace, many imagine a drama of Machiavellian maneuvering, a social world filled with those who will advance themselves at your expense if they need to (see Messay 1999: 152). If they are smart about it, and the most successful people are indeed considered “smart” or *gobez*, their guilt never comes to light. Maneuvering for advancement is an accepted fact of life, and if you pursue it right, without violating social ideals too blatantly and alienating necessary allies, you might gain wealth and clients, you might head organizations and gain much esteem as a *teleq saw*, (big person) (Malara and Boylston In press). A person known to be hayleña in a pejorative sense asserts dominance crudely, excessively and prematurely, and does not balance it with displays of respect and love. The value of “social life” pushes back against the negative value of open conflict driven by unmitigated desire, hatred, and competition.

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[79] This general understanding of social fluidity is due to the historical lack of a sharp barrier between peasant and nobility. The system of bilateral descent meant nearly everyone could claim noble ancestry. It was also common for the nobility to experience social decline, which reinforced the sense of continuity between the two classes.

[80] Messay (1999) writes concerning how hierarchy worked historically in Ethiopian society that “The more leaders are successful, the higher is their authority over their followers from whom they can ask great sacrifices, whereas the more their charisma is declining, the lower becomes their control over them” (152).

Perhaps it is clear by now that the ideal of mechachal does not contradict Orthodox or Muslim values. In fact, it even works against similar forces of disorder. Most Christians would see mechachal as an expression, and effect, of Orthodox values. They would claim communal deference to the Orthodox hierarchy of divine mediators as a necessary condition of social harmony; and, as we saw in the last chapter, Muslims would likely assert the same with respect to their sacred hierarchy (as Islam means “peace,” see Chapter 3). Nevertheless, I would argue that maheberawi nuro constitutes its own complex of value-work in Gondar because it involves practices that, while often encompassed by Orthodox and Muslim ritual apparatuses, are not defined by, or limited to, those apparatuses. Moreover, unlike religious rituals, the value complex of mechachal constitutes a project Muslims and Christians share and work to sustain in a joint effort. The practices of mechachal are marked specifically as achieving an ideal “social life” (*maheberawi nuro*) of peace (*salam*), love (*fiqir*), respect (*keber*) and, of course, harmony (mechachal).[81] As I will show, the religious and specifically social forms of value-work sometimes come into conflict and one value has to supersede the other.

Robbins (2013b) argues that Dumont provides useful tools for conceptualizing how different values relate to one another in a social context that has a plurality of values at play. In my analysis thus far, I have linked religious values with the macrocosmos and ritual sites of micro-macrocosmic connection. This is consistent with Dumont's (1980) idea that values are ranked at different levels in a hierarchy and that the highest values link up with social wholes and encompass all elements within that whole (cosmos=wholes). A stable value hierarchy is not inevitable, as Robbins (2013b) acknowledges that different values often coexist in a society without a stable hierarchy ordering them, which can result in the never ending contest of values Weber discussed, in which people feel pulled in different directions and must make difficult choices between competing values (Weber 1946b). By contrast, in other social contexts there is a stable hierarchy between values, in which one value is broadly recognized in discourse and practice as higher than the other. In Gondar, highly territorialized Orthodox neighborhoods have established Orthodox notions of the good as the highest ranking value within that territory. The same goes for highly territorialized Muslim neighborhoods. The important aspect of the neo-Dumonteianan framework for the purpose of this chapter is his insight that even lower ranking values have priority in certain contexts. In Gondar, the values of "social life" sometimes take precedence over the values of the deference-blessing economy. Moreover, religious values also routinely take precedence over mechachal, which sometimes makes religion into an obstacle that integrative practices must adapt to and work around. In this chapter, I will look at how religious and social values are negotiated as Muslims and Orthodox Christians work to realize the ideal of social harmony, and, in particular, interreligious harmony.

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[81] I included translation of these terms to highlight that each of them are emic terms that Gondarés frequently used to describe social virtues.

Gondar: Land of Religious Tolerance

Each year for the Orthodox holiday of Mesqel (The Day of the True Cross) throngs of Orthodox Christians gather in Gondar's Mesqel Square at the center of Piassa. European and American tourists observe the holiday events from a perch in front of the castle walls next to local VIPs (mayor, archbishop etc.). I was told they were given this space in order to protect them from pickpockets. For the Mesqel main events of both 2013 and 2014, a government official gave a speech in Amharic, and then delivered the same speech in English directed at the small group of tourists. Both years, the speeches in English and Amharic each bore mention of Ethiopia's long tradition of religious tolerance. The government official asserted that, unlike other countries, in Ethiopia Christians and Muslims have lived together peacefully for centuries. I heard the same statements in government speeches delivered to Muslims during their holiday observances at the stadium (specifically Eid al-Ftir), and holidays at the awalīyya shrines (Shékh Ali Gondar and Shékh Abdul Basset Festivals). Government administrators also made similar statements in their speeches at the anti-ISIS demonstration in 2015. Finally, Muslim and Orthodox Christian individuals regularly echoed these public statements when I spoke to them individually. In casual conversations, Muslims and Christians often alternated from talking about interreligious conflicts in Ethiopia to talking about Ethiopia's tradition of religious tolerance. A Christian administrator at Gondar's Office of Culture and Tourism elaborated upon the idea of Ethiopian tolerance as we spoke over lunch, telling me that there is something special about Ethiopian brands of Christianity and Islam that inclines them towards peace and away from violence. The peaceful norms of Ethiopian culture, he claimed, had a moderating influence on both religions.

Desplat and Østebø (2013) argue that the EPRDF's discourse on Ethiopia's primordial religious tolerance erases centuries of conflict between Muslims and Ethiopia's Christian government. This allows the government to chalk up any religious conflict in Ethiopia to the influence of extremist elements in Arab Islam. While the historical events covered in chapter one show Desplat and Østebø are in large measure correct, it is also true that the EPRDF is not spinning their narrative of Ethiopian tolerance out of whole cloth. In Gondar, the model of Ethiopian society the EPRDF puts forth, that of harmonic Muslim-Christian coexistence, is regularly performed in religiously mixed neighborhoods through a concrete set of practices. Many of these practices emblematize what my informants called "*yehaymanot mechachal*," "religious harmony." My bilingual Gondaré informants tended to translate this phrase into English as "religious tolerance," thus linking local concepts of harmony with globally circulating notions of tolerance associated with modernity (Brown and Forst 2014). One Muslim man I met on a taxi gave a definition of yehaymanot mechachal with which most Gondaré would agree. I asked him to tell me the meaning of the term and he explained, "I am Muslim. I respect Christians and Christians respect me." This model of a balanced exchange of respect (keber) between Muslims and Christians as ostensible equals contrasts with the hierarchical models of interreligious relations discussed in previous chapters. In the practices of mutuality that define the Gondaré brand of religious tolerance, interreligious hierarchies fade into the background, and symmetrical models of interreligious relations come to the fore. The narrative representing Muslims and Christians in Ethiopia as living respectful, integrated lives since time immemorial supplements these practices.

Gondarés use the Amharic word mechachal as a gloss for the practice and social condition of interreligious harmony and tolerance. Going forward, I will similarly use the word mechachal as a gloss for the value of interreligious harmony/tolerance as conceived of, and practiced, in Gondar. I do this because rendering mechachal as either tolerance or harmony would evoke genres and clichés that bring too much baggage to the current account.

A specific set of discourses and practices underpin the integrated value-complex of mechachal, which allow Muslims and Christians to interact "as if" the symmetrical model defined their social relations (Seligman et al 2008). Tokens of respectful symmetry permeate even the most basic of courtesies: greetings. A sociable, respectful person will greet those they pass with gusto. My research assistant Diborah told me that when she mentioned to people that she worked for me they would often say, "He respects people. He greets everybody." When Muslims and Christians pass each other on the streets, the greeter says, "*Dehna nesh*?", "You are well?" To answer this polite inquiry a Christian or Muslim might respond, "Thanks to God." However, a Muslim might answer in Arabic, "*Alhamdulillah*" and a Christian in Amharic "*Egzīyaber Yemesgen*." Both phrases mean, "Praise be to God," but the language they use indexes different religious authorities. These respective phrases appear during some the highest ritual moments in Muslim and Orthodox sacred spaces, and, in greeting practices, they permeate out into shared space.

Because religious identities come into mutual awareness in the act of greeting, the greeting itself performs recognition of the other-qua-other.

Acts of recognition directed not just at the person of the religious other, but *at the religious aspect of the other*, also show up in connection to religious holidays. On Christian holidays, for example, Muslims often visit Christians to wish them a happy celebration. When happening upon Orthodox Christian acquaintances on a Christian holiday, a Gondaré Muslim would likely greet them, "*Enkwan aderesachu*,", which means effectively "Congratulations" or "Happy holiday."[82] Christians similarly visit and congratulate Muslims on their holidays. Shortly after Christmas in 2015, Diborah took a random sample of 25 Christians in Piassa and 25 Christians in Arada (total 50) to ask them if any Muslims visited them on Christmas to wish them well. In Piassa, 15 out of the 25 respondents reported Muslims visited them, while in Arada 8 out of 25 respondents reported receiving Muslim visits. [83] This suggests that the practice of visiting the religious other on their holidays is widespread in Gondar but is unevenly distributed in different residential areas. I sat with Mustafa in his café on the first day of the month of Ramadan and he showed me six texts he had received on his cell phone from Christian friends that contained nothing more than the phrase, "*Eid Mubarak*" (Arabic for "Blessed Celebration!"). Small acts of respect to the religious aspect of the other get worked into small talk as well. Small talk in Gondar often begins with a greeting, followed by a set of benign questions, such as, "How is your family?," "How is your work?," and "How is your health?" During the Ramadan fast it was common for

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[82] This phrase literally means, "Even it [the holiday] arrives to you."

[83] She acquired the random sample by visiting every third house until she interviewed 25 Orthodox respondents in each major residential area.

Christians to also ask their Muslim friends casually, “How is your fast?” “Ṣom endét now?” Many of my Orthodox informants considered asking Muslims about their fast to be an important social courtesy. For example, during the month of Ramadan, I visited Souseunu, an Orthodox Christian woman, in her kiosk as she was helping a Muslim customer. After I greeted both of them, Souseunu said to me didactically, “You need to ask him, ‘How is your fast?’” I promptly followed her instructions and asked the Muslim man how his fast was going. He smiled and told me it was going well with no further details. Asking about the fast of the other implies recognition that their fast has value, just as asking about the other’s family and health presupposes their value. The fast is worth asking about because, at the very least, it has value to the one being addressed.

In addition to greetings and small talk, keeping *frequency* of contact is an important way to show anyone, whether of the same religion or of a different religion, that you respect and care for them. While in the field, I noticed few seemed to care if I was late for, or even missed, a casual appointment, but they became angry if I went too long without visiting or calling them. In Gondar, if I ran into a friend after not seeing them for a few days, they would likely greet me by saying “ṭefah,” which means, “You disappeared.”[84] My interlocutor sometimes delivered this in an accusatory manner, especially if they felt I had forgotten them. One often responds to that kind of greeting by saying “*Allehu*,” which is to say, “I am here.” It is as if to say, ‘Yes, I disappeared, but I’m here now,’ or, alternatively, ‘I never disappeared. You’re exaggerating my absence.’ The accuser may dispute the claim that “I am here,” and sternly insist, “No, you disappeared.” They would then demand an explanation, “Why did you disappear?”

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[84] Sometimes Gondaré greet each other like this even after only one or two days pass, but it is done more casually, without the demand that one provide an explanation.

“*Lemindenow* ṭefah?,” often with a show of slight anger, hurt, and an expectation that I provide a valid reason for not visiting during the elapsed time. The point of the display of emotion was to show that one cares for the other person. It establishes an expectation of regular contact, or assumes that such an expectation had already been established. When I told my neighbor Thomas I was moving out of Autoparko he expressed sadness I was leaving. I assured him I would visit regularly, but he countered, “We *habésha* [Ethiopians] are not like you foreigners. We have to see people every day. We always miss people if we don’t see them everyday.” He delivered this statement with a mournful, downcast countenance. To increase frequency of contact, Gondarés often call one another on their cell phones and have very short exchanges. These calls often go something like this:

> Hi, are you well?
>
> Yes, I am well. Are you well?
>
> Yes.
>
> Okay, bye.

This practice, my informants tell me, also shows respect. It shows your friend that you remember them. Religious difference presents few barriers to Muslims and Christian having frequent contact with one another in this way.

In addition to frequency of contact, close friends would expect you to spend copious amounts of time with them. These periods of co-presence may include conversations held while drinking coffee, eating off the same plate, passing time in cafés, and visiting each other’s homes and businesses. Mustafa once expressed annoyance at how long customers would stay in his café, passing time with friends for hours, while only ordering a few small items. Spending hours in cafés with friends is a common form of leisure in Gondar and seems crucial to building and maintaining relationships. Longevity of contact also emerged as a theme in the narratives Muslims and Christians told when I asked them how Muslims and Christians live together peacefully in Gondar. In what one might call narratives of mechachal, Christians and Muslims tell stories of passing the day together. Both Christians and Muslims emphasize that when prayer time comes the Christian will wait outside of the mosque while their Muslim friend performs prayer. When it is time for the Christian to go to church, the Muslim waits outside while the Christian friend performs their religious duties. All accounts of this sort feature both the Muslim and Christian performing the same act of waiting for the other, which paints a symmetrical picture in light of a mutually exclusive, religious division.

These narratives contrast obligations to friends with obligations to religious hierarchies—as the ideal of frequency of contact also applies to one's relationship with God and his mediators. Orthodox Christians have an obligation to do the sign of the cross when they pass a church or to kiss the gate of the church upon passing. If one does not have time on a saint's day to stay for the full liturgy, a Christian often performs the equivalent of greeting the saint, which entails making a trip to the church, kissing the gate and then moving on. Muslims have similar obligations to frequent the mosque to perform salat five times a day. When in unmixed religious company, friends often fulfill these obligations together. The narratives recognize that the mutually exclusive religious obligations of Muslims and Christians provide an obstacle, a reason to break contact. However, they also portray Muslims and Christians stepping around that obstacle. Both Muslims and Christians find a way to continue in one another's presence even though the need to perform religious duties puts pressure on them to separate. Moreover, the fact that one has to wait outside so the other can perform their religious duties indicates the frequency and length of time they spend together. Generally, this kind of willingness to commit time and effort to maintain frequent contact provides a reliable index to Gondarés of respect and love.

Meat, Taboo and Commensality

Upon meeting me at a mosque or a shrine, some Muslims asked “Do you believe in Allah or Egzīyaber?” I tried to explain that I see Allah and Egzīyaber as different words for God (Egzīyaber is Amharic for God, and Allah is Arabic for the same). They then often corrected me, explaining that Egzīyaber was born of a virgin, while Allah was not. In this view, though not all would express it this way, Allah and Egzīyaber are not different words for God, but in effect, different loci of authority. Taboos on Muslims and Christians sharing meat insures that the separateness of the two authorities remain at the front of intersubjective awareness. Muslims the world over take great pains to insure the meat they eat is “halal,” that is, blessed, slaughtered, and prepared in accordance with Islamic law (see Fischer 2016). Christians in Ethiopia have their own version of halal meat. For Ethiopian Orthodox Christians, “Christian meat” (*yeKristian séga*) must have a proper Christian blessing at the time of slaughter, otherwise it is off limits for baptized Orthodox Christians. My informants told me that before a Muslim kills a sheep, goat or ox, he[85] says in Arabic, “*Beshmi Allah al-rahman al-rahmin,*” which in English translates to, “In the name of Allah. Passionate and Merciful.” A Christian butcher, on the other hand, will say in Ge’ez, “*Besme ab, weWeld, weMenfes Qedus, ehadu Amlak, Amen*”, meaning in English, “In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.” He says this while doing the sign of the cross before slitting the animal’s throat (see Zellelew 2015a; Ficquet 2006).

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[85] Only men are permitted to slaughter animals in both Muslim and Christian communities.

Due to the restriction on eating meat blessed by the religious other, butcher establishments in Gondar each have a religious affiliation. Butchers mark the entrance to their shops with either a cross or a crescent to signify the religious identity of their meat. Christians and Muslims hold to the taboo against eating the meat of the religious other all over Ethiopia. However, in Gondar, Orthodox Christians follow this taboo scrupulously and see its violation as a major breach of proper Christian conduct. During my first few months in Gondar I ate sheep at a Muslim acquaintance’s house for Eid al-Arafa. It was delicious and I happily accepted the offer to take some home with me in plastic container. While later chatting in the internet café near my house, I casually told Christian neighbors about my day. I soon learned that discussing my consumption of Muslim meat evoked shock, sometimes moral outrage. One young man told me in English, “That makes me angry.” Another gave me a disappointed look, and said “I thought you were a Christian!” Another stalwart Orthodox Christian young man asked accusingly, “So because you’re an anthropologist you can eat whatever you want?” Christians who lived in my home compound asked to see the Muslim meat. When they set their gaze upon it, I playfully raised it a few inches closer to their faces in a swift movement. They startled and laughed wildly, wrinkling up their faces with disgusted glee as if I had swallowed a bug on a dare.

Ficquet (2006) wrote that in Ethiopia “consuming meat that is not consecrated to one’s faith is seen as a highly sacrilegious act equivalent to apostasy” (47). Once word of my sacrilegious act got out, the rest of my fieldwork I was subject to lectures from Orthodox Christians who were privy to my transgression. An Orthodox Christian woman I had met once a year and half earlier approached me in a church courtyard and exhorted me to never eat Muslim meat again. She also encouraged me to ask the priest to “baptize” me in order to undo the meat’s taint. I knew one Orthodox Christian young man who lived right outside a church and was known for being *gobez*, clever, in his religious knowledge because he had attended seminary for a time. I asked him why he never even entered the church courtyard, especially during fasting season. In response, he confided that he felt he could not enter the church courtyard because he had consumed Muslim meat. I asked him why he did not confess to the priest and make penance. He was afraid and/or embarrassed, he said, to confess this deed to the priest because of the severity of his sin. The people, he added, call Christians who commit such acts “*wenjeliña*,” criminal.

The severity of the act of eating Muslim meat makes sense when one takes into account the transformative effects of ritually mediated consumption in Orthodox practice. Eating the senbet kīta, drinking holy water, partaking of communion, eating food blessed by the priest, brings the Christian under the purview of the Orthodox hierarchy. By eating blessed food, one ingests its sacral power and absorbs the holy. So too, by eating Muslim meat one ingests and absorbs *Muslimness*, which, according to many of my informants, transforms one into a Muslim. My Orthodox Christian friend Teddy first told me about this idea when I disclosed to him that I had eaten Muslim meat. He said, “If I eat Muslim meat it will make me a Muslim, then I'll have to get baptized."[86] Muslims I spoke to in Gondar laughed off the idea that a Christian can become Muslim just through an act of eating meat, however, with very few exceptions, most Orthodox Christians I spoke to in Gondar affirm its transformative effects.[87] Muslim meat carries with it, what might be called, the "mana" of religious alterity (cf. Mauss 1972 [1905]). As such, it removes one from the encompassing purview of the Orthodox sacred hierarchy. The act of eating Muslim meat inverts sacramental acts of consumption, affording the kind of deference to Islamic authority that should only be afforded to the Holy Trinity and its many refractions.

As seriously as Gondaré Christians take the restriction on eating Muslim meat, they find it perfectly appropriate for Muslims to eat it. So long as I did not bring up the possibility of transgression, most Orthodox Christians described the different consumption habits in neutral terms. Meat serves as an emblem of religious difference in Gondar that suggests sameness and difference at the same time. I often asked Orthodox Christians to describe what distinguishes Muslims and Orthodox Christians. They would commonly say, something like, "We are all the same, the only difference is meat." Or, they may reduce religious difference to the different blessings pronounced at the time of slaughter**:** "We say, 'In the name of the Father' and they say, 'In the name of Allah.'" In statements like this, the divide separating Muslims and Christians takes on the arbitrary interchangeability of Levi-Strauss’ (1962) totem.[88] The meat taboo as an emblem of religious difference can present the distinction between Muslims and Christians as trivial in some sense and non-trivial in others. The ostensible triviality comes out intentionally from statements like that above—which say, essentially, there really is no major difference in habits, values, basic humanity between Muslims and Christians, there is only this blessing thing. On the other hand, the centrality of food sharing in northwest Ethiopia in general, and Gondar in particular, works against this claimed triviality.

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[86] He was not talking about being Christened again, I don't think, but visiting the holy water spring and engaging in the practice I described in Chapter three of having his whole body drenched in holy water.
[87] Historically, both Ethiopian Muslims and Christians have attempted to convert each other to their religion by forcing them, or tricking them into, eating their meat (Ficquet 2006).

If I walk into a shop in Gondar while any of the shopkeepers are eating, they nearly always point at their food and say, "Let's eat!" (*Ennebla*). If I am waiting in a restaurant for my food and make eye contact with a fellow customer, eating their half-finished meal, they too will point at their food and say, "Let's eat!" The same interaction occurs if I linger about for a while after finishing my food. Be it at home, work, or a chance meeting on the street, it is hard to think of a time when I have had even a brief interaction with a person eating when they did not point at their food and say, "Let's eat!" It would be difficult to overstate how crucial eating off the same plate is to social life in Gondar. The reflexive invitation, "Let's eat!" displays the bare minimum of pro-social behavior. My informants often expressed disapproval of what they interpret as the American culture of eating alone. They are particularly amused by images in American movies of people eating in the car, which to them indicates that foreigners are either constantly working or constantly hungry. Many see the recent practice of using individual plates in Gondar—instead of large plates, half meter in diameter, shared by up to five people—as an example of how globalization is eroding the virtues of Ethiopian culture. In commentaries, the act of eating off the same plate indexes the special love Ethiopians have one for another, "We eat together because we love each other." I regularly observe Muslims and Christians sharing lentils, boiled cabbage, potatoes and carrots, and chickpea paste, all eaten with a sour pancake (enjera) on a large plate. Zellelew insightfully notes that while in a European context commensality means sharing the same table, in an Ethiopian context it means “to share the *same* food” off the same plate (2015a: 45). In addition, he wrote that unlike Europeans, who use forks, Ethiopians use their hands to eat, and “scooping with fingers allow Ethiopians to get closer to one another…to make ‘manual contact’ with the food itself.” However, if a Muslim visits an Orthodox Christian who is eating meat, the most basic social nicety of “Let’s eat!” must be withheld. The centrality of commensality to human connection in Gondar means that this moment of restraint is like the deictic equivalent of a loudspeaker ramped to full volume, blaring the declaration, “BOUNDARY HERE!” However, the way Gondarés step around this boundary to connect with each other—to provide the other with displays of respect and recognition—makes the public presentation of religious difference one of symmetry.

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[88] Levi-Strauss argued that totems mark distinctions between the groups in an arbitrary way, whereas Malinowski and Durkheim argued that there is something more motivated behind totemic identification, either that there is thought, in emic terms, to be some ontological similarity between groups and totemic animals (see Singer 1984), or that there are taboos on eating certain totemic animals because they are “not good to eat.”

The meat taboo means that religious differences are brought front and center as Muslims and Christians participate together in the most important events in social life: those that call for feasting. At the most important social events, like graduation ceremonies, or, quintessentially, weddings, the host serves meat to guests. To accommodate guests of the other religion, Muslim or Orthodox hosts have an obligation to sponsor two feasts in separate locations. One of the feasts serves Muslim meat to Muslims guests. The other feast serves Christian meat to Christian guests. A common narrative of mechachal I heard in Gondar focused on this practice of hosting segregated wedding feasts. In these stories, Muslims and Christians eat in different locations, but then all move to a single location and dance together. Though the dance floors I have observed at Muslim and Christian weddings tended toward religious homogeneity—with a few religious others occasionally scattered here and there—the point of the wedding narratives was not the dance per se, but the boundaries accommodated and crossed.[89] For a Christian to have an animal slaughtered for Muslim guest, the message conveyed is 'I value you as a neighbor and a friend. I value you enough to accommodate your religious restrictions. You are different than me, but I love and respect you.' It provides recognition to the other as a neighbor and as a Muslim at the same time.

A similar form of mutual respect is at work when an Orthodox Christian chooses a vegetable dish over a meat dish so they can share off the same plate with a Muslim. In interviews and casual conversation, Muslims expressed appreciation and affection for Christians who make this gesture. In one of the recorded interviews my research assistant

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[89] The weddings I attended had a religious mixture of guests, but the dance floor tended toward more religious homogeneity than popular narratives suggest. At Christian weddings, for example, you may have Christians dancing together, while a few Muslims stand to the side clapping along. Likewise, at Muslim weddings, Muslims usually dance together to religious neshīda music and Christians stand stiffly looking on from the slide lines (though there were some exceptions). That the narratives may be underdetermined by the empirical make-up of your typical wedding dance floor indicates that the narratives might be overdetermined by ideals of social harmony and integration. In describing wedding practices, Gondaré prefer to focus on mixture rather than the lack thereof. It is what, perhaps, they see as presenting their best face, that aspect of themselves they prefer to broadcast to a foreigner like me. That Muslims and Orthodox Christians may not dance together as much as they say is not an indicator of antipathy per se. Orthodox Christians start learning the traditional Amhara dance, known as *eskesta*, from the time they can walk, while Muslims tend to take it up awkwardly as adults. Likewise, Christians feel odd dancing to the Muslim neshīda music that often plays at Muslim weddings. Given how dancing can tie in with worship in Orthodox practice, it is understandable that Christians would feel uncomfortable about dancing to music that shouts praises to Muhammad and Allah—though I once observed an elderly Christian women clapping along to neshīda with great enthusiasm.

Fatima conducted, Jamal, a 27-year-old Muslim clothing merchant, expressed how much he liked living with Christians in Gondar. Fatima probed him to explain. As an example he described how a Christian he knows orders vegetable dishes on a non-fasting holiday, a day when Orthodox Christians tend to relish their meat. He makes this sacrifice, Jamal explained, “because we are friends” and he wants to eat off the same plate with Jamal. Similarly, I once observed a Christian young man sitting in a Muslim butcher shop eating nothing while his Muslim friend scarfed down some spicy beef stew. This Christian wanted to remain by the Muslim young man’s side even though he could not eat because, as the Christian told me, “he is my friend.” These accommodations add another layer to the typical gestures of love and friendship. The effort required in stepping around religious difference complements, and perhaps enhances, other costly displays such as frequency and duration of contact. After discussing some of the practices of accommodation discussed above, Jamal added, “It seems to me that because our religions are different, it causes our love to increase.”

The Values of Religion and the Values of Social Life: Conflicts and Priorities

One could describe the different value-complexes of “social life” and religion as different economies of respect. In religious centers of value-work, every member of a religious community is expected to direct their respect unidirectionally, vertically to God through his mediators. In the value-work of social life, respect is directed in a diffuse, relatively more lateral fashion, with scattered pockets of fluid verticality with limited reach. When you bring Muslims and Christians into the picture of social life, the ideal-typical flow of respect is lateral and mutual, i.e. symmetrical, between religious communities. Routine practices of interreligious respect mirror each other in form and proportionality. Muslims and Christians provide the *same kinds* of feasting accommodations, they *both* congratulate each other on their holidays, they *both* greet each other in the same way, and they *both* wait respectfully while the other performs their religious duties. Moreover, in some instances, religious values take priority over those of social life. Religious obligation and the exclusivity of sacred space supervenes the social value of sustained co-presence. Likewise, in case of meat consumption, the values of Orthodox and Muslim blessing economies take priority over the social value of commensality. I have shown that these priorities do not lead to the disintegration of relations, but help set the terms for those relations. Accommodations to religious priorities mark acts of respect and love as specifically *interreligious* acts of respect and love, a kind of macro-recognition for the other. The lateral flow of these expressions perform the social model of symmetry and, by extension, mechachal. In some cases, it can lead to stronger feelings of closeness because of the added effort involved in making accommodations.

Most practices of mechachal seem designed to work around religious restrictions, perhaps presupposing the priority given to religious values over social values. However, in some contexts social values clearly supervene religious values. The common practice of Christians sharing vegetable dishes with Muslims provides an example of the values of mechachal taking priority. Muslims and Orthodox Christians pronounce blessings immediately prior to eating any dish, be it vegetable or meat. The blessing that precedes all eating is similar to that performed on the animal at slaughter. Christians bless their food in the name of the Trinity and Muslims bless their food in the name of Allah. Once someone applies a Christian or Muslim blessing to a vegetable dish, I was told, it becomes unsuitable for consumption by those with allegiance to another religious authority. I also learned that Muslims and Christians have found a way around this obstacle by prioritizing commensality over blessing in this one case. My informants told me that when Muslims and Christians share vegetable dishes off the same plate they withhold the typical verbal pronouncement and gesture of the blessing. Instead, they verbalize the blessing in their minds. There is even a proverb circulated among Orthodox Christians to describe this accommodation: *Sélafiqir besme ab īqer*. This can be translated into English as, “For the sake of love, ‘In the name of the father’ is held back.”

In addition, normative restrictions on sacred space provide a domain with flexibility under certain circumstances. That is, under certain circumstances, the project of mechachal takes priority over the restrictions on sacred space. Before discussing these exceptions, I will elaborate a bit on the interreligious exclusivity of sacred space. During my first month in Gondar in 2013, I was talking with an Orthodox Christian tour guide I had met during my trip to Gondar in 2010. When I told him about my project he invited me to come with him to the main mosque in Piassa. We walked into the mosque compound and an imam soon came out and interrogated my guide, asking “Are you Christian?” He answered in the affirmative, and the imam declared, “Christians are not allowed in mosques. Christians have the church.” Though my guide was surprised, most of my Christian informants knew about this norm and would not presume to go a mosque. Likewise, Christians also affirm that Muslims, with a few exceptions, would not normally be welcomed into a church courtyard. When I asked Christians why Muslims were not allowed in the church gates, they often answered my question with a question, “Why would they come to a church? There is no reason.” I found in Gondar that if there is not a comprehensible reason for a person to be somewhere, people often suspect they are up to no good; that they have some kind of nefarious intention. When walking in neighborhoods where I did not know anyone, I sometimes heard whispers, “Why is this foreigner here?” and even “Maybe he’s a terrorist.” Muslim and Christian ritual spaces in Gondar presuppose the deferential orientation of all who enter. Therefore, for someone who has not committed themselves to a deferential relationship with Egzīyaber or Allah to enter these ritual spaces feels like an affront or a mockery, except in certain cases.

Overall, Muslim informants told me that everyone who enters a mosque should have the same belief in Allah and Muhammad as the messenger of Allah.[90] This is consistent with the role of mosques as controlled spaces cut off from mundane distractions. I met my Muslim friend Adam for lunch one day at around the same time as midday salat (*zuhr*). He asked if I would wait in a café while he went to the mosque in Piassa to pray. I told him I could come to the mosque courtyard and wait for him there, as by that point, I had gained permission from the Ulama to sit within the walls of the mosque compound during salat. He told me that praying in a mosque while a non-Muslim sits in the courtyard would make him “unhappy,” *des aylem*. The incongruity of his deferential prayer in a Muslim ritual center, and the proximity of one who does not defer in the same way, made him uncomfortable enough for him to restrict my movement with him. Me waiting in the cafe instead of going to the mosque was an act of respect for Adam. While waiting in the café for Adam’s return, I lived out an episode in popular narratives of mechachal, in which distance from, and hence respect for, the ritual boundaries of the other underpinned a relationship of mutual respect.[91]

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[90] It makes sense that complying with the first pillar of Islam, the testimony of faith, would be a prerequisite to participation in the second pillar, prayer. My Muslim informants told me that if I wanted to pray in the mosque, all I had to do was make a declaration of faith, “There is no God, but Allah and Muhammad is the true messenger of Allah.” Similarly, Christians see Christening as an essential prerequisite to full participation in liturgy and communion.

Despite the general norm of ritual separation, however, sometimes Muslims and Christians participate in each other's lower, more instrumental, rituals. For example, Muslims are known to visit holy water springs in search of healing. Christians I knew had no issue with this practice. In fact, many Christians I knew loved to talk of Muslims being healed by holy water and sometimes converting to Christianity as a result. I met a Muslim woman who slept for a week in the *Tekla Haymanot* church near Fasilides' Castle. This church compound functioned as a temporary home for a group of laypeople who paid the church a fee to sleep on church grounds and receive holy water baptisms daily for a week at a time. Each person had a specific ailment of body or mind they sought a remedy for. I asked a Christian man outside Teklah Haymanot what he thought of Muslims who follow the baptism routine and slept in the church compound. He told me that seeking holy water for healing was just like going to the doctor.

Likewise, I also saw a few Christian women at the Shékh Ali Gondaré and Shékh Abdul Basset shrines. The Christian woman I met at the Shékh Ali Gondaré shrine told me she came there hoping Shékh Ali, a "teleq saw," a "big person," could heal her from an illness she incurred from a debtera's curse in the church—which is probably one reason she did not seek healing from church rituals. She said after participating in du'a at the tomb over the course of a few months her illness improved. She also claimed she was still a Christian, as the mateb and visible cross around her neck made clear. The awalīyya shrines and holy water springs were more porous places than mosques and churches,[92] which is likely why my presence at the Shékh Ali Gondaré shrine did not cause as much discomfort as my presence in the large mosques. As an additional example of ritual mixing, in Piassa and Arada, some groups of Muslim and Christian young men chew khat and perform du’a together. I met a young man once who was born Christian, had a Muslim best friend, and labeled himself “half Muslim.” He said he loved to perform du’a and visit the awalīyya shrines (Zellekew 2914). In Gondar, Christian young men who participate in du’a circles are normally of low repute among relatively pious Christians—not only for performing du’a, but also for openly chewing khat on a regular basis.

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[91] After that experience, I began to ask Muslim acquaintances if many Muslims experienced similar discomfort at my presence in the mosque. They told me that some were happy to see me sitting there showing an interest in Islam, but others were uncomfortable and suspected I was a spy. At that point, I decided to stop hanging out around mosques.

Often Orthodox Christians and Muslims appreciate it when individuals from another religion recognize their powers of blessing. It is a reason for their presence in religious spaces that Christians and Muslims can understand. Most do not see it as disrespectful; rather, they take it as a form of positive recognition. I have even seen religious leaders publicly celebrate it. For example, Muslims sometimes perform a selet (vow) to the Bata Mariam Ark, which is known for its power in vow fulfillment. When a Muslim man delivered a gift on Bata Mariam’s yearly holiday in 2014, the priest made sure to announce to all in attendance that the gift had been offered by a Muslim. After hearing this announcement, the Orthodox throngs erupted in glee. These mixed ritual contexts offer an opportunity for individuals, to not only show respect to individuals of another religion, but to partake in their rituals and show respect to the religious hierarchy of the other, hoping to attain its powers of blessing. While Orthodox Christians and Muslims tend to welcome this kind of recognition from the religious other, most individuals I spoke with are highly critical of those in their own ranks who go out seeking alien blessings. The negative evaluations of those who venture outside their own religious rituals, in a sense, proves the rule of religious separation. I was often subject to scrutiny and interrogations from Christians once word got out that I regularly attended the Shékh Ali Gondaré shrine and had been given a Muslim nickname, “Nursiel Gondaré.” Even my Christian banker once confronted me after he heard gossip about my activities and made sure to communicate his disapproval to me. Moreover, when I mentioned the Muslim woman I saw at the holy water spring to my Muslim informants, they tended to furrow their brow, and say, “*Haram now*!” “That is forbidden!” Therefore, the kind of ritual mixing the religious other might approve of, and find validating, garners disapproval from some in one’s own religious community. This one-sided opprobrium—e.g. ‘Our rituals are good’ ‘Their rituals are bad,’ ‘They can participate in ours, but you can’t participate in theirs’ (paraphrasing what is implied)—that results from interreligious ritual participation brings asymmetrical models of interreligious relations to the fore.

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[92] At some awalīyya shrines in Ethiopia Christian attendance has reached up to 60% (Bruzzi and Zeleke 2015).

Now that I have covered a bit how Muslims and Christians relate to one another’s ritual spaces, I will turn my attention to interreligious participation at Orthodox funerals: a practice wherein the project of mechachal takes priority over prevailing restrictions on sacred space. The life of an Orthodox Christian culminates in a church funeral and, usually, burial in the cemetery of their local parish. The number of people in attendance at a person’s funeral tends to symbolize how worthwhile a life they led, their status and esteem in the community. Boylston wrote the following about the significance of funeral attendance in Zege and Afaf, which also applies to the Amhara region more generally:

> To have an unattended funeral is to live a life unrecognized and unsocialized. It means you have established no meaningful connections, nor any of the status or respect that would compel people to attend and commemorate you (2015: 294).

Most Gondarés agree, the prospect of paltry attendance at their funerals would be a cause for much grief and even horror. Diborah told me that if a Gondaré passes the funeral of a stranger, say, on their way to work, they will stop and briefly attend, because there is a notion that if you attend the funeral of others people will attend yours. In a sense, people's attendance at your funeral is the culmination of one's life work within social life's economy of respect and recognition. While, at times, people questioned my intentions for going to a mosque or church, questions never came up when I attended funerals. On the contrary, I often received compliments such as, "You're a good neighbor," when I attended funerals. Funeral attendance seemed to win me the equivocal praise of all in attendance.[93]

When I asked Orthodox Christians and Muslims about how they get along with each other, a very common, almost generic answer was, "We attend each other's weddings and funerals." Muslims and Orthodox Christians from all age demographics tended to give this answer and often times it was considered a sufficient account of Muslim-Christian coexistence. They felt little need to say much else, I think, because funerals and weddings offer the highest expression of social life, and in a way they encapsulate the daily flows of respect, love and recognition that comprise it. If Muslims and Christians attend each other's funerals and weddings it presupposes more routine social ties and a generally amicable relationship. Likewise, non-attendance at a funeral—without at least showing up at the funeral tent that is set up for three days after burial—

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[93] In her ethnography of Amhara villagers, Pankhurst (1992) argues that funerals are at the center of Amhara society.

"will often be taken as a severance of friendship" (Boylston 2015: 293). An interaction between my neighbors Hirut and Hana illustrates what is at stake socially in responding to a person's death. I was talking with Hirut and her friends on our neighborhood street when Fana walked by. I greeted her from a distance and she, oddly, ignored me. When her back was turned, Hirut flicked her wrist in her direction, as if she was swatting away a fly with the back of her hand. I asked her what that was about. Hirut said that Fana does not greet her these days and completely ignores her on a daily basis. This began, Hirut told me, a few months back when Fana's father died and Hirut forgot to express her sympathy. Fana's father lived far away, so Hirut would not be expected to attend his funeral, but at the very least, she was expected to acknowledge Fana's grief. Hirut's answer suggests that her oversight was so severe that it sealed off all potential flows of mutual respect in the future.

In addition to being indispensable sites for the affirmation of social ties, Orthodox funerals, and sometimes weddings, are also events wherein high religious rituals and the higher expressions of interreligious social life intersect. Orthodox funerals begin at the house of the deceased. Friends carry the coffin with clergy leading the way adorned in ritual paraphernalia that presents a scene reminiscent of the Ṭimqet procession, except the joyful hymns are replaced by the mournful wailing of the loved ones of the deceased. The clergy leads funeral attendees to the church compound, stopping at intervals to perform prayers and chants that Orthodox Christians understand as "loosening" or "releasing" (*fīthat*) the soul of the deceased from this world and enabling them to enter the next. I followed many Orthodox Christian funeral processions during my fieldwork, and there were always Muslims scattered among those who followed, though few if any wore conspicuous Muslim attire. The Muslim men did not wear taqīyas (Muslim skull caps) and the women wore only discreet headscarves. Upon arriving at the church gate, I noticed that the Muslim contingent often thinned out, but not completely. Some Muslims entered the church courtyard and stood with their Christian friends for the whole funeral service. The chants, prayers and ritual paraphernalia at the funeral resembled other Orthodox worship services.

One time I was walking with a Muslim and Orthodox neighbor in a funeral procession headed to Gabriel Church. The women were walking side-by-side, holding hands as friends often do in Ethiopia. I asked the Orthodox woman if it was permitted for Muslims to enter the church courtyard, and she answered, "Only for funerals, because of social life" (maheberawi nuro). On another occasion I walked with Hana, a Muslim woman, to a funeral in Piassa and I asked her about why she as a Muslim attends a Christian funeral in the church. She simply said, "A neighbor is a neighbor." These statements, and others, suggest the exception to the norm of Muslims not entering Christian religious space is justified within the value framework of "social life."[94] This is different than the justification for a Muslim sleeping in a church so she can pursue a daily baptism routine, which is justified by her participation in Orthodoxy's deference-blessing economy.

While some more theologically sophisticated Orthodox Christians, like Diborah, claim that anyone can enter the church compound, others will tell me that Muslims can only enter the church compound for funerals. As I argued in Chapter 2, the ritual organization of space in Orthodox Churches—specifically the greater restrictions on access the closer one gets to the Ark—resonates with values of deference for the sacred. Keeping a certain distance shows respect, while moving closer than warranted by one's status expresses disrespect. When Orthodox Christians told me Muslims cannot enter the church compound, they were reasoning within this ritual logic. The question is, why do funerals warrant an exception to restrictions on sacred space that many Orthodox Christians state as a rule? In two major instances discussed in this chapter in which mechachal took priority over the value of religious deference, practices with high level importance for social life collide with low level religious practices—one could describe them as the outer, thin branches, of the religious value tree. In the case of funerals, one of the most important expressions of mixed social life bump up against the minor, somewhat ambiguous restriction on entrance into the church compound.

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[94] Muslims do not conduct funerals in the mosque, but do have their own cemeteries. Christians enter the Muslim cemetery grounds, even though individual Muslims engage in Quranic chants (reading materials provided on small booklets passed out to attendees) and perform du'a over the graves of important Muslim Shékhs.

In addition, the exception made in the case of routine blessings on food is another example of a crucial practice of social life running up against a lower rung in the Orthodox blessing economy. If Muslims and Orthodox Christians were unable to share food at all it would drive a major wedge between the two communities, but skipping over one instance of a food blessing is a relatively minor transgression, especially given that vegetable dishes already have a sort of blessed, Edenic status (see Chapter 2). In addition, exceptions are often contingent on circumstances and can be decided on the fly. When I went to the Losa Mariam church with Addisu and Ali, Addisu improvised an exception on Ali's behalf. We arrived at the construction site of the church, as it was currently under renovation, and asked the guard if we could look around. The guard asked Addisu, "Are you all Christian?" Ali gestured to the spot below neck where his mateb would have been, drawing attention to its absence, indicating that he was not Christian and would be willing to wait outside. Addisu pushed his hand down, told the guard we were all Christians and led Ali onto the church grounds by the hand. In this instance, the values of mechachal supervened the values of vertical deference (as expressed through maintaining distance from the Ark), despite the church guard implying that we should give priority to deference and norms of religious separation. However, I will show that on another occasion, Addisu gave priority to the value of preserving deference to, and honor of, divine mediators over the project of mechachal. This illustrates how the specificity of the circumstance shapes which values have priority.

I have discussed how a high number of Orthodox Christians will insist, with the exception of funerals and weddings, that a Muslim cannot even sit in a church courtyard. If there is not a clear reason for the Muslim's presence, they will assume some kind of ill-intent, such as an attempt to spy on or insult Christians. On the night before Easter in 2014, I saw an example of this restriction on Muslim presence being extended outside the church walls to the surrounding area. I was walking to the St. Gabriel Church with some neighbors, including Addisu and Thomas, at about 10 PM on Easter Eve. As good Orthodox Christians are supposed to do, we were setting out to spend the night in the church compound. At the church we would lay half asleep on the concrete floor outside the church building while absorbing the blaring liturgy. As we walked up the steep dirt road that leads to the church, a Muslim young man left the place he was standing on the side of the road and introduced himself to me while walking beside me. Addisu and Thomas grabbed him, and pushed him to the side of the road. They had a heated argument I could not quite hear. At the end, the Muslim young man tried to smooth things over, "*Salam now*?", "Is it peace?", Addisu answered harshly, "Salam aydelem!", "There is not peace!" As discussed a bit earlier in this chapter, these are fighting words: something you only say in very serious situations, when anger is strong and justified. I asked Addisu that night why he became so upset at what appeared to me as benign behavior. He said, "He's a Muslim! He should not be around the church!" Addisu is the same person who fibbed to the church guard so his Muslim friend could enter a church construction site. I regularly see him laughing with Muslims, affectionately holding hands with Muslim young men and trusting Muslim young men to guard his music kiosk. The main issue that night was not his general problem with Muslims, but the particular placement of *that* Muslim during an Orthodox holiday. It was enough of an offense to justify a breach of the peace, if you will, in order to discipline the Muslim young man into keeping a respectful distance from the church.

Generally speaking, the “macro-level” interreligious conflicts discussed in the previous chapters—which, in the contemporary Amhara region, emerge in contests over sacred space and territorialization—can be linked, at times, to the hardening of boundaries, and to more extensive patterns of prioritizing deference over mechachal. In Gondar, I knew a few Orthodox individuals who asserted that when attending funerals Muslims should only walk to the gate of the church compound and then turn back home.[95] Moreover, Boylston found that in the Orthodox majority town of Afaf that this more exclusive orientation, held by a few in Gondar, became an official rule. In Afaf, Orthodox Christians hung a sign on the gate of a church compound located in an area with a large Muslim population that said “Orthodox Christians only” (nd.: 172).

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[95] Knowledge that some Orthodox Christians are of this opinion may explain why many Muslims walk in Orthodox funeral processions, but do not enter the church.

Boylston's informants told him the sign was put up in response to a large mosque recently built in town. Incidentally, when Addisu's confrontation with the Muslim young man at Gabriel came up in a conversation we were having a few months later, Addisu explained that he had assumed the young man was being intentionally provocative and disrespectful because of the mosque recently built near the Gabriel Church. Around 2009, neighborhood Muslims built a mosque with a minaret without government permission about 200 meters from the St. Gabriel Church. For Orthodox Christians throughout Gondar, the mosque is still a subject of significant controversy and bitterness (see Chapter 6). For a Muslim young man to show up on the road to the Gabriel Church on the night before Easter was, from Addisu's perspective, akin to blatantly throwing the recent Muslim offense in their faces; flaunting the new reality that the neighborhood no longer belonged exclusively to Gabriel. Because of the recent mosque construction, one might say, this interaction was transvalued to a macrocosmic scale. The Muslim young man became a proxy for the offensive mosque that arrogantly towered over Gabriel, while Addisu acted as a proxy for Gabriel, disciplining the young man for his insolence toward a mediator of God. In contrast to the intentions imputed to this Muslim young man, in all the exceptions to popular restrictions on sacred space we discussed in this section—the Muslims seeking the blessing of holy water, Ali volunteering to stay outside, Muslims attending a funeral—Orthodox Christians can assume the Muslims in question entered church grounds with an attitude of minimal respect.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have mapped distinct models of interreligious relations, symmetrical and asymmetrical, onto different value spheres, those of mechachal and vertical, ritual deference. Spencer (2007) suggests that maybe every society alternates between two models of their society. One that represents all its members as unified, harmonious and good, and another that represents society in terms of us versus them, as basically antagonistic. While working with an antagonistic model, both sides represent themselves as good and beneficial to society, and the other as evil and corrosive. I have begun to show that asymmetrical models implied in the ritual centers of Orthodox and Muslim value-work do not necessarily devolve into antagonistic representations of the self and other relation, but have the potential to when the religious other becomes positioned as subverting one's own religious values. In the case of the Muslim hanging around St. Gabriel Church, the values of ritual deference took priority over the value of mechachal, which resulted in overturning an initially harmonious relational context into one of antagonism between a Muslim and a Christian—even motivating the Christian to explicitly perform a break of harmony, reversing a routine affirmation of social values with the declaration "There is not peace." Prioritizing religious values to overturn mechachal made sense in this circumstance because preceding events, from Addisu's perspective, positioned the Muslim man as subverting the value of deference in an ostensible demonstration of disrespect directed toward an Orthodox ritual center.

Generally speaking, I have shown in this chapter how Gondarés organize routine practices of coexistence in such a way that religious values and integrative social values rarely subvert one another. Only under certain circumstances is one value chosen at the clear expense, or subversion, of the other. Horizontal flows of respect between Muslims and Christians perform and instantiate symmetrical models of harmonic coexistence, while working around the sometimes mutually exclusive practices of vertical deference.

In the next chapter, I will discuss another crucial dimension of the practice of mechachal, which involves keeping asymmetrical models, particularly their antagonistic permutations, from coming into explicit intersubjective awareness in religiously integrated company.

Chapter 5

Fluctuating Asymmetries and Antagonistic Secrets

Orthodox Christians and Muslims in Gondar talk about each other. Sometimes, they talk about each other in a way that reinforces their sense of superiority; their place at the top of an imagined interreligious hierarchy. At times, these discourses devolve into denigrations of the other. If spoken in the presence of the other, they have the potential to construe real-time interactions in terms of antagonistic models, which can spark an interreligious conflict. This chapter deals in part with how Orthodox Christians and Muslims manage the flow of these antagonistic, or potentially antagonistic, representations of self-other relations. Much of the work of Orthodox Christians and Muslims to control the flow of antagonistic discourses involves keeping the discourses out of their shared world; if they persist, at the very least, they remain ambiguously beneath the surface of shared social life. Antagonistic discourses remain, from the perspective of the religious other, *secret*. In addition to my discussion of secrecy, towards the end of this chapter I will also show that amidst a social process sometimes characterized by harmonic symmetry on the surface and vague hierarchical antagonism underneath, people also grapple with a basic ambivalence concerning interreligious relations. Because the harmonic and antagonistic models are both contested *within* religious communities, individuals experience the gravitational weight of harmonic and antagonistic polarities pulling them in both directions. Some individuals actively push back against antagonistic forces, seeking to extend the reach of mechachal, while others persist in discursively typifying self-other relations in less than harmonic terms. All the while, this process of contestation is mostly invisible to the other—it remains a “secret” controversy.

Before moving forward with this discussion I should clarify the terminology I use in this chapter because sometimes the distinction between terms becomes blurry. I use the term *asymmetrical models* to refer to representations of interreligious relations that position the other religion as inferior to one’s own. By slight contrast, *antagonistic models* represent the other as a threat and/or denigrate the religious other in some way (cf. Spencer 2007). Often, discourses that simply assert the superiority of one religion over the other can be taken as an act of denigration, and assertions of superiority can slide into mutual antagonism, so the distinction between the two does not always hold. I hope to unpack this dynamic in the sections that follow.

Secrecy and the Perils of information

Before discussing the practices of secrecy in the context of Muslim-Christian relations in Gondar, in this section I will provide some of background on practices of secrecy in the Amhara region more generally. Amhara tend to have a keen sense of the difference between surface and hidden realities. Though underlying realities are not totally opaque and the surface contains clues to the hidden, the hidden still often remains ambiguous and must be carefully uncovered if at all (also Girma 2012; Levine 1965, 2014 [1985]). Levine argued that this ambiguity, particularly speech which has a vague meaning, or multiple meanings, is a prevalent and often prized feature of Amhara culture. He treated a genre of Amhara poetic verse called “Wax and Gold” as a prototypical example of this culture of ambiguity. This verse has “two fold meaning,” the “wax” is the surface, sometimes figurative meaning, the gold is the “more or less hidden actual significance" (1965: 5). After describing this type of poetry in detail he claims, "wax and gold is a more refined and stylized manifestation of the Amhara's basic manner of communicating. This manner is indirect, often secretive" and involves "the studied use of ambiguity" (9). In Levine's comparative argument about language and modernity, he argued that the value Amhara place on ambiguity bears stark contrast to the values of Americans, and "moderns" in general, who tend see univocity and direct speech as the ideal (2014 [1985]; see also Silverstein 2010). I am not interested in taking up this part of Levine's argument here. However, from what I observed in the field, the ability to negotiate the interplay of social surfaces and their hidden depths is an important, and much elaborated, social competency in Gondar.

In vernacular discourse, Gondarés make a distinction between "*mister,*" which can be translated as "mystery" or "secret," and "*gelṣa*," that which is "revealed" or "clear." If you want to ensure someone understands something in Amharic it is common to ask "Gelṣa now?", which could be translated, "Is it clear?" or more literally, "Is it revealed?"[96] This usage implies that a "clear" understanding results from revealing something hidden. Hence hiddenness, we might say, is the resting state of that which is revealed. There is a religious connotation to this dichotomy between prevalent mystery and rare revelation. Girma (2012) sees Christian metaphysics—namely that classic chasm separating a transcendent God from a fallen humanity—as underpinning the persistent Amhara sense of a more real, mysterious something beneath the surfaces they encounter (cf. Messay 1999: 180-193). I found that many Orthodox Christians talk about secrets in their church as a positive phenomenon. The inscrutability of divine mystery justifies years of clergy training and shrouds priests in an aura of transcendence and awe. They are guardians of something both fundamental and inaccessible to most mortals. Yet, while classic Christian dualism and Amhara metaphysics may have something of an elective affinity, Amhara practices of secrecy and ambiguity reflect historical social patterns extending beyond the theological realm to the mundane world of realpolitik:

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[96] Geleṣe is a regional variant of the word geleṭe which is used the Amharic Bible for "reveal," the act of uncovering God's mysteries.

> The nobility have traditionally gained or lost position through notoriously secret intrigues. Literati have maintained their superiority in good part through their monopoly of esoteric knowledge…the peasantry have resorted to secrecy, and equivocal and evasive communication, in order to defend themselves against exploitation (Levine 2014 [1985]: 363).

In feudal Ethiopia, there was no formal limit to how much a noble could extract from a peasant. Therefore, controlling information about one's resources was a crucial strategy used by the peasantry to shield themselves from noble predations (see Donham 1986; Hoben 1973).

Gondarés continue to play a similar information game with local tax collectors. While renting an office in Arada, tax collectors came by a number of times to question me about how much rent I was paying. They suspected the owner was making a killing renting to a foreigner, all the while trying to avoid paying taxes on his new found bounty. My neighbor Souseunu redesigned her shop so customers could not sit down and drink beer as they had previously done, in part because, she told me, if a tax collector sees that you sell beer, they assume you have a high income. Of course, attempts to control information extend beyond these well-worn games of cat and mouse between private citizens and government representatives. Gondarés tend to see "information," or "*marejja*," as one of the most effective weapons an enemy, private citizen or government representative, could wield against them. Mustafa once explained that some in Gondar are nervous about my research because, for example, “If I want to hurt you, I will do a research on you, then I can hurt you because I know you.”

The tacit norms of ambiguity and secrecy are subtle by design, so I will use an example to begin to tease them out. Survey methods presuppose direct, one might say, “sincere” speech norms (Briggs 1986), and so the distinctions of communication in Gondar came out when Diborah conducted a door-to-door survey on interreligious practices. When one of my research assistants asked Orthodox Christians to tell her how many Muslims visited them on Christmas, they resisted giving her a specific number. Many would just say, "*bezu*", "many" or "*tinish*" "few." She then engaged them in a casual conversation, and in a roundabout way, drew out the number of Muslims visitors they received. She explained to me that Amhara have a general aversion to counting, or more specifically, to enumerating specific aspects of their lives and passing that enumeration on to someone else as "information." Diborah cited the aversion of mothers to counting children as a kind of prototypical example of the Amhara aversion to giving precise information. Amhara mothers, she said, will never communicate the number of their children, or even speak that number out loud when alone for fear of "*yeSatan joro*", "Satan's ear." As she explained it, mothers fear that if Satan hears the number of her children, he will kill one of them. Different informants repeated this story to me several times after this first hearing, though it was not always clear why Satan killed the children, sometimes it was jealousy or just an ill-defined maliciousness.

In any given situation, a neighbor, an acquaintance, or, most importantly, a government official could play the role of “Satan,” and one could change out "number of children" for any information an enemy might find useful. I found it helpful to evoke the generic Amhara mother’s fear of yeSatan joro in some of my interactions. Knowing that foreigners have different norms for sharing information, some people inquired about personal details in a way they never would if I were Gondaré. For example, individuals I had just met often asked about the size of my research grants, a detail I never felt comfortable sharing. Once I heard the above story, I experimented with answering these inquiries by simply saying, "yeSatan joro." When I referenced "yeSatan joro", my interlocutor usually smiled knowingly, and said "*ishi*," "okay," in capitulation. Because of its salience as a basic metaphor, the reference to ySatan joro immediately placed both of us within Gondaré ethical norms of interaction, bringing to the forefront the risks and dangers of information-giving and the courtesies this risk requires on the part of others.

To summarize what I have discussed so far, one manifestation of the Amhara culture of ambiguity is the aversion to giving certain personal details, however innocuous those details may seem, and a tacit norm of not pushing others to reveal certain personal details. In public social settings in Gondar individuals were not shy about telling a secret to a confidant and conspicuously excluding others present. Often times, when talking in a group at a café, two members of the group would suddenly turn and face each other, bring their faces close in a huddle and speak in hushed tones. I described these gestures to one of my Gondaré informants. In response, he smiled and mimed as if he was sitting in the huddle himself and said, “*Mīster now*,” “It’s a secret.” Generally, it seems there would be a tension between the impulse Gondarés have to maintain social company with large numbers of people and their need to maintain their secrets. However, even in a large group, friends regularly create these secrecy bubbles. The individuals you bring into your secrecy bubble says something about social relationship, as Levine notes, “Amhara define a close friend as ‘someone with whom one can share secrets’” (Levine 2014 [1985]: 363). As my relationships developed with certain Gondaré men, sometimes they would ask me to tell them some secret they assumed I was keeping, assuring me they would tell no one. In my neighborhood, I was cautioned who not to tell my secrets to. Sometimes, if friends have a falling out, I observed that a begrudged person would go tell the former friend’s secrets to their rivals. The role secrets play in interpersonal conflict, alliance and intimacy in Gondar deserves its own treatment. However, for the purposes of this chapter, I will turn my attention now to the role secrecy and ambiguity plays in the life of religions along the boundaries that separate them.

Secret Interreligious Hierarchies and the Project of Mechachal

In the last chapter, I talked about how Muslims and Orthodox Christians coexist in Gondar by engaging in practices that maintain flows of mutual respect across religious boundaries. These practices perform symmetrical models of intergroup relations. I also discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 that Orthodox and Muslim value-complexes center on deferential practices that recognize their sacred hierarchies—which are spatially situated in ritual centers—as encompassing the cosmos. I also showed that the model of intergroup relations often evoked when these value complexes come into relation with each other is asymmetrical. In these asymmetrical models, the religious other’s value-complex is understood as encompassed by one’s own and sits in a subordinate position within an interreligious value hierarchy. When Christians and Muslims move out of the earshot of the other they freely circulate these models in discursive form among themselves, i.e. models that represent, for example, Christianity as *better than* Islam, or a

Christian practices as *better than* an Islamic practice. Nevertheless, Orthodox Christians and Muslims tend to actively withhold discourses that evoke asymmetrical models when in religiously mixed company. While, on the one hand, practices of mechachal enact symmetrical models, on the other hand, religious codes of silence withhold discourses that would disrupt these harmonic construals of self and other. [97]

It is useful to compare religiously homogenous social contexts, where asymmetrical models can be discussed freely, to the dyadic bubbles of secrecy discussed in the previous section. When conversing on non-religious topics, one can engage in some kinds of talk while in the ear shot of anonymous or unvetted "overhearers" (Goffman 1981). However, other kinds of talk—talk that, for example, involves sensitive information that could compromise you socially—must be limited to trusted confidants, and to conversations held in one's residence and/or in the hushed tones and intimate huddles of secrecy bubbles.[98] Likewise, in conversations on religious topics, one can broadcast mechachal discourses far and wide. However, negative evaluations of the religious other must be preserved for, what one might call, *religious* secrecy bubbles, which are comprised of trusted individuals belonging to the same religion. On the whole, relationships within and across religious boundaries involve different combinations of what Simmel called "communicative and retentive energies" (1906: 466).

To begin to understand how these retentive and communicative energies get parsed in different contexts, I will focus on asymmetrical renditions of practices that tend to evoke symmetrical, harmonic models of interchangeability in mixed company, namely:

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[97] I first heard the term "codes of silence" used in reference to Amhara secrecy practices from Tom Boylston.

[98] Residences are often porous enough, with regular flows of neighbors, visitors and distant relatives, that private space in itself does not ensure contained information flows.

meat taboos and fasting. In Chapter 4, I discussed some Orthodox Christian discourses on Muslim meat that frame the distinction as somewhat trivial. Likewise, when Diborah went door-to-door in Piassa and Arada to interview a random sample of 11 Orthodox Christians about religious difference, the respondents also tended to discuss the difference between Christian and Muslim meat in value-neutral terms, as if the only thing separating the meats was an arbitrary word spoken at slaughter.[99] It should be noted that the formal nature of these interviews made the context into one of social surfaces, in which anyone could be a potential overhearer. Similarly, value-neutral descriptions prevailed whenever Muslims and Christians spoke about these matters in religiously mixed company. However, once I got to know individual Orthodox Christians, and became something of a casual insider, they would tell me in private that Muslim meat would likely make me sick; that it is dirty (Braukamper 1982; Zellelew 2015b). They would say that Muslims do not clean it properly. Another Orthodox Christian took a jab at Muslim cooking, telling me, “Their *wot* [meat stew] tastes like water,” which is to say, the meat stews have no spice or flavor. Therefore, in mixed company, the difference between ritual meats takes the form of arbitrary interchangeability, like Levi-Strauss’s (1962) totems; however, in religiously homogenous company, in what one could call “Christian secrecy bubbles,” you get something that appears more motivated, along the lines of Malinowski’s totemism. In the asymmetrical, evaluative discourses that remain beneath the surface in mixed company, one must avoid Muslim meat because it is not “good to eat.”

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[99] The random sample was obtained by visiting every third door until she found an Orthodox Christian respondent to interview.

In addition, when an Orthodox Christian wishes a Muslim “Eid Mubarak!”, or when they ask a Muslim, “How is your fast?”, it evokes a scene of value symmetry between Orthodox and Muslim fasts. However, if you ask Orthodox Christians in private about the Muslim fast, some will talk about how gluttonous the Ramadan fast is in comparison with the Orthodox fast. Muslims eat meat, eggs and milk for breakfast and then, starting at 7:00 PM, they can eat meat all night. One group of Orthodox Christian young men told me Muslims sleep all day and gorge themselves all night. Orthodox Christians, on the other hand, must abstain from meat, milk and eggs for over a month during the Lenten fast, and ideally, five days a week during that time they abstain from all food and drink from the time they wake up until 3 PM.[100] However, Muslims will point out that most Orthodox Christians do not abstain from food and drink during the day, but only comply with the bare minimum of not eating animal products. This means one can claim to “fast” without actually ever abstaining from food. The Muslims and Christians who circulate these discourses hone in on the aspects, or forms, of the other’s fast that are most antithetical to the express purpose of fasting. Both take that unflattering moment, cut it out from the array of forms the fast can assume, and hold it up as a synecdoche of it, using it to gauge the value of the other’s fast relative to their own. These representations evoke a value hierarchy that is purposely suppressed in Muslim/Christian interaction. In my research, conversations about the relative value of the different fasts always occurred outside of the earshot of religious others. If someone thought a Muslim or Christian overhearer might be close by, they spoke to me in hushed tones and/or huddled into a secrecy bubble. On the whole, it was not difficult to get Muslims or Christians to talk about the superiority of their fasts in the absence of over hearers from the other religion.

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[100] Those who follow this strict, ideal form of the 56 day Lenten fast throughout the week are permitted to eat breakfast and lunch on Saturday and Sunday, both of which Orthodox Christians consider Sabbath days. The Sabbaths give them occasion to rest from their rigorous fast, even though remain obligated to abstain from animal products on these days until Easter arrives.

Gondaré Muslims and Orthodox Christians have a reflexive understanding of how codes of silence function as a technique of mechachal. In an interview, I asked an Orthodox deacon about how different religions coexist in Gondar. The excerpt below comes from his explanation:

> I have my own personality and attributes, therefore if you and I, or any other person, meet we should only say things like, "Salam [peace/hello], how did you pass the night, John?" This is enough. We cannot talk about a deep secret. I have no knowledge of you. You have no knowledge of me […] We should not talk about other secrets except, "Hello, how did you pass the day my brother?" "Hello, my sister." This is the secret to how religions in Gondar live in harmony *[techechelew*][101] with each other.

The deacons statement suggests that mechachal is enabled by limiting exchanges to the social surface of greetings and small talk, and avoiding topics, like religion, that take one deeper into worlds that should remain separate. Gondarés see this self-conscious practice of discretion as a form of "respect" (keber) and so we can count it among the mutual flows of respect that make up practices of mechachal.[102] Diborah for example told me that my Muslim research assistant Aisha probably thinks Diborah is a "Christian Extremist," while Diborah thinks Islam is a false religion, but they never say anything about it because they "respect" each other. This is similar to what Taussig called an "open secret," something "that is generally known, but cannot be articulated" (1999: 5), or at least in this case, something everyone knows, but cannot articulate in the presence of the religious other. The tacit openness of this secret also enables mutual recognition, with each recognizing that the religious other that keeps to the code of silence is a *respectful* other. Granted, at times I've heard Muslims tell stories of theological debates with Orthodox Christians. In one man's telling, he logically stumped his Christian interlocutor, who then, in humiliated fury, proceeded to threaten and insult the Muslim victor. These kinds of discussions are rare.[103] The feeling among Muslims is that if you engage in theological debates with Orthodox Christians, they will become angry and it could cause a serious conflict. One time a Muslim friend was expressing his bewilderment about the concept of the trinity. When I suggested that he discuss his questions with a priest, an expression of aversion formed on his face. He told me he would never discuss these issues with Orthodox clergy, not because he feared the priest's logical prowess or debate skills, but because he feared the burst of aggression that might result from the broken code of silence.

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[101] This is a conjugated version of mechachal, meaning "to be in harmony" or "to create harmony."

[102] A study of debates and antagonistic discourses of Ethiopians online found that most of the critical discourses focus on politics not religion (Gangliardone et al 2015).

In order to give ethnographic flesh to a practice that tends to manifest itself as an absence, I will focus on how the code of silence fits into the social life of an individual Muslim I knew in the field. In my first neighborhood there was a Muslim man in his late-twenties named Adam who had a strong reputation as a "good person" among both Christians and Muslims. One time I brought up Adam to Teddy—an Orthodox Christian man who often complained about the changing religious makeup of the neighborhood—and he responded, "Adam is a good guy. I grew up with him. He is one of this neighborhood's first Muslims." While sleeping on Hirut's couch one night (because

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[103] I heard of students in the dorms at Gondar University engaging in religious debates, but they also sometimes breakdown into mutual denigrations (menaq), and the student body in at Gondar U comes from all over the country, so they are not representative of Gondar.

Thomas and I were going to a midnight baptizing ritual for a week-long holiday called Pagmé), I heard Thomas say to Bertukan, “There is no better friend than Adam.” Adam employed both Muslim and Orthodox youth at his metalworking shop. He even employed a young man, named Hasan, who had a reputation for being a thief. Adam wanted to help Hasan reform, he explained, “If he doesn’t have a job he will keep stealing.” As his employer, Adam sat above Hasan in a hierarchical relationship and thus could keep him in check. When I first came to the neighborhood Hasan would approach me and attempt to rub my head aggressively as I walked by—not the most respectful treatment. One time Adam caught him attempting to sneak a head rub while we were talking and gave him a swift slap to the face, which the taller and more muscular Hassan receive meekly. He never rubbed my head again. Adam was known as a good neighbor who often helped Addisu with his nearby music shop. Adam’s employees watched the music kiosk when Addisu was away. Moreover, Adam, to my knowledge, never failed to attend an event when invited. When I threw a birthday party after I had moved some distance from his house, he and his employees made sure to attend and stay the entire time. Overall, he had a quiet, reserved, self-assured charisma that helped him maintain a heavy Christian and Muslim clientele.

Adam knew about my research and had expressed a desire to help me with it. However, he responded curtly when I asked about religion, insinuating that he would prefer that I not probe any further about the topic. One time I noticed some water on his head and asked him, “Have you gone to mosque?” He answered, in all seriousness, “You’re a genius!” like I had uncovered a secret. Overtime, I learned that character traits reflected in his reliability in attending social events, the responsibility he took over his subordinates, his willingness to help neighbors, and his discretion about his faith all came as a package of social virtue. They all contributed to his social charisma and the trust Muslims and Christians put in him. To be clear, his discretion did not stem from religious apathy. Though he was clean shaven and only distinguishable as a Muslim by his lack of mateb, from what I could tell, he more or less consistently prayed in the mosque five times a day. Every Friday, he put on his thobe and went to the big mosque for Jumma worship.

In addition to these discreet indexes of piety, one time I glimpsed a sign that beneath the surface he harbored a personal investment in the demographic competition unfolding between Christians and Muslims in Ethiopia. One day, as we ate lunch together in a Muslim restaurant/butcher shop, the subject of the 2007 census came up. The numbers of Ethiopia's 2007 census indicated that Orthodox Christians were still in the majority and Islam only made modest gains. Many Muslims claimed that the government deflated Muslim numbers to make it look like Ethiopia was still a majority Christian country (see Haustein and Østebø 2011). Adam asked me adamantly, "Who has a majority in Ethiopia?" I answered evasively, repeating what the census claimed and acknowledging the counter-claims of Muslim critics. He kept pushing me to acknowledge a Muslim majority with an overt display of interest I had never seen before. This brief revelation about the personal stake he had in Ethiopian number politics soon faded back into the shadows of his private thoughts. I never heard about it again. To express religious evaluations to those you disagree with is socially dangerous. The setting of our discussion—in a Muslim restaurant, sharing Muslim meat, surrounded by homogeneously Muslim customers—likely emboldened him to discuss topics he would not otherwise broach. We briefly interacted in something of a Muslim secrecy bubble. However, my non-commitment to one side or the other of the census controversy quickly burst our bubble. I fell short of marking myself as a safe person with whom to discuss these topics in the future.

A conversation I had with Ephraim, Adam's childhood friend, suggests that even for someone as careful as Adam, the possibility of a religious argument can loom as an unspoken danger, creating barriers to intimacy even as it enables cordial relations. I had met Ephraim independent of Adam, but at my birthday party I learned that Ephraim and Adam had been "good friends" growing up and played on the same football team. From all appearances at the party they were still good friends. Incidentally, a few weeks later I was talking to Ephraim about friends who change religions. He said, "If my friend goes to another religion, he is no longer my friend. I don't want him." I asked him to explain further and he said, "Because he will try to change my thinking, so I don't want him." I then asked him about Adam and he told me, "When we were little we were friends, but once we grew up and learned about our religions, we grew apart, because he's interested in his religion and I'm interested in my mine. We don't want to argue." I followed up by asking him, "Would you argue?" He responded, "Yes, he will explain 'This is the right path' and I will explain, 'No, this is right path', we will explain to each other." In this telling, the possibility of religious argument foreclosed the continuation of a close friendship into adulthood. Though in Ephraim's mind they are not exactly friends anymore, perhaps distant acquaintances, in 2014 Ephraim texted "Eid mubarak!" ("Blessed celebration!") to Adam on the first day of Ramadan. This foregrounding of harmony and respectful symmetry may be why when I later asked Adam about Ephraim he could say confidently that they are still "best friends."[104]

Ephraim and Adam's adult relationship illustrates how interlocutors maintain a surface of mechachal as latent tensions that stem from unspoken interreligious hierarchies are kept beneath the surface. Both sides work to maintain negative evaluations outside of intersubjective awareness because they risk overturning mechachal. I unwittingly contributed to such a dangerous situation when hanging out with a Muslim and Orthodox Christian worker in Adam's shop. I mentioned casually to the Muslim worker that I might have an easier time following the Muslim fast than the very strict versions of the Orthodox fast because I could at least eat a big breakfast in the morning. In voicing this opinion, I had unknowingly made explicit negative evaluations that both Orthodox Christians and Muslims work to keep out of shared social life. Worst than that, I had unintentionally aligned myself with the view that the Christian fast is superior (though I personally thought easiness to be virtue). This lit a spark that fueled a heated argument between the two workers. Once I made my initial statement, the Muslim shot back, "It's not easier!" The Orthodox Christian began laughing, and expressed his agreement with me, pointing out how Muslims eat meat and eggs at night and that it is much harder to limit one's diet to vegetables for over a month. The Muslim young man then questioned me forcefully, "What's more important for the body, vegetables or meat?" Trying to make up for appearing to side with the Christians, I answered that I thought vegetables were more important. He then looked over to the Orthodox Christian, and said, "Vegetables are more important for the body!" I had not grasped the seriousness of the situation, as the argument appeared like many arguments I had seen between friends, about say football or geopolitics (as opposed to domestic politics), which are often pursued lightheartedly. Once the argument was underway, Adam arrived at the shop and asked me what was going on. I casually told him they were arguing about which fast was more difficult. His face remained serious and he said quietly, "That's not good." He then walked over and put an end to the argument. We talked about this incident over lunch a few months later. He reiterated that it is not good to argue about that sort of thing. He then ended our discussion on that topic, striking his standard diplomatic tone with a declaration of symmetry, "All fasts are difficult."

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[104] Adam's English ability was limited to a few words, including the English phrase "best friends." The phrase is a common English phrase used by the younger generation in Gondar. There is not a precise equivalent in the colloquial Amharic I was familiar with. The closest are "*ṭeru gwadeña*" (good friend), "*beṭam ṭeru gwadeña*" (very good friend) or "*arīf gwadeña*" (also very good friend, but with a slang word arīf). He likely meant to say that he and Ephraim were very good friends, rather than saying he was actually his "best friend." Maybe his intention approximated the English phrase "the best of friends."

Simmel claimed that "open societies" that co-exist "on the same plane, run across each other" and individuals "come into sharp collision, because each of them is at the same time solicited by the interests of other spheres" (1906: 491). In contrast to "open societies," in "secret societies, in view of their sociological isolation, such collisions are very much restricted." While Muslims and Orthodox Christians are not members of secret societies, by isolating each other from negative evaluations based on asymmetrical models of self-other relations, they enable the other to preserve their tacit interreligious hierarchies without challenge. As the above example suggests, when interreligious value hierarchies do come into intersubjective awareness the interaction can turn into one of mutual contestation, which, according to many of my Orthodox and Muslim informants, involves a high degree of social risk. This kind of openness puts the project of mechachal in jeopardy.

Up to this point, I have argued that the codes of silence employed in mixed company help maintain a social context that is construed in terms of mechachal. While engaged in the practice of mechachal, harmonic models define intergroup relations, however breaking the code of silence risks changing the relational context and coming to construe it in antagonistic terms. This can happen even if one breaches the code of silence unintentionally due to the presence of unknown over hearers. For example, on one occasion a fight almost broke out between a Christian and a Muslim guest at a Muslim wedding because of a comment made in a mini-van taxi the hosts had contracted to transport the wedding guests to the reception. While driving the guests, the Muslim chauffeur chided the passengers to dance: “Why aren’t you dancing? They even dance for the Ark on Ṭimqet!” (*Lemen atçheferum? Enkwan letabot beṬimqet īçheferalu*?). Unknown to the chauffeur, there was an Orthodox Christian in the taxi. When they arrived at the wedding the Christian confronted the chauffeur and threatened to beat him. Many feared a fight would break out, but friends of the groom managed to talk the Christian down.

Orthodox Christians dance for the Ark on Ṭimqet for the express purpose of showing it respect.[105] It is near unthinkable that the Ark would travel outside of its sanctuary without an accompanying band of Christians singing and dancing in joyful praise. The chauffeur’s joke suggested that the music playing in the wedding taxi is as worthy of dance as the Ark. Moreover, his joke only made sense in the context of a shared Muslim understanding that dancing for the Ark is absurd. The content of the joke, and the evaluative norms it presupposed, brought tacit negative Muslim evaluations into the Christian's explicit awareness. Mutual respect between Muslims and Christians—for which the Christian's attendance at a Muslim wedding provides a prototype—suddenly gave way to an interreligious construal of disrespect. It fell upon the Orthodox young man to act in terms of the antagonistic model, setting out to discipline the offending Muslim with violence on behalf of the Ark—like the guard who hit the seminary student with his horn, or an individual who slaps a child for presuming to stand too close to a high status adult.

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[105] This is the primary religious explanation Orthodox Christians gave me, though I imagine that some Christians dance on Ṭimqet for the sheer fun of it. Moreover, many of the activities on Ṭimqet in particular, such as drinking and fighting, appear far from deferential.

The verb in Amharic that describes the chauffeur's offense against the Ark is *minaq*. Dictionary translations of *minaq* include "to denigrate" or "to shame." Gondaré English speakers I knew translated the term as "to underestimate." To minaq is to construe something as inferior. It could be used to describe an explicit evaluative statement that suggests something or someone is lower than their ostensible status. The chauffeur's joke was received as an overt form of denigration, as it portrayed one of Ethiopian Orthodoxy's highest ritual expressions of piety as absurd. By contrast, the argument the Christian and Muslim young man engaged in about whose fast was better had not yet crossed the line in the same way that the chauffeur's joke about the Ark had. However, there is a fine line between asymmetrical construals and antagonistic denigration, which is why Adam became alarmed once he learned of the argument. To assert that the other's faith practice is inferior to anything external to it is to esteem it as *less than* its ostensible status in the eyes of the faithful; it is to "underestimate" it, even insult it. If you insult an individual, you have to deal with backlash from that individual. If you insult a parent (which would be a very big deal in Gondar), you might deal with backlash from all his or her children. However, if you insult a person’s faith, you could conceivably have to deal with backlash from anyone and everyone in that faith community. I regularly asked Orthodox Christians if it would be worse for someone to insult one’s parent or one’s religion. They answered in one of two ways. They either said insulting one’s religion would be worse, because, for example, “everything comes from religion,” or they said that insulting religion and insulting parents are essentially the same thing, “there is no difference.” The first answer indicates the severity of the act of insulting religion stems from its exalted status at the top and thus its co-extensiveness with the cosmic whole. The second answer suggests that the honor of one’s religion and the honor of one’s parents are intertwined. Both are *higher*, both deserve the esteem and deference of those who are *lower* (children and/or creatures)—to insult the higher is to often evoke the wrath of the lower, that is, the subordinates who have a duty to honor and defend their superiors.

To a Muslim the Ark may be a mere piece of wood, with no status or authority, but to a Christian it is the site of the divine presence, the physical location of the cosmic sovereign, Orthodox Christianity’s highest authority. Codes of silence help Muslims and Christians avoid showing disrespect for the other’s sacred hierarchy, even if that disrespect may be felt internally. In this way, religious codes of silence have a function similar to general function of the wax and gold style in relation to Amhara hierarchy. Levine wrote that ambiguity and secrecy “serves the Amhara well” because in a system that “emphasizes hierarchy” people have to be treated “according to what fits their status” not according to the regard an individual actually holds for them. Ambiguous communication allows one to “express compliments he does not mean and avoid utterances that might injure the sentiments of others” (2014 [1985]: 364).

Pushing Back Against Antagonism and Extending the Reach of Mechachal

Before moving on to the next chapter I have to qualify the account I have given thus far. To say that antagonistic models remain beneath the surface of social interaction risks giving the impression that they represent what both parties *really* think, because in the classic wax and gold paradigm Levine described, the hidden meanings are the real ones. To the contrary, my data suggests that antagonistic discourses are subject to contestation even *within* religious communities; yet, antagonistic discourses have limited circulation while harmonic ones have free reign. In this section, I will illuminate the variation and processes of contestation occurring within religious communities in Gondar, a process from which the religious other is often isolated.

While it was common for Orthodox Christians to evaluate the Islamic faith negatively among themselves, and most would assert their own religion’s superiority without hesitation, most Christians found severe denigration of Islam unacceptable. They knew enough about Muslim sensibility, close as it is to their own, that they would often call foul if they heard another Christian go too far. Once, I heard an Orthodox Christian woman say of Muslims in a nearby mosque, “They say *Allahu Akbar* like dogs.” When I told Teddy about this, he frowned and said, “If Muslims heard that they would never stop fighting Christians. Ethiopia would be like Syria.” At a small coffee shop filled with mostly Orthodox Christians, plus one Pentecostal, I mentioned that I often visited the Shékh Ali Gondaré tomb. One of the Orthodox Christians I was with, who was also friends with the Pentecostal man, loudly proclaimed that Shékh Ali Gondaré was a *ṭenqwai*. Ṭenqwai usually functions as a pejorative term meaning "magician," used to refer to folk healers or illegitimate priests (Debtera) who perform magical spells, often thought to be either ineffective frauds or wielders of Satanic power. Upon hearing this, another Orthodox Christian yelled angrily from across the room, "Do not denigrate [*minaq*] other religions! Only talk about your own!" An argument erupted, in which both Orthodox Christian men earnestly engaged. I should note that the presence of the Pentecostal man—who kept his head low and, he later told me, worried that the ire would eventually be directed at him—may have had something to do with why the Orthodox Christian defended Muslims with such vigor. Pentecostals are known to openly accuse all Orthodox priests of being ṭenqwai, so he may have personalized the insult the Pentecostal's Orthodox friend leveled at Shékh Ali Gondaré. He might have suspected the Orthodox man had fallen under the Pentecostal's influence, so in addition to defending Muslims, he may have been sending a message indirectly to the Pentecostal man that he should "only talk about his own" religion.

I have seen similar movements between antagonistic and harmonic models in conversations only involving Orthodox Christians (and myself). In a private conversation with a group of Orthodox men outside a coffee shop, Sami attributed the perceived rise in interreligious tension in Gondar to passages in the Quran that, he claimed, espouse violence and intolerance.[106] The idea was that interreligious tension has increased because Muslims were following their religion with more fidelity. Another Orthodox man castigated him for "complaining" (*meqewem*) against Muslims, and asserted that Muslims and Christians would get along just fine if it weren’t for government meddling. He claimed that the state was employing a divide and rule strategy, and by blaming Muslims, Sami was playing their game, giving them exactly what they wanted. In my research, I always kept in mind the possibility that Christians and Muslims might foreground harmonic discourse in the presence of a researcher because they were trying to avoid potentially incriminating speech. That this man would criticize government authorities while defending Muslims indicates that it was not his primary intent to avoid incrimination.

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[106] This is consistent with Ethiopia's Gragn narrative, but it also reflects the influence of western Islamophobia, and a western discourse going back to the crusades that represents Muslims as particularly "bloodthirsty" (Green 2015).

It is safe to say that some Christians and Muslims in Gondar live in a world more imbued with the harmonic model. In these worlds, the sense of interchangeability between religions is more constant, even within macro-imaginaries. For example, I asked a Muslim man at the Shékh Ali Gondaré shrine if the land we sat on was holy. He affirmed that the space was indeed holy, of pointing out that the Shékh Ali Gondaré tomb was nearby, but he also recognized the nearby Abo church, approximately 515 meters’ distance from the tomb, as a contributor to the holiness of the area surrounding the Shékh Ali Gondaré tomb. [107] He was suggesting the kind of universalism that is implied by mixed attendance at holy water springs and awalīyya shrines: that the rituals of both religions are sources of divine power. In this view, their spatial juxtaposition is additive, providing multiple sources of blessing (Carrithers 2000; Chau 2012), certainly not precipitating a mutually antagonistic conflict.[108] From this perspective, Islam and

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[107] I recorded the locations of both the tomb and the Abo church with a GPS unit and measured the distance as the crow flies using Garmin’s Basecamp software. They are not very accessible to each other because Abo sits high on a hill without any direct roads or paths leading to it.

[108] This additive view of religious ritual from different religions is more common in southern Ethiopia (Vecchiato 1993).

Christianity are interchangeable as sources of blessing—which transvalues interchangeability to the macrocosmic level, making them symmetrical as sites of divine blessing, taking symmetry far beyond mere surface level expressions.

This porous take on religious ritual, the idea that commensurate blessings can be found in different religious forms, is often associated with "popular religion" in the literature, while elite religion is known to be more exclusivist (see Duijzings 1993; Fox 1996; Hayden 2002). In Gondar I did not find evidence that religious elites, like priests, imams and theologically literate individuals espouse the kind of additive universalism that would justify participation in the religious rituals of the other. However, this does not mean that prominent members of the communities could not imagine a kind of non-threatening, macro level symmetry, in which different religions can expand without necessarily impeding on one's own. For example, my friend Teddy told me about how the *Meuzzen* (man who performs the prayer call) at the Keña Bét Masjid gave 10,000 birr ($500) to assist in the restoration of the nearby St. John church. As Teddy told me about this he wore a soft, satisfied smile on his face. In his view, this act represented a broader trend in an Ethiopian tradition of tolerance of which he was proud. As I went about my fieldwork thereafter, I asked Muslims and Christians about this donation. Many individuals told me that this Meuzzan is not unique. In fact, Muslims and Christians donate to each other's religious projects all the time. Christians donate money when Muslims are looking to build a mosque and Muslims give money to Christians when they construct a church (Haileyesus 2011: 52). Muslims and Orthodox Christians also donate money to support each other's holiday celebrations. An Orthodox Christian had a seat of honor in a performance hall within the Qidamé Gebeya Masjid (Saturday Market

Mosque) compound during the madrassa student performance for Mawlid al-Nabi in 2015 because he had donated a sizable sum to help fund the festivities. Some Orthodox Christian informants confirmed to me that Muslims also donate to the Ṭimqet celebration. I asked Hana, a Muslim woman with a shop near Keña Bét Masjid, why people would donate to fund activities of another religion. She answered, "If there is love [between Muslims and Christians], they will give. If there is no love, they will not give" (*Fiqir kalla īseṭalu. Fiqir keléla ayseṭem*). She claimed that the practice of interreligious donations was very common, so in her view, there is indeed love.

Religious holidays and building construction test the limits of just how far mechachal, and associated displays of symmetry, can be extended into the macro-sphere without provoking a popular backlash. I lived in a neighborhood known as Autoparko, which is down the street from Gondar stadium where throngs of Muslims gather to pray on Eid Al-Fitr and Eid Al-Arafa. On both holidays, the march of the Muslim faithful to the stadium bottlenecked on the main road that passes my old neighborhood. On the remaining stretch of road leading to the stadium, processions of chanting Muslims, dressed in conspicuous Islamic attire, became as dense and loud as the Ṭimqet procession. Christians dotted the sidelines and looking on with amusement or with unreadable expressions. How some of these Christians talked about the Muslim jubilations bore clues into the strength and limits of their inner mechachal. As the crowd thinned out following prayers, I struck up a conversation with a group of Christian men on the main road, asking them what they thought of the celebration. One said, "It's nice, *for them*" (with the implication that, perhaps, that it is not nice for him as a Christian). Then another man interjected, "This is a fake holiday; they want to make it similar [to

Orthodox holidays]. Before they just went to their mosques, now they go to the stadium. They want to create a *tumult*!" (Amh: *gerger*). The first young man then gave a harmonic counterpoint to the first's antagonistic proclamations, saying "In Ethiopia, there is no problem between Orthodox Christians and Muslims." I asked them why Muslims began praying in the stadium, and the second man said, "This government [the EPRDF] lets them. The government is a thief. Now there are Muslims, heretics [Pentés]…this place is filled with them because the government permits them. This is a Christian country!" In contrast to this Christian man's fairly antagonistic statement, other Christians I spoke with had a different interpretation of the events. The following conversation with an Orthodox man in his late forties, whom I will call Mulu, provides a good example of more harmonic Christian discourses about these visible Muslim holidays:

> John: What do you think of this celebration?
>
> Mulu: It is joyful!
>
> John: Why do you think it is joyful?
>
> Mulu: When they [Muslims] are happy we [Christians] are happy.
>
> John: When they are happy you are happy?
>
> Mulu: Because we have lived together a long time, when they are happy, we are happy […] To keep this country in peace, we have to collaborate together.

Holidays like Eid al-Arafa and Eid al-Ftir link up the time-space of Muslims participating with the global scale of worldwide Muslim observance *and* with mythical events like Abraham's sacrifice, the founding events of Islam, and macrocosmic realities of forgiveness and judgment in the world to come.[109] For at least one of the two Christian men I spoke with, the holiday also made larger spatio-temporal realities present in their lived time-space, namely, the EPRDF's political shift toward greater religious pluralism and what he saw as the erosion of Ethiopia's Christian identity. He imputed to Muslims a certain nefarious intention to create a "tumult," to imitate Christian holidays in order to ultimately supplant them. Mulu, on the other hand, focused on the affective dimension of the holiday, shared in its joys, and assumed that Muslims celebrate their holidays for the same reasons he, as a Christian, celebrates his holidays. For him, the robust crowds on the Muslim holidays did not signal the ascendance of a moral other, but a religious joy commensurate with his own, a joy like that he experiences on holidays like Ṭimqet and Mesqel. He claims that this kind of empathic identification, being "happy when they are happy," helps Muslims and Christians live together in peace. According to this discourse, Muslims are long term neighbors of Christians, neighbors who are like Christians, with holidays like those of Christians, with feelings and motivations parallel to, and interchangeable with, those of Christians. [110]

To put Orthodox interpretation of Muslim holidays in context, it is important to note that there are prayers specific to Eid al-fitr that Muslims the world over tend to perform in just the manner I observed in Gondar: en masse in an "open place" (Inter-Islam 2001). Moreover, one should ideally make pilgrimage to Mecca on Eid al-Arafa, and Gondaré Muslims see the march to the stadium as a mini-pilgrimage for those who cannot afford to make the trip. The public form these celebrations take in Gondar has motivations internal to religious logics and cannot be reduced to a mere attempt to mimic, or compete with, Christian holidays. I should also note a somewhat puzzling contradiction in my informants' statements. Many of my Christian informants expressed surprise at the large crowds of Muslims that merged upon the main road passing Autoparko. Some also talked about the practice of praying en mass at the stadium as if it was a new development recently authorized by the EPRDF. However, numerous credible Muslim sources, including imams, told me Muslims have been praying publicly like this for Eid since the Derg period— before the stadium was built they used to pray in the amphitheater, Revolutionary Square, that now sits next to the stadium. I am not certain what to make of this discrepancy, except perhaps to observe that many Orthodox Christians associate Muslim visibility with *the new*; it evokes consciousness of, and negative affect in response to what they see as a deleterious break with *the old*, specifically the EPRDF's present-day legal framework of religious pluralism. Additionally, Muslims would be more likely than Christians to remember the exact period this practice began because it represented a march forward for the Muslim community. It is a benchmark in their movement towards parity. Finally, perhaps Muslims made their way to the stadium more discreetly in the recent past. At the very least, maybe there were not so many groups of Muslim youth shouting, singing and dancing—a practice that bears the most striking sonic and visual resemblance to the Ṭimqet procession.

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[109] The mythological links in particular were elaborated upon in the speeches I observed at the stadium and in mosque preaching leading up to the holidays.

[110] This is not to say that some, or even a great many, Muslims and Christians do not see their holidays as in part a political show of strength vis-à-vis the other. However, many Christians, perhaps most, focus on feelings of joy (*destilal*) when they talk about what their holiday means to them.

Returning to Mulu's understanding of Muslim-Christian commensurability, I would like to draw attention to his focus on the affective dimension of religion. This focus is consistent with the ideal place of religion in secular modernity, that is, as a matter of "the heart" (Latour 1991), as essentially private. The EPRDF's framework of religious freedom, working as it does within a modern secular frame, seeks to subordinate religion to the state's objective of economic development and political stability. I will discuss the state's interventions into the religious domain in Chapter 7. Now I only want to recognize that Mulu's expansive sense of mechachal is consistent with the current state project, which works to define religion as a matter of individual conscience, and empty it of political and exclusivist valences.[111] As I suggested in the last chapter, the EPRDF regime did not create their harmonic vision of interreligious symmetry, as reflected in their laws and public discourses, out of nothing. Rather they continue to latch upon, reformat and endorse one cultural current at play within a sea of shifting alliances, pushes and pulls of harmonic and antagonistic forces, and a scatter of expanding and retracting pockets of antagonism and mechachal.

Spencer (2007) discussed alternations between antagonistic (what he called "the political") and harmonic (what he called the "anti-political") social models in south Asia as seasonal, as alternating with the election cycle. In using some of his concepts to think about Muslim-Christian relations in Ethiopia, I emphasize a process of alternation that is more in flux, almost in constant movement, within social networks and neighborhoods, between individuals engaged in conversation, and even within the same individual. I emphasize this not because of a theoretical preference for understanding social life as a nominalist flow, but because, as the literature on the region has consistently argued, Amhara social life is uniquely characterized by ever shifting alliances and hierarchies (Hoben 1973; Levine 1974; Messay 1999; Tronvoll 2009). Amhara kinship structure does not involve a corporate lineage, but centers on the nuclear family unit. This unit is connected as a node to a wider web of extended relatives who have open-ended, informal obligations to one another. Religion, by contrast, is the major site of transcendent corporate belonging in Amhara society. Secular domains of social life are frankly acknowledged as in flux; historically, power in Ethiopia was "retained only insofar as the holder was able to justify it by successful achievements" and "the spirit of rivalry permeated the whole hierarchical structure" (Messay 1999: 152-153). Still today, social life requires constant alertness, clever maneuvering and alliance building (and alliance breaking if need be) if you wish to come out on top, or at the very least, avoid the bottom. Therefore, so not to romanticize the harmonic modality too much, we could presume a Muslim donating to a church or a Christian donating to a Mawlid celebration is also engaged in a project of alliance building. They would be building alliances in a way that, in the meantime, marks them as a particularly tolerant and good person in the eyes of Christians and Muslims alike; it sends a message to all members of that religion that they are their ally in a general sense. Muslims would make important allies to a Christian because of their strong presence in market activities, and Christians make important allies because they comprise the majority of the population and fill the majority of government positions. Were we to investigate the trajectories of specific individuals more closely, we may find that mechachal and antagonism, in so far as a person has room to play with them, can be two sided coins, involving both morality and strategy, the “good” (*ṭeru*) and the “clever” (*gobez*).

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[111] Article 27 of Ethiopia's constitution states "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include the freedom to hold or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and the freedom, either individually or in community with others, and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching" (EPRDF 1994).

Untangling utility from authentic moral feelings in these practices is beyond the scope of this dissertation, and, in fact, to keep the two ambiguously entangled anchors us more firmly in Gondaré social imaginaries. Gondarés *do* have a robust concept of feelings truly felt in the “heart” (*lib*), a conception of conjuncture between external and internal that is analogous to North American cultural models of authenticity (see Dulin 2013; Lindholm 2008). Moreover, in Gondaré discourse, true feelings contrast with, say, expressions of love that are *beṭeqem* or “instrumental.” Costly actions, like frequency of contact and longevity of co-presence, the act of providing significant assistance in times of need, can increase the confidence of interlocutors that expressions of affinity reflect one’s true affections. That said, the intuitive sense of ambiguity between surfaces and imagined interiors is rarely eliminated in full. Generally speaking, the Gondaré social imaginary is populated by both truly felt actions and instrumental actions; however individual actors find it difficult to untangle them fully because of a strong sense that so much remains hidden from sight. I will provide more examples of this dynamic in Chapter 7. On the whole, in this section I have suggested that different discourses of interreligious relations are circulated and repressed, promoted and contested within a broader social dynamic in Gondar that involves competition, alliance-building, secrecy, state interventions, as well as perceptions of authentic feelings and instrumental facades. We could consider the push and pull of harmonic and antagonistic forces to be, among other things, part and parcel of this broader social dynamic.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have mainly discussed the circulation of discourses that articulate antagonistic/asymmetrical and harmonic/symmetrical models of interreligious relations. I have shown that harmonic and antagonistic models are contested within religious communities, as conversations about the religious other often involve different individuals vying to discursively represent interreligious relations in terms of one model or the other. I have also shown how codes of silence work to keep the religious other isolated from this process of contestation, so the social surface presents a more or less united front of mechachal to the religious other. As the few examples discussed in this chapter suggest, to do otherwise—to even flirt with explicitly asserting the superiority of, say, one's fast in shared space—risks overturning mechachal, and defining religiously mixed interactions in terms of mutual antagonism.

In addition, many of the discourses and imaginaries I discussed in the first three chapters of this dissertation—such as different interpretations of the Ahmad Gragn and al-Najashi histories, including Christian statements that suggest Muslims are merely "guests" in Ethiopia—never came up in religiously mixed company while I was in the field. Moreover, neither Muslim educational pamphlets, nor public discourses at the Shékh Ali Gondaré festivals, told the story of Shékh Ali's victory over Tewodros. The pamphlet on the Shékh's life only told of his work resolving regional conflicts for Tewodros, while the speech at the 2014 festival portrayed him as an international diplomat for Ethiopia. Because Muslims and Christians' insulate each other from the task of negotiating divergent historical imaginaries and interreligious evaluations, one could say Muslims and Christians live in the same world *and* different worlds. Their shared world is typically construed in terms of mechachal, of interreligious symmetry. Muslims and Orthodox Christians tend to enter separate, religiously homogenous social worlds before openly construing the religion of the other as inferior and weaving that construal into their religious imaginaries. This is not too difficult a task given that both Muslim and Orthodox imaginaries have built into them cosmic hierarchies of superior and inferior agents, superior and inferior authorities, practices and modes of life. However, as I have shown, the two worlds do not *always* remain separate. In the next chapter, I will discuss an incident in which Christian and Muslim ritual macrocosms collided, religious secrecy bubbles burst, and, for three days, antagonistic discourses erupted onto the social surface.

Chapter 6

“Land of Blood”: Ritual, Value and Antagonistic Surfaces

In previous chapters, I have referenced to a set of conflicts between Orthodox Christians and Muslims that took place in Gondar in 2009. Here, I will discuss these events in detail. Up to this point, I have tried to make the case that mixed social life in Gondar is defined most of the time by mechachal. Moreover, alongside the practices that positively perform mechachal, like commensality and funeral attendance, there are actions which obstruct and push back against forces of antagonism that threaten to undo mechachal. In the last chapter, I discussed examples of *preventative actions*, like codes of silence, and *reparative actions*, like Adam stopping the argument between his employees. Other reparative actions include the Muslim groom’s friends who talked down the irate Orthodox Christian wedding guest, as well as Orthodox Christians who contest antagonistic discourses. In this chapter, I will show how religious values, as expressed and realized in Orthodox and Muslim ritual centers, can, under certain circumstances, play a role in constituting antagonistic relations. To be clear, this is not to echo the now almost generic enlightenment notion that religion is uniquely prone to conflict because of some inherent qualities like divisiveness or absolutism (Cavanaugh 2009: 15-56). Rather, I would argue that religion is a site for the realization of some of a community’s highest values and thus provides a widely recognized “good” that can be subverted, intentionally or not—value subversions provoke pushback, some of which result in antagonistic relations and even violence.

I showed in previous chapters how value subversions can provoke discipline from individuals within the offended religious community. I also gave specific examples of interreligious value subversions, such as when a Muslim violates unspoken norms for the organization of Orthodox ritual space (see Chapter 4).[112] Since failing to keep a respectful distance from a high authority figure signals insolence in Orthodox imaginaries, and since the Ark is the locus of Orthodoxy's highest cosmic authority, these actions subvert, or reverse, the Orthodox value of deference for the divine. The combination of disjuncture and conjuncture between the Muslim and Orthodox value complexes is important in understanding the role of religion in fueling these conflicts. Both Muslims and Orthodox Christians value vertical deference, but they point their deference in different directions. Orthodox Christians locate the presence of the divine in the Ark, while many Muslims see that association as disrespectful to God, even as idolatrous (see Chapter 3). However, for a Muslim to express this view out loud within the hearing of an Orthodox Christian, as we saw in the last chapter, is itself taken by Christians as an inversion of deference, an act of denigration directed toward their sacred hierarchy, and can provoke physical discipline.

This kind of push-pull, internal-external, value relation—wherein one person's value realization is another's value subversion—contains ingredients for antagonism; we could call it a "latent value conflict" that Muslims and Orthodox Christians manage to contain most of the time. The conflicts I discussed previously that were tied to this value conflict occurred in small groups, between just a few individuals. In what follows, I will discuss a more wide-scale relation of antagonism that, for a short period of time, took over and defined the social surface. This surface-level inversion of mechachal occurred when a Muslim-Christian value conflict, normally hidden from view, was unmistakably put on public display. In addition, towards the end of this chapter I will discuss how the relationship between territorialization and Orthodox/Muslim value-work helps understand how a latent religious value-conflict can give rise to violent territorial conflicts.

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[112] I may have more data on Muslim subversions because I had greater access to the Orthodox community. Also, the power asymmetries in Gondar may make it more likely that Muslim behavior is marked as offensive.

The 2009 Relation of Antagonism

According to Gondar town officials interviewed by Haileyesus, in 1995 the Muslim community received a lease to build a mosque on a large open field down the street from the university (2011: 45).[113] However, as Muslims tell it, they had not been given the green light to begin construction (or, did not have the money), despite obtaining the lease, and basically sat on it until the late 2000s. [114] By early 2009, Muslims had assembled a temporary mosque of corrugated tin sheets on the field to mark the site of the future mosque and were set to soon begin construction. The field in question sits unused most of the year, but it serves an important function on the Orthodox holiday of Ṭimqet. On Ṭimqet, a priest approaches the Ark in the nearby *Lideta Mariam* church, hoists it on his shoulders and takes it outside the compound on a slow-paced journey lasting several hours until he arrives at the far end of this field near a small stream.[115] There, the Ark rests in a tent all night. Early in the morning the priests perform liturgical prayers in the field and then return the Ark back to the church's holy of holies. It remains there all year, coming out only one more time during the year on the annual Lideta Mariam festival. Deacon Meleku, who has a close relationship to the Lideta Mariam church, claimed that the Lideta Mariam Ṭimqet had been celebrated in that field for about 300 years. He further claimed that Emperor Yostos (1711-1716 C.E.) bought the land from local farmers, paying them with gold, in order to preserve it for the use of Lideta Mariam Church on Ṭimqet.

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[113] In 2010, Ethiopian scholar of peace and security studies Haileyesus Muluken (2011) interviewed several government officials about this incident, and they claimed the mayor granted permission to build the mosque in 1995 without "knowledge of the town and zone officials" (45).

[114] The legal aspects of the lease and the reason for the delay in construction were murky. According to Haileyesus (2011), town officials claim a corrupt mayor gave permission and was soon removed from office. Once the 2009 conflict occurred, everyone likely rushed to distance themselves from the lease, so it is difficult to assess what the Muslim community was being told between 1995 and 2009. Based on Diborah's conversation with housing officials, we know that after the 2009 incident, Muslim leaders wrote a letter demanding Muslims be given another plot of land as compensation for the revocation of their lease. In response, they were given a piece of land in Kebele 16. In 2015, they have yet to begin construction on the new mosque and the plot of land remained a bare field with a fence around the perimeter.

The journey of the Lideta Ark is one of many in Gondar town and the surrounding countryside that occur every year on the 18th and 20th of January. Gondar's grand celebration of Ṭimqet, which takes place in Piassa, dwarfs and overshadows the smaller processions outside of the central hub. In Piassa, five Arks make the journey together, leaving their individual churches and meeting up along the way to form one large procession. The Ark procession in Piassa completes its journey at the Fasilides Bath, a refurbished castle ruin that historically served as a holiday residence and swimming pool for Ethiopia's royal family. Right outside of Fasilides Bath, the five Arks of the Piassa procession meet up with three other Arks before all eight enter their resting place for the night. Because of the celebratory spectacle and historical relics that surround it, Gondar is famous the world over for its Ṭimqet celebration and draws in droves of European and American tourists. Tourists conspicuously dot and coagulate amidst the Gondaré Orthodox throngs that follow the Ark procession. In addition, the city's preeminence during this time is reinforced every year when the Ethiopian national news gives special coverage to Gondar's Ṭimqet celebration.

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[115] As noted earlier, there are numerous St. Mary Churches in Gondar. Many are named after important events in Mary's life. *Lideta Mariam* refers to the birth of Christ (Fritsch 2001: 64).

The canonical symbolism of the ritual is straightforward. It commemorates Jesus' baptism at the river Jordan, when the Holy Spirit appeared in the form of a dove and the voice of God spoke from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son" (Mathew 3:17). The Arks' movement from their sanctuaries to a body of water reenacts the journey of Jesus to the river Jordan (Chaillot 2003). It is perhaps significant that other branches of Orthodoxy name their commemoration of these events "Epiphany," meaning "manifestation" (Fritsch 2001: 208) while in Amharic the most popular name of the festival among Ethiopian Orthodox Christians is "Ṭimqet" which means "Baptism."[116] The name "Epiphany" draws attention to the divine manifestations surrounding Christ's baptism, while the name Ṭimqet, of course, draws attention to the ritual of Baptism itself. Christ's baptism is a symbolically dense event in its own right, as it entails the participation of God incarnate, the actual head of the cosmos, in a ritual that is performed on every Orthodox Christian as an infant—a ritual of which marks Orthodox Christians' initiation into the redemptive purview of said God incarnate. Every Orthodox Christian wears the mateb around their necks as a deictic sign of their own baptism. In the 2014 Ṭimqet, the festival's focus on baptism was reinforced by a float depicting a child being baptized and a group of young men aiding the procession wearing matching shirts with the words “The baptism of faith saves,” “Yamena teṭemequ yadenal,” as well as the sermon at Fasilides Bath on the second day of the main festival, which focused on Jesus' baptism.

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[116] For an explanation of the Greek Orthodox celebration of Epiphany see http://www.goarch.org/ourfaith/ourfaith8383. Orthodox Christians may also refer to Ṭimqet as Epiphany using the Amharic cognate "*Epifanīya,*" or the Ge'ez word "*Asterayo*" (Fritsch 2001: 139). When the EOTC talks about the festival in English they translate Ṭimqet as Epiphany, see the church's English webpage: http://www.ethiopianorthodox.org/english/calendar.html Gondaré English speakers also refer to the holiday as Epiphany when speaking in English. The point I am making here is one of emphasis not mutual exclusivity.

On the first day in 2014, the Arks in Piassa (and Arada) left their churches around noon and arrived together at Fasilides Bath at dusk. On the second day, all the Arks return to their respective churches except the two St. Michael Arks. Here is where it gets a little complex. The third day is dedicated to St. Michael. The St. Michael Arks have their own special procession to the two St. Michael Churches in the city center, named respectively, Fit Michael and Agat'ami Michael. The St. Michael Arks are known for being c*abad*, heavy. Because the St. Michael Arks are some of the oldest in Gondar, and because of the high status of the archangel, the heaviness of the St. Michael Arks bear down on their carriers and thus they travel more slowly than the others. My informants told me that before the Arks will permit the priest to move them, they require a surplus of singing, praising and dancing from the laity. I will discuss the central Ṭimqet holiday more later. For now, I will turn my attention to the smaller scale Lideta Mariam Ark procession and the events of 2009.

In contrast to the splendid main event in Piassa, the Lideta Mariam Ark procession advances without global or national fanfare. The crowds are considerable, especially as the procession reaches its destination, but the Lideta Ṭimqet is primarily a neighborhood event. It is a time when those who have regular face-to-face contact, sometimes since birth, celebrate *their* Ark together. The small-scale, neighborhood-centric nature of the Lideta Mariam Ṭimqet does not diminish the importance of the practice, in some ways it may enhance it because of the importance of neighborhood based sodalities in the Amhara region (see Chapter 2 and 3). To highlight the possessive aspect of Ṭimqet, I might note that as the crowd thickens during the procession (and on other major holidays), some young men usually form a circle and chant, “*Yeña! Yeña! Yeña*!” which, in English, translates as, “Ours! Ours! Ours!” If I might unpack this chant a bit, its polysemic evocations on Ṭimket could include the following: “*Our* country’s religion, Orthodoxy!,” “*Our* country and religion’s holiday, Ṭimqet!,” “*Our* city, Gondar’s Ṭimqet!,” “*Our* country, Ethiopia’s, culture!”, or “*Our* neighborhood’s Ark, Lideta!” The chant expresses the relationship between a people, a territory, a ritual, and the Ark of the Covenant. By looking to build a mosque on that land, Muslims claimed for themselves a bit of territory that had already been claimed by a cluster of neighborhoods (no small thing), for *their* Ark, for the Virgin Mary (the mother of Christians), and, ultimately, for God.

As I stated earlier, the Muslim community had not yet broken ground when 2009’s Ṭimqet rolled around, but Muslims had constructed a small, make-shift mosque out of corrugated tin sheets. Deacon Meleku helped organize a demonstration on Ṭimqet to protest the mosque construction. I will begin my account of the conflicts that followed with an excerpt from a police report written within a few weeks after the events transpired:

> The names of 36 individual accused mentioned below appeared in Gondar Town on Terr 10,11, 12, and 13 [January 18, 19, 20 and 21] for reason of the Ṭimqet Holiday. In their actions, they contradicted religious freedom assured in the constitution. They did this by organizing in groups, dancing, and chanting in the form of a poetic stanza, "This year we will segregate", "Our blood will flow", “They [Muslims] came here as guests, once we hosted them, they wanted to build a mosque at the door of the church"; also, [they contradicted religious freedom] by wearing T-shirts with the quotation, "Akeldama" printed on it (the meaning is "land of

> blood"…some [contradicted religious freedom] by waving flags with an image of the conquering lion "Moa Anbassa" [Haile Selassie's flag], by throwing stones, by hitting Muslim business establishments, by putting human bodies and treasure in danger. They have given testimony in denial of the accusation. Because of all this, that they violated developmental, religious, economical, security etc. policies and laws, the government puts forth these accused (NGPD 2009a).

In this excerpt, we see an account of conflicts that spanned the entire three days of the Ṭimqet celebration. Diborah was at the protest on the first day and she told me she remembered that some of the young men gathered on the field that day shouted the inflammatory chants detailed above, such as "Our blood will flow" and "This year we will segregate." However, given the generality of the above statement, it is likely the chants were not limited to the protest on the 18th, as a variety of chants pervade all phases of the Ṭimqet celebration. A Muslim man I interviewed about the conflict, Said, told me Christians were chanting "Akeldama! We will make Ethiopia a land of blood!" on the third day of Ṭimqet. These chants would have blended into the military themes and mock fighting that unfolds among the Orthodox throngs that accompany the Ṭimqet procession. In addition, Diborah distinctly remembers the protestors in the field on January 18th singing a hymn with the following lyrics:

> We do not depend on our own strength,
> It is our God that is our power

She described this as a hymn of Christian self-defense. Christians sing it, she said, to express their bravery and faith in God when they are under attack. Diborah and Deacon Meleku both told me that at one point during the protest on January 18th, a group of young men took to the make-shift mosque "from four sides" and reduced it to rubble. Diborah claims they found stones nestled inside the rubble and picked them up in order to “defend themselves” from encroaching security forces. According to one of the police reports, “at 7:00 PM in the evening an unlawful conflict occurred because of the temporary mosque of tin sheets constructed on the land of Lideta” (NGPD 2009d) At around 7:00 PM, the Ṭimqet procession usually reaches its destination and the clergy puts the Ark to rest for the night. So it is safe to say the conflict escalated once the Ark neared the mosque.

The portion of the police record I obtained did not mention the destruction of the mosque or a clash between Christian protesters and security forces on January 18th; however, we were only given access to a few pages of a very long record detailing these events. Whatever “unlawful conflict” transpired on the first day, it allegedly provoked local Muslims to react violently themselves. In the testimony of one of the accused, a Muslim man testified that he spent January 18th at a mosque far away from the events, adding, in response to an accusation, that he “did not throw stones when the followers of the Christian religion came dancing with the idea of starting a conflict.” (NGPD 2009c). According to another police report, police officers were also met with violent resistance when they arrived at the al-Najashi Masjid, which is the mosque nearest to the contested “land of Lideta.” One report claims that when the police approached the mosque a “Shékh”, “picked up stones and threw them at us and other security forces, saying, ‘Until today, we have tolerated [*chelenal*]. Now a war of Jihad will begin’" (NGPD 2009f). The term “chelenal,” which is rendered here, “We have tolerated,” is a verb form of the term “mechachal,” conjugated in present-perfect tense. The Shékh’s alleged statement could also be rendered, “Until today we [Muslims] have lived in mechachal [with Christians], but now a war of Jihad will begin.” This statement contrasts the mechachal of the past with the antagonism of the present. In effect, it declares the end of mechachal, and the inauguration of a relation of antagonism, here framed as “jihad.” While the police officer quoted above states the Shékh threw stones at police, another police testimony accused the Shékh of delivering a speech intended to provoke other Muslims to attack security forces:

> On Terr 10/05/2001 [01/18/2009] in Kebele 18 at 1:00 [7:00 PM] in the evening an unlawful conflict occurred because of the temporary mosque of tin sheets constructed on the land of Lideta. When police came to pacify and implement peace, you Shékh [name withheld] gave a disruptive speech in the al-Najashi Masjid that provoked the Muslim believers. In the middle of the speech you said "Today we proclaim jihad!", "How long shall we remain silent?" In addition, you caused others to throw stones at security forces (NGPD 2009d).

Notice that, in this account, the Shékh also suggests Muslims will soon break their silence, which is significant given the argument I have made about the relationship between mechachal and the code of silence to which Christians and Muslims usually adhere. In his own testimony, the accused Shékh asserted the officers’ claim that he “initiated bloodshed” was a “false accusation” and that actually “I calmed down the believers who were there” (NGPD 2009b).

It would have been inappropriate to ask Muslims to corroborate the police officer’s account, since I would be asking them to incriminate a Shékh. While the police and defendant testimonies are the most contemporary accounts of the event, so they cannot be ignored, many individual police officers have biases against the Muslim community (one high ranking police officer, for example, told me mosques were a front for terrorism), so their testimony should be taken with a grain of salt. However, the statement quoted earlier recounting the behavior of Christians protesters provide evidence that the police officers pulled no punches in their prosecution of Christians either. Overall, there is no evidence the police sought to place the blame squarely on Muslims.

Police accounts suggest that Christians were the first to break the code silence, loudly shouting antagonistic discourses in a group protest. Muslims, then, reciprocated in kind. On the night of January 18th a police officer stated that he heard a “light brown, fat man, a mini bus driver” say “If I were there, I would have hit all the Christians with a stone. They think we Muslims are weak. Tomorrow if something occurs, I will not let them get away.” The police officer then adds, “At the time, being angered by the discussion, I told him ‘Leave it! That is not good.’" (NGPD 2009f). This statement provides evidence that at least one Muslim reflected on the day’s events and vowed to fight if Christians provoked Muslims the next day. The fact that a police officer overheard such an incriminating conversation suggests that this kind of antagonistic discourse, outside of secrecy bubbles no less, may have become more common once the conflict began. However, the police record and oral histories do not report any incidents on the second day of Ṭimqet. Apparently, in the major festival, all the Arks, except the two St. Michael Arks that stayed at Fasilides Bath, returned to their churches without anything out of the ordinary happening. However, many of the provocative chants, shirts, and flags may have kept the hostile milieu of the first day alive.

On the evening of the third day, the Fit Michael Ark was returning to its church in Arada, the market area of town. As discussed in previous chapters, the market area of Gondar has a dense Muslim population. The Fit Michael Ark procession is the only one that passes through, or at least nears, what Muslims would likely see as their domain. The rest of Arks returned to their resting places in Piassa and around Fasilides Castle without issue. Both oral reports and the police report suggest that when the Ark passed through main road in Arada, a wad of khat fell from the sky and landed near the Ark.[117] As virtually all Orthodox Christians tell the story, a Muslim sitting on the roof of a building across from Gondar's main bus station dropped the wad of khat with the apparent intent of hitting and/or insulting the Ark. The following account comes from an interview with Deacon Gebre, who serves at the Fit Michael Church:

> A Muslim sitting on the upper floor of the Olympia Café dropped khat. His purpose was to give [the Ark] disrespect [*keber balamesṭet*], to denigrate [be*minaq*], with evil intent [be*tenkol*]. In dropping it, they say 'We respect another religion.' […] Khat is forbidden in our churches, so dropping khat on the Ark is a huge denigration [*teleq nqet*]. After that, the youth went to the mosque and demolished the mosque. The people escaped but the mosque was broken.

Given how sensitive this event was, all the details of what happened that night are hard to tease out with full detail. Diborah tells me many young men, "Arada guys" she called them, "vowed to destroy the mosque", she added "not a specific mosque, but any mosque." An Orthodox man in his late 20s proudly told me that he and a group of Christian friends threw stones at the nearby Keña Bét Masjid that night. One police report also states that Orthodox Christians hurled stones at Muslim businesses, while another police report contains testimony from a Christian young man who claims a Muslim had shot him in the hand with a pistol (NGPD 2009e). Several of my Orthodox informants told me a police officer was killed amidst the carnage, but none of the testimonies I read documented the death.

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[117] The only record I read about the khat incident is the following testimony from the accused: "On the St. Michael Ṭimqet holy day, my friends and I were not involved in the incident wherein khat was dropped on the Ark in order to start a conflict between Christians and Muslims" (NGPD 2009c).

Teddy told me he was walking with a Muslim young woman in Arada when the violence broke out. As they walked together, a group of Orthodox Christian young men asked Teddy if his friend was Muslim. He told them she was not, believing that if he confirmed her Muslim identity they would have attacked her. He accompanied her to an Orthodox Christian friend's house where all those present comforted her, saying "*ayzo,*" which means "take care" or "I have my eye on you." I should note here that even when the antagonistic modality of relations was at its height, defining the social surface, pockets of mechachal opened up as well, but this time, it was mechachal that went underground. The violence was severe enough on the surface that the police cut the power and all of Arada went dark as security forces sought to bring order to the situation. Many of the youth involved in this incident were still in jail by the time I arrived in the field four years later.

The story I have told thus far, as recorded in police records and recalled by informants, reflects Christian perspectives on the conflict. In Chapter 1 I showed that Muslims and Christians in Gondar have different historical imaginaries, and this bit of contemporary history is no different. When I first started asking Muslims about this khat incident, many told me they had never heard of it. Some of those willing to talk about it claimed a Muslim man had dropped the khat *by accident*. Said claimed to be on the upper floor of the Olympia building at the time of the incident, and he claimed a female worker had tossed a few leaves of khat out from the upper floor while cleaning. The following excerpt is taken from his account:

> They say, 'Khat was dropped from upper floor of the building as we followed [the Ark].' They say, 'It was the Olympia building that khat was

> dropped from,' but, some child [young female worker][118] grabbed a little bit of khat and threw it out. This happened because this is a house in which Christians and Muslim youth chewed khat together. The Ark had not arrived; it was far, but they said 'They dropped khat on us' *because they wanted to give rise to a conflict*. I was there and took note that khat was not dropped on the Ark. We worked to bring calm.[119] After the Ark entered the Michael [church], and it all ended peacefully, I dialed someone on the phone, and went on my way. Then we heard the shout of a bullet, I said, 'A shot fired!' […] After that many people moved about and gathered together, from there, the shots continued and people became confused/mixed up. We passed each other, and Muslims separated to their houses and they [Christians] began to hit [their houses] with stones. They [Muslims] protected themselves by closing up [their houses].

There are a number of khat houses nestled in the upper floors of various buildings in Arada. Christians and Muslims do indeed chew khat together in these houses, and these businesses are often tended by young female employees or children of the owner. I was told the khat house on the second floor of the Olympia building was shut down as a result of the 2009 conflict. I do not have enough evidence to adjudicate the relative factuality of these two stories. I can imagine Muslims forming a collective memory of these events that minimizes the culpability of the Muslim actors, and I could imagine Christians, given the climate prevailing at the time, reading malevolent intent into a few leaves of khat innocuously tossed out some distance away from the Ark.

Antagonistic Relations and the Religiousness of the 2009 Conflict

In this section, I am going to explore the role of religious values in igniting this conflict, but first I would like to discuss the non-religious factors that comprised the "conditions" of this event. The fact that Orthodox Christians threw stones at Muslim businesses perhaps suggests that economic resentment and an ongoing competition for a power and resources may have helped create the conditions for this clash. Historically, mercantilism was stigmatized in Ethiopia, while farming and government work remained the high status occupations (Mains 2012). Due to policies of religious discrimination, Muslims were de-facto excluded from these honorable professions. However, they were able to draw on transnational ties with the Arab world to become successful merchants, and thus came to control a large slice of the Ethiopian economy. For example, even though Emperor Menelik II saw Muslims as a potential threat with compromised national loyalty, he decided he needed to integrate Muslims into his kingdom because of their economic acumen. Ficquet writes that during expansive and consolidating reign of Menelik II in the 19th century that Muslims "connected Ethiopia to the world through international commercial networks" and that "Menelik understood that Muslims were the economic lungs of the country. Therefore, his government tolerated their distinctness as long they practiced their faith discreetly" (2015: 99).

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[118] The grammar and context suggests it was a female employee or domestic worker.

[119] It is not clear if he meant that he worked to bring calm or peace after an initial uproar in response to the incident, or if he worked for peace or did peaceable work in general. Either way, he clearly places himself on the side of peace in this situation.

These days, Orthodox Christians in Gondar have reevaluated mercantilism. Besides migration and remittances, the Gondaré youth I knew saw running a successful business as a merchant (*negadī*) and/or working in the tourism industry as offering the most promising paths to economic advancement. [120] In addition, though government work is respected in Gondar (cf. Mains 2012), government workers often complain about their low salaries. Granted, some farmers with significant land holdings in the countryside around Gondar enjoy an abundance of wealth, those kinds of returns from farm work are not an option for city dwellers with no farmland.

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[120] Between individual remittances and investments, money sent to Ethiopia from the Diaspora amounts to about 20 billion annually (Lefort 2015: 368).

Muslim wealth is palpable in the high proportion of Muslim-owned businesses in Arada, but also in the growth of Muslim populations in formerly Orthodox majority neighborhoods. For example, as I noted in the introduction, Autoparko used to have only a few Muslim residents; however, by purchasing the neighborhood's nicest homes, Muslims had achieved an apparent majority in its most affluent quarter. It was common to hear Orthodox Christians lament among themselves that, while Muslims have foreign sponsors sending money from the Arab world and Protestants have sponsors sending money from America, Orthodox Christians are left to fend for themselves. For some Christians, even the ability to gain permission for mosque construction indexes the undue influence Muslims exercise because of their wealth. For example, Deacon Meleku claimed concerning the permission granted for mosque construction on the Lideta field, "Some government officials took an illegal path, receiving money [bribes] in order to give Muslims the land."

This is all to say, I accept that ongoing group competition for power and resources, and a sense among Orthodox Christians that Muslims have a disproportionate amount of both, are among *conditions* that helped make the violence of 2009 more likely.[121] However, I also agree with Feldman that the "Conditions and relations of antagonism are not identical and are often discontinuous" (1991: 20). When Feldman talks about "relations of antagonism" he refers to ideological formations and constructions of space that emerge in the context of violence and facilitate its reproduction as a mode of life by helping social actors grasp the contours of the relation, giving them motivation to initiate and sustain the antagonism, as well as enabling them to develop a shared understanding of how to act collectively within it. The Muslim/Christian violence of 2009 did not result in a protracted violent struggle spanning months and years, but it did reproduce itself over a three-day period. To understand the "relations of antagonism" that intruded upon the everyday practices of mechachal and explicitly redefined Muslim-Christian relations, we have to understand them in the contexts of the rituals with which the relation of antagonism was enmeshed. Given that the violence became part of the Ṭimqet ritual (Smith 1982), the rituals were a significant part of what defined this specific relation of antagonism.

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[121] I should probably add that the discourses of the U.S. led War on Terror were an important part of the conditions of antagonism, especially since Ethiopia's preoccupation with terrorism increased after a series of terrorism attacks in 2008, which led to the anti-terrorism bill of late 2009 (Oakland Institute 2015; Human Rights Watch 2009). I will discuss the impact of western discourse on terrorism and Islam in the next chapter.

As we discussed earlier in this dissertation, I conceive rituals as particularly dense iterations of a common tendency to link up particular time-spaces with general orders (Stasch 2011; cf. Rappaport 1999; Bloch 1986). I have already discussed how some of the elements of the Ṭimqet ritual make present larger macro-cosmic realities. To the layperson, the Ark is a site of the divine presence, perhaps a refraction of God, so intertwined with divinity that some Orthodox laypersons can say confidently, "The Ark is our God." It is also an icon of the Old Testament Ark of the Covenant, which defined the identity of the Israelites as the chosen people and allowed that chosenness to be transferred to Ethiopia. It links the Bible and Christianity with Ethiopian nationhood, and holds some of the power and status of the original Ark of the Covenant. Also, as I discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, the Arks enact Ethiopian civilization with their power of protection and blessing, making the social order possible.

A particular Ark also functions as a vessel of the saint it is named after and, sometimes, behaves in a way that reflects the personality of its namesake. For example, my informants told me the Ark of St. Gabriel used to come out on Ṭimqet; however, because Gabriel is an "angry" angel, that is quick to punish sinners, one year the Gabriel Ark did not cooperate with the procession. The stories about what happened the last time the Gabriel Ark came out on Ṭimqet were varied. Bertukan told me the Ark killed a menstruating women for coming too close to it. Another informant told me that the Ark never made it out of the gate, no matter how much the faithful sang, danced and even discharged a pistol into the air to show it respect, the Ark would not allow the priest to take it out of the church courtyard gate. No matter how much they sang, it was not enough for Gabriel. Their insufficient adulation made the archangel angry enough to halt the celebration. I talked to an elderly priest who served most of his life at the St. Gabriel Church, and who also claimed to be present when the Ark first showed this stubborn streak. As he told the story, during a Ṭimqet celebration in the Haile Selassie era (sometime in the 1960s, he estimated), the Gabriel Ark had spent the night at Faslides Bath with the other Arks. The next morning, however, all the other Arks went on their way, but the priests could not pick up the Gabriel Ark. In response, the archbishop ordered seven days of fasting and prayer. At the end of the seven days, the archbishop picked it up himself and carried it back to the church. "From then on" the elderly priest told me, "it [the Ark] did not come out. There is not permission [from Gabriel]." When I asked Orthodox informants why the Gabriel Ark does not join the other Arks on Ṭimqet, many answered "*Gabriel qoṭu nachow*", "Gabriel is angry." This story illustrates how literally Orthodox Christians understand the Ark to be a locus of otherworldly divine agency. Moreover, it illustrates how many Orthodox Christians understand Ṭimqet as an interaction between the saints and those devoted to them—which, through the process of intercession, also amounts to an interaction between God and his chosen people.

I have discussed quite a bit about Ṭimqet's symbolism, now I want to focus on the movement of the Ark as a way acting or intervening in the world. A number of Orthodox Christians told me the Ark will not move unless there is sufficient praise in the form of song and dance from the faithful. At several points during the Ark's journey, the priest carrying the Ark stops and stands in one place for a while. Sometimes it stops for several minutes while the hymns of praise continue and intensify before the Ark moves again. We can see from the stories about the Gabriel Ark that if the Ark is not satisfied with the singing, the whole Ṭimqet celebration could theoretically come to a halt. I asked a priest at one of Gondar's Kidane Mehret churches, the one outside the city center near the university, how long his church's Ark takes to arrive at its destination. He told me the swiftness of its journey depends on the quantity and intensity of the "*mezmur*" or hymns that surround the procession. This highlights how the Ṭimqet ritual is a way of acting in the world (Tambiah 1985). Ritual accomplishes something in a way perhaps analogous to quotidian actions, but because of its macrocosmic connections, it often accomplishes something on a plane apart from the flux of quotidian life. As discussed in Chapter 2, Orthodox values center on acts of respect directed toward the Orthodox hierarchy of divine mediation. In an ideal picture of the Orthodox cosmos, God or his mediators respond to acts of respect with interventions in the mundane world, bestowing blessings and protection. During the Ṭimqet celebration, the Orthodox faithful shower the Arks with respect, and, in response, the Arks move. Thus the interplay between adulation and divine response, which defines Ethiopian Orthodox value-work, is realized in a concrete, observable way through the movement of an object that constitutes the dwelling place of God. On Ṭimqet, the Orthodox faithful watch God move; in effect, they *convince* God to move with loud, ostensible displays of respect.

In addition, aside from the exuberant singing and dancing, the spatial buffer around the Ark is another important component of the ritual display of respect. The priest carrying the Ark is surrounded by a multilayered buffer, first of priests, then of ordained deacons behind and in front of the priests. Volunteers carry a wooden barrier that fences the Ark procession off from the surrounding crowd. Then further out Sunday school students sing hymns of praise, while on the outer layers, laypeople look on, engage in spontaneous singing and dancing, and boys and young men engage in mock battles with wooden sticks. In Gondar, the Lideta Ark's clerical entourage walks upon two red carpets that a group of Sunday School students roll up and roll out as the Ark advances. [122] In 2009, the tin mosque entered into this scene as an intruder, as a rival, as a disruptor to the wave of adulation intended to wash over the Ark. I would argue that the tin mosque was understood by many Orthodox Christians as subverting Orthodox value-work and the violence was a push back against that subversion. As discussed in the introduction and Chapter 3, the mosque is microcosm of the Islamic macrocosm and a center of Muslim value-work. It issues audible calls for Muslims to defer and to point their deference towards Mecca. There is little about the mosque's public role that signals respect for the Ark, rather it draws Muslims to direct their respect somewhere else. This in itself does not signal *disrespect for* and *rivalry with* the Ark per se; however, the tin mosque's placement on territory already claimed for the Ark appeared, to some, to "reveal" an intent to challenge and rival the authority of the Orthodox hierarchy. This interpretation of the mosque's presence is not inevitable. However, the way Orthodox Christians organize ritual space, on Ṭimqet and throughout the year, and the way that spatial organization ties into Orthodox values of deference, makes this interpretation more likely. Moreover, the "open secret" that many Muslims equate the Ark with an idol could have reinforced the tin mosque's recognizability as a value subversion.

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[122] Some Orthodox Christians told me the practice of using the carpet began after the khat incident of 2009 to create a stronger buffer between the Ark and alien entities of profane space. Though not everyone agreed about this, I wanted to note, the carpet may not have been part of the scene in 2009.

All this said, I would argue that what made the mosque's placement most inflammatory is how it partially nullified the ritual action of one of Orthodox Christianity's most important festivals. Because of the mosque's location, in 2009 Christians were put in the position of taking the Ark out of its church only to carry it *to* a mosque, or at least to a small plot of land now shared with a mosque. The Ṭimqet procession is supposed to typify a hierarchical relationship between Christians and the Ark as a stand-in for God, as well as produce a unidirectional flow of respect towards God and his mediators, but *instead* the Lideta Ṭimqet procession was about to perform a scene of Mosque-Ark parity. Moreover, the space and the body of water at the Ark's destination is supposed to be transformed by the Ark's sacred power, but the mosque—as an icon of the Muslim macrocosm, there clearly visible on the surface—refused to be transformed and encompassed. Thus, the efficacy of Ṭimqet as ritual action was blocked. Its value realization was stifled. It was not able to accomplish its ostensible purpose of realizing, in slowed down, controlled form, the high Orthodox values of respect for the divine hierarchy and typified recognition of the Ark's preeminence. As we know, however, some Orthodox young men took it upon themselves to violently remove this "obstacle," i.e. the tin mosque, right when the scene of Mosque-Ark parity was about to be realized.

My sense is many Muslims would have appreciated the scene of Mosque-Ark parity, and may have had that in mind when they put together the tin mosque—not *necessarily* to show Christians disrespect, but to gain some for themselves. Every new mosque in Gondar cashes in on the constitutional promise of parity with Christians, likewise any restriction on mosque-building indexes, to some, a continuation of Christian oppression. The destruction of that mosque not only halted the Muslim movement toward parity, recognition, and fuller macrocosmic connection, it reversed it, undid it, destroyed a ritual site of the Islamic macrocosm. From the perspective of both Muslim and Orthodox Christian actors, the religious other attacked the heart of value, the *very means of value production.* Through their chants, Orthodox Christians transvalued the time-space surrounding the tin mosque to a macrohistorical scale, making events going back to the 7th century relevant to the here-now, such as Muslims coming to Ethiopia "as guests" during the first hijra.   If a Shékh had indeed declared jihad as the policeman claimed, the Shékh acted, like the Christian protesters, on the macrocosmic level, evoking founding events in Muslim history, typifying a few youth throwing stones in the mosque courtyard as defenders of Islam writ-large. Said said, "When they hit the mosque, they started a conflict with us. It is our duty to protect Allah's house." The khat incident maintained the relations of antagonism on the macrocosmic level with blistering intensity.

Khat is an important part of Muslim ritual life, but Christians largely see it as a Muslim vice. Teddy told me, dropping khat on the Ark is "like throwing a devil at it." He added that Orthodox Christians associate khat addiction with demonic possession. By contrast, the St. Michael Ark has a level sacred gravitas only exceeded by the Gabriel Ark. Dropping khat near the St. Michael Ark was a blatant act of *minaq*, and, because of khat's known enmeshment with Muslim ritual life, its use in this instance marked the act as specifically "Muslim minaq"—an act of denigration carried out, as Deacon Gebre typified it, "with evil intent," coupled with a presumed expression of allegiance to "another religion," namely, Islam. If Said's account of the events is accurate, and the act amounted to only a few khat leaves tossed out by an oblivious young girl some distance away from the Ark, the symbolic conjuncture of khat and the Ark was potent enough in this tense situation to fill in the gaps and confabulate a grave Muslim offense. While deacon Gebre could confidently declare that the Muslim who dropped the khat had "evil intent," Said was certain Christians conjured up the khat offense because "they wanted to give rise to a conflict." Both sides in the conflict were thus typified with essentially antagonistic internationalities, which left little room for a misunderstanding or justified anger on the part of the other.

As the controlled space of ritual reduces human actors to types, in 2009 it represented Muslim and Christian as type and anti-type. The Ṭimqet ritual core parses the world in in terms of the Ark and the graded hierarchy of believers who respect the Ark, but the events on the 2009 Ṭimqet added another type to the ritual performance: those who denigrate the Ark. In part because the vehicles for denigration were broadly recognizable emblems of Muslim ritual, i.e. mosque and khat, the offense of denigration was transvalued to include the whole Muslim community. Denigrations of the Ark provoke outrage for most Orthodox Christians, and, as the events of the 2009 Ṭimqet demonstrate, some felt that this denigration justified violence against the Muslim community—though it is notable, and maybe speaks to the continued force the sensibilities of mechachal held over the rioting young men, that even an outraged Gondaré mob, shouting “We will make Ethiopia a land of blood!” and running towards a large mosque, ended up inflicting harm mostly on buildings, not human bodies.

Police soon intervened and put an end to the riot that night; however, a relation of antagonism continued on somewhat thereafter. Orthodox Christian informants tell me that the next week, Muslims did not permit Orthodox Christians to walk on the street of the Keña Bét Masjid, telling them it was a “Muslim neighborhood.” Moreover, for about five days after the incident, many Muslims in the market area closed their shops in protest. Aisha, a Muslim woman, told me at the time of the conflict she had heard every Christian was looking to kill five Muslims, so she hid in her house for several days. Also augmenting the Christian anxiety about Muslim aggression, in the months that followed police allegedly stopped a car that was carrying swords imported illegally from Sudan. The purpose of the swords was never spelled out, as the person transporting them allegedly escaped on foot, running off the road onto the kaha river bank and disappearing in the shrubbery. Some Orthodox Christians suggested that the swords were part of an effort to arm Muslims in preparation for jihad, though it is not clear what good swords would do against the firepower of the Federal Police. Today, a metal cross, painted with the Ethiopian Orthodox colors of red, green and yellow, stands to mark Christian ownership of the Lideta field. Deacon Meleku put it there in lieu of the now absent tin mosque, to make it clear to all who pass that this empty field is Christian territory.

Ṭimqet, Violence and Imperial Nostalgia

Anyone who has experienced the Ṭimqet festival may balk at my description of it as "highly controlled" and "slowed down" realizations of deference; at the very least, they would see these descriptions as incomplete. The further out you move from the highly controlled, travelling ritual center, the less controlled things seem. In fact, observing the festival one might conclude that overall the town is less orderly during Ṭimqet than it is during everyday life. Also, much of the behavior of Christians on Ṭimqet does not fit Orthodox models of ideal piety and deference. For example, some pious Orthodox Christians I knew complained about the groups of young women who would come to the festival with hair and makeup done to the nines, wearing matching outfits that do not meet traditional modesty standards. As these complaints would go, these women (and many young men too) do not participate for reasons of piety, but to have a good time, to "be seen." Likewise, some not so pious Orthodox young men told me Ṭimqet was a good time to pursue sexual liaisons. On the outer stretches of the procession, young men perform mock battles with sticks, mock battles which, as the men become more drunk, also often turn into real fights and police have to intervene. In 2015, I spoke to a few police officers in Arada working in crowd control on the third day of Ṭimqet. Seeing one officer's worried expression I asked him if he was nervous and, without hesitating, he responded, "Very much."[123] Many Orthodox Christians are critical of the young men who engage in drunken excesses on Ṭimqet, or any time, but they also accept it as an almost inevitable part of the festival.

Boylston argued that there is a something carnivalesque about Ṭimqet, as it "sees the suspension of normal rules and hierarchies, followed by a reconstruction of the social hierarchy" (nd.:123; see also Bakhtin 1984; Turner 1969). I have argued that in Gondar the Orthodox ecclesiastical hierarchy is on full display at the core of the Ṭimqet procession. The fact that things become more uncontrolled at the outer stretches of the procession reinforces the differentiation between the different hierarchical grades. However, Boylston is right that there is something leveling, sort of topsy-turvy about the "dwelling place" of God, kept out of sight most of the year in the protected inner sanctum of the church, being carried around in profane space (which is reminiscent of the incarnation). Moreover, the fact that the likelihood of drunken fights decreases once the Arks have returned to their respective holy of holies has a way of reinforcing the authority church hierarchies and the value of deferring to them. Similarly, Kaplan (2008) argued that historically the rituals of the Mesqel festival have reinforced hierarchy while also dramatizing social conflicts.

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[123] They had reason to be nervous, given that in 2009 a police officer was allegedly killed on the third day of Ṭimqet.

My purpose is not to dwell on this dual feature of some Ethiopian Orthodox festivals; rather, I want to address in more detail the question of why the non-deference of a mosque on Ṭimqet was so offensive. Why did the mosque produce such intense anger, while Orthodox Christians quietly accept other seemingly non-deferential behavior from fellow celebrants? For one, Gondaré Orthodox Christians know that most Muslims do not regard the Ark very highly, while even poorly deferential Christians can be seen as holding the Ark in some esteem. In addition, I argued earlier that the mosque on the Lideta field nullified to some degree the ritual performance, by contrast, as I also argued above, the disordered exuberance of Christians on the margins of the procession does not put the ritual's efficacy in jeopardy, it may even reinforce it. While this provides part of the answer, I want to draw attention to another layer of the tin mosque's macrocosmic entailments that likely added intensity to the outrage, while also explaining the form the antagonistic discourses assumed. Often, when I bring up specific mosque construction projects with Orthodox Christians they start talking about a plan, a conspiratorial intention Muslims have, to build 44 mosques in Gondar to rival its 44 historic churches. For example, in a discussion about an attempt on the part of some Muslims to build a mosque with a minaret in Autoparko, Hirut told me Muslims had made a "secret promise" to build a mosque in every neighborhood in Gondar. This also came up once when I asked the Christian owner of a butcher shop if there was a mosque to the northeast of Fasilides Castle. A Christian young man overhead the discussion and opined, "That's not good. They want to build a mosque for every church."

The larger past and future imaginaries through which some Orthodox Christians understand the significance of mosque construction ups the stakes involved in every new mosque built. It means that Orthodox Christians protesting a mosque might not only see themselves as defending one church, but in a sense, as defending every church. This transvalues the time-space of a single mosque to a larger macrohistorical scale, according to which every mosque moves Gondar closer to the total recession of Christian dominance. In response, the Christian protestors at Lideta advocated for a return to the other end of the temporal binary—that is, in reaction to the prospect of total Muslim parity, they called for a return to the total Christian hegemony of imperial Ethiopia. This explains their display of Haile Selassie's flag, and statements, such as, "Today we will segregate," which harkens back to the days of Christian-Muslim segregation. Ṭimqet, especially in Gondar, already enacts something of a microcosm of imperial Ethiopia. The Ark itself indexes the enmeshment of Christian identity and Ethiopian nationalism.

Adding to this sense of enmeshment, the Arks' resting place in Fasilides Bath during Ṭimqet transforms the old residence of the king into a functioning church for three days. This has an effect of turning back the clock, because before the revolution in 1974, this holiday residence of Fasilides functioned as a church year-round. When the Derg came to power, they secularized the building, moving its Ark to Keha Yesus Church. So, on Ṭimqet in Gondar, the castle ruin is returned the status it held prior to the fall of the Christian monarchy. Also of significance, some Orthodox Christians told me the spontaneous mock battles surrounding the Ṭimqet procession symbolize the period when church and state were one, when it was a soldier's duty to fight for the church. Indeed, that is what some Orthodox young men gathered on that field in early 2009 saw themselves as doing. In this frame, violence, even violence specifically targeting Muslims, has the potential to take on a positive valence.

Antagonism Resurfaces: A Mosque in the Land of Gabriel

For Muslim and Christian Gondarés working to realize mechachal, the year of 2009 was off to a rough start, as the Ṭimqet travails were not the last time that year a relation of antagonism would come to the surface. Later that year, Muslims completed construction on a mosque with a minaret located 200 meters from St. Gabriel Church. According to an official from Gondar's Land Administration and Municipal office, this mosque was illegally constructed, without government permits. Normally, he said, the government demolishes buildings constructed without permission, but they have a policy of not demolishing religious buildings because it would cause too much social unrest.

Once a mosque is built, he said, there is nothing they can do.[124] Government policies against demolishing religious buildings did not stop some Orthodox young men from picking up stones and attempting to demolish it themselves, though I was told the police intervened, arrested the young men, and put a stop to the vandalism.

Once it was established that police had placed the offending mosque under their protection, potential vandals left the building alone. However, an Orthodox Christian man who lived directly adjacent to the mosque chose to retaliate in his own way, not by attempting to destroy the mosque, but by sponsoring a rival construction project. Deacon Solomon explained it in the following way:

> A Muslim individual said he wanted to build a house so [the government] would give him permission, but he built a mosque, a worship space […] An Orthodox individual then built a large house next to the Muslim house. He said he did it so the church would not be made deaf when the Muslims prostrated, so they would not disturb the church. He built a large building to hide the mosque, so it could not be seen.

Next to the Kebele 14 Masjid, as it is called, a Christian man built a three story building that he planned to turn into a hotel. If he had not constructed this building, the Kebele 14 Masjid would be starkly visible from a main road in Piassa—a highly trafficked road that leads from Piassa to Autoparko, and then on to Gondar's main hospital and Gondar University. While it seems the mosque was positioned for maximum visibility from the city center, the new hotel completely blocked the mosque from view. And, just in case the new hotel owner's intention was not clear, he placed three crosses on the top of the building. Many Gondaré Christians were shocked at such bravado. The Ṭimqet conflict notwithstanding, it was highly unusual an older man would not only express his clear, open opposition to a mosque, but would turn his own residence into a permanent display of that opposition. Teddy told me that everyone was shocked that he would basically say publically, “he hates Muslims,” “Christians may say that to their Christians friends, and Muslims may say that to their Muslim friends, but they don’t usually say it when their friends and neighbors of another religion can hear it.” I asked him why he thought the building meant the man “hates Muslims,” he responded “He had no reason to build it so high. He has no use for those rooms. No one is going to rent there or stay in the hotel. It is an ugly building…crosses do not go on houses. They are for churches.” He told me the man’s grandchildren wish he would at least take crosses down, as they fear Muslim retaliation.

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[124] To specifically address the problem, they created a new office in 2010 called the "Building Construction Office," which is responsible for reviewing building plans to insure they match the description in the land application. Prior to 2010, the Land Administration took the applicant's word for it without reviewing the building plans, as a result, buildings that were supposed to be schools and private residences turned out to be Protestant churches and mosques with minarets.

While the man himself denies “hating” Muslims, and he claims he put the crosses on his building because “That [Islam] is not my religion,” many Orthodox Christians were shocked by way the hotel seems to clearly inscribe normally covert Muslim-Christian antagonism on the landscape. On the other hand, many Orthodox Christians approve of how the building occludes the mosque from view. In gauging whether the construction project, or even vandalism, is worthy of positive evaluation, Orthodox Christians are caught between the value of mechachal—which would call for adhering to the code of silence and withholding expressions of discontent (see Chapter 5)—and the value of deference to Gabriel, which may call for some kind of disciplining (see Chapter 2 and 4). Teddy went into mechachal mode as he criticized the hotel owner’s act of open confrontation with Muslims. Often times when I ask Christians and Muslims about religious conflict they tell me that, while there is a small group of people who fan tensions and engage in conflicts, most Muslims and Christians in Gondar are peaceful. In Teddy's framing above, the man who build the hotel to cover the mosque was one of the deviant exceptions, a trouble-making "difficult person," "eschegarī sew." Yet other times he talked about this act of symbolic warfare with a display of affect that was more celebratory. When the issue came up in a conversation with my neighbors Hirut and Ayzeb, Hirut condemned the construction of the Kebele 14 Masjid, with her brow furrowed in righteous anger, she said "All of that land belongs to Gabriel!" Then she recounted how the man built the hotel with the crosses on top in response to the mosque, while smiling and laughing with an expression of positive affect and a sense of triumph. I was at her house one day when she was cooking with her family, talking to her daughters and tenants (who rented rooms in her compound), when we heard a prayer call. The prayer call triggered once again a joyful mention of the man who had built the house to block the mosque.

In 2014, I was sitting down to coffee with Hirut and some other residents of Autoparko when the subject turned to religion. They complained about the preaching of Pentecostals, talked about khat incident of 2009, and praised the government policy of not allowing a mosque to be built in Axum. Then they turned their attention to local neighborhood history. Hirut, one of the women, explained to the rest, "In this neighborhood there is a place they say 'Allah Akbar.' I was in the place nearby, next to Abebech there is an *Islam Bét* [Islam House]" (a rented house that discreetly performs the functions of a mosque). Upon learning this information, her teenage daughter's eyes widened, and her mouth opened in an expression of shock. Hirut went on to explain that Muslims bought all the land around this house and planned to build a large mosque "like the one in Arada." However, she said, "now they are restricting it." She went on to tell how their plans were thwarted. When they were about to break ground, Christian youth gathered at the construction site and "hit five trucks with stones when they were about to pour concrete." The Christian leader of the stone-throwing youth said "While any Christian youth live here, a mosque will not be built in this neighborhood! When I die, maybe they build a mosque, but now they will not build." At another point in the conversation she quoted him saying, "You will not build a mosque in Autoparko. This [mosque] is not the cross of Gabriel."[125] Hirut then related the mosque Muslims attempted to build in Autoparko to the Kebele 14 Masjid:

> Did not this rich man construct a building and place a cross that all can see? He put up the cross so that people could see this is a Christian's house, and now they do not say, "Allahu Akbar." This is how it seems, does it not? I have heard them say that it was like this. They [Muslims] made a promise previously [to build a mosque in every neighborhood], and now only Kebele 17 [Autoparko] remains. Many people love Autoparko, but they [Muslims] do not hesitate.[126]

When a minaret is built in a neighborhood that had once been fully territorialized by an Orthodox ritual center, in the eyes of some, Orthodox value-work is undone, pushed back against, hindered. According to the above statement, it causes injury to a Christian neighborhood that "many people love." Despite the love Christians have for Autoparko, that is, despite the great attachment Christians have to preserving Autoparko's Christian identity, Muslims "do not hesitate." In this typification, the Muslims move forward without regard for Christian sentiment, coming off as callous and somewhat malicious. Also, in Hirut's account, the young men who threw stones *prevented* the mosque from being constructed in Autoparko. Moreover, the man who built the house next to the Kebele 14 Masjid put a stop to the Muslim prayer calls and ritual activities unfolding brazenly close to that volatile Gabriel Ark. At the very least. he hid the mosque from being seen from the town center. These aggressive actions were presented in a positive light insofar as they were understood as halting the progression of a rival system of mediation in its attempt to subvert Orthodox value work—that is, the work of territorializing and encompassing Christian neighborhoods. Ritual sorts out identities, brings the moral order and the macrocosm down to the here-now and realizes values, but it also provides the opportunity to confront those values head-on, to stand in their path, to push back against them in a way so explicit that it is difficult to deny. In situations like those recounted in this chapter, some actors come to see open antagonism as acceptable as long as it counteracts broadly recognizable subversive forces. In these instances, the drive to counteract the subversion of high religious values takes precedent over mechachal.

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[125] The Gabriel church is about half a kilometer from Autoparko, and it functions as its parish, and thus Orthodox Christians consider it "Gabriel's neighborhood." Though Al-Nur Masjid is much further away from Gabriel Church than the Kebele 14 Masjid, this conflict shows proximity is not the only issue. Mosques undermine neighborhood identity as a Christian neighborhood, perhaps more so if that neighborhood's proximity to a mosque is closer than that to their parish.

[126] I had received permission from those present to record this conversation.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed four events in 2009 that brought Muslim and Orthodox macrocosms into collision, creating a scene that was typified as a display of 'Muslim minaq.' These particular instances of Muslim minaq also were linked up with larger narratives of value-subversion, such as a plot to build a mosque in every Christian neighborhood. The affordance of ritual in cutting through the messiness of life, in creating a "controlled environment" in which practitioners realize values with clarity (Robbins 2015; Smith 1982), also, in these cases, enabled comparable clarity in the display of a value subversions. That is, just as dancing and singing hymns on Ṭimqet creates an unmistakable realization of the value of “respecting the Ark,” planting a tin mosque at the Ark’s resting place enacts an equally recognizable subversion of that value. When a value subversion is put on display with sufficient clarity, antagonistic persons can go from being typified as violating a shared value, mechachal, to being typified as protecting a value from violation and thus aiding in its realization. In the cases recounted above, the antagonism was seen as protecting the honor of Mary, Gabriel, Michael and the Ark of God. For Muslims, the antagonism on their side protected the “house of Allah” and the not unrelated value of achieving Muslim parity. The construction, and subsequent destruction, of the tin mosque not only expressed value incommensurability, but, in eyes of many Muslims and Orthodox Christians, it *performed* incommensurability. This, in effect, changed social relations. It typified identities antagonistically in a way that had reverberating effects on Muslim-Christian relations, effects that could not easily be reversed once the overt relation of antagonism subsided. According to some Gondarés, the event had the longer lasting effect of reducing the scope of mechachal and adding intensity to a subtle antagonistic backdrop that sometimes colors everyday acts of coexistence. I turn my attention to this antagonistic backdrop in the next chapter.

Chapter 7

Ambiguous Antagonism, Nebulous Extremism, and Signs of Mechachal in Decline

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Social surfaces of mechachal come with an invisible cavity of hidden intentionality that interlocutors must fill using inference and speculation. People give off subtle clues as to what lies beneath the surface with facial expressions, tones, and perhaps most importantly, by withholding acts of recognition—e.g. pretending that you do not see someone when you pass, *not* inviting someone over, *not* acknowledging grief, *not* extending wedding invitations or *not* attending weddings to which one is invited. Haileyesus interviewed Orthodox Christians and Muslims in Gondar in 2010 about how relations have changed after the incident and this is how he described their response:

> All informants from both religious groups have explained that the historically […] peaceful coexistence is waning. Muslims and Christians were living in cooperation with each other by sharing their happiness and sorrows. The present interaction between the two religions, however, is replete with the use of revenge, denial of greetings, termination of participation in each other's religious festival, funeral and wedding ceremonies. These social facts could be taken as manifestation of inter-religious intolerance in the town. Before the conflict, Gondar was known for hosting different cultures and religions. However, the 2009 incident brought about a dramatic change regarding the relations between Orthodox Christian and Muslim communities (2011: 59).

These subtle signs of disregard, perhaps of quiet contempt, are too ambiguous to create an open conflict, but they can cause the other to imaginatively fill that inner cavity with hidden antagonism, giving an antagonistic backdrop to a social surface of ostensible coexistence. Haileyesus expressed skepticism that things changed so dramatically, saying these descriptions may be "exaggerated," but one of the legacies of the 2009 conflict was it provided an open display of mutual contempt with so much symbolic density and value-relevance that it remains etched in people's memories, providing a reference point for filing that subcutaneous layer of Muslim and/or Orthodox intentionality with antagonistic feeling. For example, in a conversation I described in Chapter 5, Sami blamed Muslims for the rise in interreligious tension in Gondar, while his friend blamed the government in an oblique reference to the 2009 incident. In that conversation, Sami's friend added that Christians and Muslims have an essentially positive relationship, "everything is good," he said, if it wasn't for that recent conflict, everything would still be fine as always. I then asked them what overall effect they thought that conflict had on their relationship with Muslims. Sami told me that since the conflicts of 2009, interactions between Muslims and Christians are more "*keanget belay*," or, "above the neck." He further explained that a relationship is "above the neck" when someone greets you, and acts like your friend, but these expressions are not matched by true feelings of love and respect in the "heart."

Overall, the difference between "above the neck" expression and what one might call authentically felt expression is not an absolute binary, but, as the following example will show, one can imagine a continuum of *more or less* above the neck expressions. Diborah recounted to me how a Pentecostal co-worker asserted to her that the Ark was an idol, and in response Diborah threatened to pick up the stapler on her desk and staple her on the forehead. We had a chance meeting with this former Pentecostal co-worker while walking together in Piassa. Upon seeing her, Diborah smiled big, gave her an enthusiastic hug and even paid for her fare once we all boarded the mini-bus taxi. Huddled in a secrecy bubble in the back seat she told me this interaction was "a *little* above the neck." She still had some positive feelings and some negative feelings toward her former co-worker, but they did not match the intense, unambiguous positive affect of her expression. We could then see the expression “above the neck” as pointing to an internal/external disjuncture of various degrees of separation, intensity, and ambivalent admixtures of feeling. It is useful to conceive of the antagonistic backdrop of Muslim-Christian relations in a similar way.

Thus far in this dissertation, I have examined the relationship between antagonistic secrets, harmonic surfaces, and antagonistic revelations. In this chapter, I will look at the ambiguous space between the harmonic and antagonistic—those vague antagonistic feelings which are inferred, but not directly seen or heard, those moments when antagonistic forces peak through the surface but remain ambiguous enough to prevent a full on relation of antagonism from forming. In other words, I look at that space between total innocence and clear culpability, between complete trust and unqualified antipathy. I will show that it is in the antagonistic backdrop the effects of discourses about Islamic terrorism and extremism are most keenly felt.

“Litigation” and the Importance of Ambiguity

Movements from surface-level harmonious interactions, ambiguous antipathy, and open conflict in Muslim-Christian relations are part of a wider social pattern of guarding, ostensibly ignoring, and uncovering incriminating information. In order to place the role of ambiguous antagonism in the context of broader social patterns, this section will provide more background than I have given previously on what is generally at stake in practices of secrecy and ambiguity. Overall, the need to guard information so tightly, to be painstakingly careful with one's words, belies an ongoing danger words and information may possess. At any given moment, the ambiguity of everyday life can give way to an accusation of explicit culpability. Litigation, both as an analogy and social practice, provides a way for us to understand the fears that underpin the practice of maintaining ambiguity, and the circumstances under which carefully-sustained ambiguity gives way to univocity, or “revelation.” Levine (1965) notes that Amhara, including Gondaré, have a love for litigation. This is true of Ethiopian society going back at least to the 19th century, as Messay writes “litigation was so frequent and general that it was hardly possible to find a person, however highly placed, who was not involved in legal wrangles” (1999: 153).[127] I did not study formal litigation at Gondar’s courthouse, so I cannot say much about it. I did hear people talk about taking their tenants to the “*ferda bét*,” literally, “judgment house,” for failing to pay rent. I also heard of a junior priest suing a senior priest for failing to pay his salary. One internet cafe owner I knew brought a civil suit against the government-owned EthioTelecomm for failing to provide reliable internet connection. In what follows, I am going to talk about how analogues of formal investigation and litigation in everyday life helps us understand what it at stake in practices of ambiguity.

When I met Deacon Tariku he was eager to teach me about all the symbols of Orthodox church architecture and liturgy. As a young man in his early 20s, he studied for the clergy at the church while also studying engineering at Gondar University. He was an example of an emerging class of urban deacons who study for a secular career at the university while also training for the clergy. Deacon Tariku also had a girlfriend he planned on marrying once he could gain some solid financial footing. He once told me that he daydreamed about his girlfriend constantly. Having a girlfriend can be a challenge for deacons, because the church requires clergy and their brides to remain virgins before marriage. A person who loses their virginity prior to marriage also loses the option of joining the clergy. One day, Deacon Tariku's plans for marriage were disrupted when he heard a rumor that his girlfriend was not a virgin as she had claimed. He did not confront her at first, but conducted a personal investigation, tracking down the man who was rumored to have slept with her in order to question him directly. After he heard a direct account of the sexual relationship from her former lover, he confronted his girlfriend and broke off their relationship.

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[127] Historically, the litigations usually concerned land rights. Because of the Amhara system of cognatic inheritance, normally there were multiple legitimate claims on a single stretch of land (see Hoben 1973).

Some play the long game, and carefully document incriminating information, before confronting their adversary. When I first visited Gondar in 2010, I spent a lot of time with members of one of the tour guide associations. There was a particular association member who some of the other members did not like, and was known to regularly break the rules of the association. Though some of the tour guides wanted to kick him out, they bided their time, and agreed to act as if everything was normal, carefully keeping track of his behavior. They slowly gathered evidence, so they could eventually make a solid case against him. As they planned it, the confrontation would come out of nowhere and present a comprehensive, undeniable case. Finally, sometimes Gondaré concoct a ruse to learn vital information. For example, Frehiwot once received an invitation to meet up with some of her boyfriend's male friends. Over coffee, the young men began telling her what a bad guy her boyfriend was. She defended him, saying, "He is right one for me." Later, she found out her boyfriend had sent his friends as a test, so he could learn her true feelings with certainty. In a related vein, I was told if I wanted to find out, for example, if a Christian hates Muslims, I should say something bad about Muslims, and watch the Christian's facial expressions. How the Christian reacts will give me clues into the normally opaque intentionality beneath the surface.

I should not overstate the litigation metaphor. It is not that Gondarés are constantly litigating one another. Normally, both parties would like to avoid it as much as possible. The point here is that litigation becomes more likely when ambiguity gives way to clarity, to explicitness. Hence usually the potential "litigant" and "litigator" both sustain the ambiguity, except in cases where the stakes are high enough to risk jeopardizing a social tie. I'll use an example from one of my relationships in the field. Given that there is a common practice in Gondar of tacit surveillance and deliberate spying, it was natural that even those who I came to know quite well could not quell the suspicion that I was a spy of some sort, especially given my interest in Muslims and my U.S. nationality. An incident related to this suspicion provides an additional example of how a hidden, though ambiguous, distrust can be ignored in Gondaré social life in order to insure an ongoing positive relationship on the surface and avoid having that distrust litigated. A relatively close Orthodox Christian friend, Iyasu, shocked some friends we share in common when he asserted strongly that "John is a spy. I'm sure he's a spy." He assumed that this group of friends would not pass his suspicion on to me. However, one of them, who we will call Negasi, disclosed it to me one day, expressing his disbelief that Iyasu would make such an accusation. Nevertheless, as Negasi and I spoke, it was hard to be certain of what Iyasu's actual intentions were in claiming I was a spy. He had hinted to me once a few weeks back that one day he tired of hearing this group of friends praising me and decided to play devil's advocate just to stir things up. When I told Negasi about this, he suggested that maybe Iyasu cares about me very much and he was just testing their loyalty. That is, he wanted to know if they would defend me in such a situation. I wanted to ask Iyasu about it directly, but that would be very bad for Negasi, and likely damage his relationship with Iyasu beyond repair. So he suggested I casually express to Iyasu that I have a concern that some of these friends think I am a spy. Then I can judge whether he was performing a ruse or not by watching his reaction to this concern. If Iyasu assured me strongly that they do not think I'm a spy, then it may indicate he was just putting them to the test. Negasi said if he claimed he did not know if they think I am a spy, then we can assume he was expressing his true belief when he made the initial assertion. Attempting to be a good participant observer, I did as Negasi suggested, and told Iyasu that I was concerned that my friends think I am spy. In response, he assured me that this group of friends do not believe I was a spy, and then added that many people think I am spy because of my interest in religion. To Negasi this answer did not provide a totally clear window into Iyasu's intentions. To him it suggested, perhaps, that Iyasu was uncertain about my status. Maybe he expressed these ideas to this other group of friends in order to assess their reaction. Maybe this was part of an effort to get a better handle on what my intentions were in Gondar. Either way, my relationship with Iyasu continued on as normal.

What is notable here is that even straightforward statements like "I am sure he is a spy!" could not be taken at face value. It was common for Gondarés to entertain the possibility that even straightforward assertions of belief are part of a strategy that one can only access indirectly. In all likelihood, Iyasu sat with a contradictory sense of what my intentions were while continuing our friendship. After Negasi's revelation, I too had reason to suspect that the attitude he presented to me was a small part of a larger, incongruous picture. However, we continued on as usual in accordance with the surface presentation. With Negasi as my witness, I could have confronted Iyasu, and engaged in a sort of ad-hoc litigation. The costs of this would be too high for both of us, so better to ignore cracks in the external veneer of friendship and continue on as usual. In other cases, like that of Deacon Tariku, he had to confront his girlfriend because his clerical status hung in the balance. However, he could not depend only on rumor. He had to have solid evidence against her.

During confrontations, where one person is, in a sense, litigating another, realities that remained ambiguously in the background suddenly confront the accused. The question of whether one wants to "litigate," however, depends on how solid one's case is and how much one has to gain or lose from a confrontation. Litigation, formal and informal, is risky. It makes enemies. It severs bonds. Bonds and alliances are often necessary for litigation to work in the first place, otherwise one cannot gain the necessary information and marshal the "witnesses" needed to make one's case. Both the ability to access information, and assurance that one's information will be guarded, requires strong relationships of mutual trust.

While ambiguous indications of wrongdoing tend to be ignored, the swiftest punishments are reserved for those caught in the act. I once observed a woman from the countryside, who looked like she was in her 50s or 60s, being marched through Arada, with a substantial crowd of laughing, jeering young men and stoic police escorts surrounding her as she walked with downcast eyes, holding a key in her mouth and a church donation box on her head. She had been caught trying to swipe money from the donation box at the St. Gabriel Church. My informants explained to me that those caught in the act of stealing are immediately forced to undergo such a public walk of shame. A crowd mocks them as they march through town carrying the item they stole. Most of my informants thought this kind of practice perfectly fitting if the offender were a young man, but many were horrified that an older woman would be forced to march through the street like that. Such a practice, Teddy told me, shows “no compassion,” as that woman was probably stealing to feed her family. The point here is that the community could exact such a humiliating punishment without trial—even a punishment grossly violating norms of respect for the elderly—because she was *caught in the act,* thus her guilt was undeniable.

All this is to say, one thing at stake in maintaining practices of ambiguity, maintaining that space in between trust and antagonism, is to avoid being caught in the act of some offense. Clarity can often mean having to deal with the social, and possibly legal, consequences of having interpretive possibilities reduced. Likewise, interlocutors looking on do not typically attempt to reduce the ambiguity of another’s presentation because that would involve a kind of litigation, an open conflict. If a conflict is pursued without clear evidence against the other, it could very well backfire. Ambiguity aids smooth relations, while explicitness can create conflict where there need not be any. Teddy once gave me an example to illustrate this point. He pointed to a rock that lay in front of someone's house, and said, "If I just take this rock, the owner will not care, but if I ask him, 'Can I take this rock?' He will say ‘no.’ That's how Habesha [Ethiopians] are.” My guess is that a great many Habesha would actually give permission to take the rock, but the point of the example is that when you spell out a state of affairs explicitly, you create an opportunity for an objection, for an unnecessary bump in the road. If you act with subtlety, you let others ignore something potentially objectionable while maintaining their dignity. You free others from the obligation to give a response. As Boylston aptly stated concerning ambiguity in Amhara social life, “It can be respectful to be vague, since you do not attempt to force an interpretation on the person you are talking to, or extract all their secrets. Vagueness and indeterminacy can be an ethical prerogative” (2012: 154).

Some Christians and Muslims in Gondar live with a subtle sense of interreligious antagonism. They imagine the other has hidden antagonistic intentions. In addition, many Muslims imagine Christians impute antagonistic intentionality to them, namely, an intentionality that is violent, murderous, extremist and anti-Ethiopian; and these Muslims imagine that Christians are just watching and waiting to “litigate” once they find some clear evidence they can use against them. It is important to note that national and geopolitical forces play a part in fueling this vague feeling of general antagonism between Muslims and Christians. I have not yet spoken at length about how the global War on Terror, state policies and discourses—which identify Muslim extremism as one of the major national security threats facing Ethiopia—have inserted themselves into the relationship between Muslims and Christians in Gondar. In the rest of this chapter, I will argue that the effects of these discourses and policies intertwine with local tensions, and have a presence in the form of an underlying *ambiguous antagonism.*

Muslims as a Surveilled Minority

When I began my fieldwork in September of 2013, Ethiopian Muslims had just experienced a first in their history, a turning point in a series of protests some observers compare to the Arab Spring (Ficquet 2015). The backlash to these events left Ethiopian

Muslims in a place of justified unease about their relationship with the government. This had likely exacerbated their reticence about researchers like myself. The events leading to the protests started in May of 2011 with a series of workshops supported by EPRDF's ministry of foreign affairs, which, the government hoped, would reinforce what they see as Ethiopia's "home grown" form of moderate Islam (*neberu Islimina*) and fight the spread of Muslim extremism. A Lebanese group known as "al-Habash" ran these workshops. Al-Habash is known for taking a militant, confrontational anti-Salafi stance, and has been implicated in extremely contentious and sometimes violent conflicts in Lebanon. In the workshops, representatives of al-Habash lumped all Salafis with Muslim insurrectionists and terrorist groups, like al-Qaeda, Al-Shabbab and Boko Haram. They presented Salafi ideology as the singular force of all these movements. The following excerpt comes from a recording of an al-Habash workshop at the Ghion hotel in Addis Ababa on July 27th 2011:

> They [the Salafis] claim that anyone that celebrates the birth of the prophet is doing an act similar to an idol worshiper…Events that have taken place in the past twenty years in Iraq, Afghanistan, Algeria, Pakistan, Chechnya, Russia, Kenya, the USA, Ethiopia, and even inside Saudi Arabia are *merely manifestations of that extreme ideology*. Of course, Somalia, where people are killed on the spot…limbs and tongues are cut off, scholars are persecuted, graves dug out, and dead bodies are burned, stands as a very close example (see Østebø 2013b: 1046-1047, italics added).

As I showed in Chapter 3, Sufi Muslims take serious issue with Salafis, but the boundary separating Salafis from Sufis in social life is often thin. Many Sufi Muslims have family members with Salafi sympathies, and I found that young people moved between both communities with ease. According to some scholars, the arrival of al-Habash has given Sufis and Salafis a common opponent, as both see government interference in their religious affairs as a violation of religious freedom guaranteed by the constitution (Ficquet 2015; Østebø 2013b).

The spark set off by al-Habash's arrival in May grew into a movement in December of 2011, when the Ethiopian Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs, which many see as a puppet of the EPRDF, fired the head of a major Islamic school in Addis Ababa, the Awaliyya School, because he refused to attend an al-Habash workshop. [128] Shortly thereafter, they fired all the school's Arabic teachers and replaced them with approved instructors. Incensed by these developments, in January 2012, 2,500 student protestors gathered in the school compound to protest government interference. From that first gathering, the protests grew and persisted in the coming months. Ficquet describes the events as follows:

> This [the protest at Awaliyya] was the first of a series of demonstrations that went on for more than a year, giving rise to a kind of social movement unprecedented in the political history of Ethiopia. Almost every Friday after the congregational juma'a prayer the showdown continued, with the Aweliyya School and Anwar Mosque at the epicentre. The wave of protests spread throughout the great mosques in a number of towns in Muslim regions. In many cases the crowd overflowed onto the streets, though in a peaceful manner. The protests focused on issues of religious freedom, the organizers being careful not to deviate into other political matters (2015: 114-115).

As the protests became more intense with the approach of Ramadan, numerous protesters, protest leaders, and journalists were arrested. Then in January of 2013, the EPRDF aired a film on government controlled media, called Jihadawi Harekat, which linked the protests to Islamic insurrections in other countries (i.e. Al-Shabab and Boko Haram). Needless to say, protesters were furious that, while protesters were working to claim religious freedom guaranteed in the constitution, that the government would respond by accusing them of being essentially terrorists and broadcasting that accusation into every Ethiopian home. By asserting there was a link between these ostensibly secular protests and terrorism implied that merely participating in demonstrations against government interference in Islamic affairs could be considered sufficient grounds for arrest and terrorism charges. This is because anti-terror legislation, enacted into law in late 2009, justified the imprisonment of any who provide "moral support" to terrorism (EPRDF 2009: 4830).[129]

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[128] Østebø writes that, while it is common for there to be cooperation between government authorities and Islamic councils, "the Ethiopian case reveals more explicit involvement by the authorities" (2013b: 1042; cf. Constantin 1993; Kresse 2004).

Most of the major Muslim protests occurred in Addis Ababa and Muslim majority towns, however, the Jihadawi Harekat film seemed to have a profound effect on Gondaré Muslims and, understandably, fanned hostility toward government media. One EPRDF opposition media report claimed that in late July of 2013 Muslim youth in Gondar attacked a journalist and broke his camera while he filmed preparations for the Eid al-fitr feast in Qidamé Masjid (ESAT 2013). The attackers were heard shouting, "We would not want to be filmed by an untruthful media that produces programs such as 'Jehidawi Harekat' by cutting and pasting films to sue Muslims" and "The government that represses us should not come to our religious centers 'Allaahuakbar [God is the greatest!].'" A police report on this incident claims that the head of the mosque grabbed the microphone, announcing to all Muslims present that the cameraman had come without permission and was “polluting” their mosque, after which which several young men dutifully took to beating the journalist (NGPD 2013).[130]

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[129] Some analysis of Ethiopia's anti-terror legislation claim the definition of terrorism is so broad that the regime could use it to stifle dissent more generally (Human Rights Watch 2009), as many claim it has done with the arrests of numerous journalists, activists, and bloggers since the legislation went into law (Oakland Institute 2015).

Overall, living under a government run by Christians in an overwhelmingly Christian majority city, Gondaré Muslims find themselves at the lower end of a power hierarchy, which puts them into a structurally defensive, vulnerable position. In the classic frame of Amhara politics of secrecy and control of information, one could say, Muslims are sometimes positioned as the proverbial peasant farmers, who must use ambiguous language and secrets as a protective shield against the mighty; whereas Christians are the proverbial nobility, who watch for cracks in that shield, who may “tolerate” those cracks, but remain on the lookout for clear evidence of that compromising something lurking beneath the surface.

Unfortunately, many Muslims had good reason to associate me, as an American, with EPRDF surveillance of the Muslim community, given that, among other things, the surveillance is justified in part by the U.S. led global War on Terror, and the EPRDF counts the U.S. among its allies. Even Muslims (and Christians) I had known for some time never quite shook the suspicion that I may be helping either the CIA or the EPRDF.[131] While having a discussion in my neighborhood mosque courtyard, one well educated Muslim man strongly asserted that a prominent foreign researcher on Ethiopian Islam—whose work, incidentally, I had read in preparation for my fieldwork—recommended to the EPRDF that they invite al-Habash to Ethiopia. This is to say, many Gondaré Muslims had a keen sense of the power implications of knowledge, and likely had it in mind when they communicated with me. Perhaps with this power implication in mind, many Muslim leaders and laypeople I interviewed vaguely expressed their allegiance with al-Habash, claiming the term simply meant “Ethiopian Islam” or “Islam,” and praised the EPRDF for allowing their religious freedom. My temporary Muslim research assistant Ahmed praised the EPRDF almost everyday I worked with him, and, sometimes, the praise came out of nowhere. One time we were leaving the Qīdamé Masjid and an imam called him over to speak with him for a minute, then he walked back to me, and said immediately, “I love this government. It allows us so much freedom. We can now do and say what we want.” As I discussed in the last chapter, I asked various Muslims’ to give their take on the 2009 conflict, including the khat incident, and many Muslims told me they had never heard of the incident, while others asserted that the khat fell by accident.

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[130] The police report makes no mention of the government criticism reported by ESAT.

[131] Even Haileyesus (2011), an Ethiopian researcher, wrote that his research in Gondar was challenging because “they consider everyone outside their community as a spy” (5).

A few Muslim young men confirmed that specific al-Habash representatives had come to Gondar in 2011 as part of a nation-wide campaign. They also criticized them for, among other things, allegedly teaching that Muslim women can wear pants, and advocating that Muslim teachers engage in a dull, lecturing teaching style, rather than teaching the Sufi way through lively chants, songs and story telling.   The ulama I interviewed did not make specific mention of the movement itself, rather they made sure to categorize al-Habash as simply “Islam”—which would have given them plausible deniability if either a Muslim overhearer wanted to accuse them of allegiance to this particular Lebanese group, or if a government overhearer wanted to accuse them of opposing their fight against extremism. In the politics of representation, Muslim leaders in Gondar find themselves in a catch-22 situation. On one side they have the EPRDF who expects them to side with al-Habash. On the other side, they have the ever proselytizing Salafis and the swaths of normative Muslims who resent al-Habash and EPRDF interference. An imam who too openly opposes al-Habash risks government sanction, but, an imam who too openly aligns himself with al-Habash risks bringing into question his legitimacy as a custodian of *Islam*—and not as merely an agent of the EPRDF. For example, one imam at a prominent mosque told Fatima that a Muslim once interviewed him and then proceeded to tell Muslims in his neighborhood that he was a follower of al-Habash. The imam apparently felt this rumor hurt his reputation; he only wanted to be known as a follower of Islam, not a follower of a specific group. Another Muslim informant told me that one of the regional Muslim leaders of the Gondar zone once agreed to participate in a recorded interview with a fellow Muslim. Following the interview, the interviewer—who, according to my informant, turned out to be Wahhabīah—then posted the recording online, but only after doctoring the recording to make it appear as though the imam said something he had not. While these accounts may not accurately describe the events in question, they give a window into the kind of scrutiny Muslims face from all sides, that their words can easily be turned against them—by fellow Muslims who may claim they are not legitimate followers of Islam, as well as by a government, and a Christian populace influenced by their government, who may claim they are not proper citizens, even that they are covert terrorists.

So, alongside the story of primordial Christian tolerance, the EPRDF also propounds its own narrative of Muslim threat, which one could call a government sponsored antagonistic discourse. It focuses on “extremists,” on “terrorists,” those influenced by Arab forms of Islam, which it distinguishes from “home grown” Islam.

Like its narrative of primordial tolerance, this government discourse seizes upon, and is partly influenced by, a thread of the popular Ethiopian imagination, i.e. fear of Muslim power and foreign Islam. The EPRDF does the work of solidifying and reinforcing this discourse in something of a feedback loop between state and populace:

> For the Christians, who have…been concerned over developments within the Muslim community, the explicit denoting of the Salafis as “extremist” and the harsh descriptions of their ideology would clearly add to their unease. The process is clearly reciprocal in which inherent pejorative attitudes feed back and inform the regime’s policy, and by the way in which the regime is intent to forward their perception of Islam to the Christian public (Østebø 2013b: 1051-1052).

Fears notwithstanding, unlike the acts of insulting the Ark, with words or khat, and building a mosque in a Christian neighborhood, the specter of extremism usually does not lead directly to open conflict, rather it contributes to a vague sense of antagonism and conspiracy lurking beneath the surface. I will discuss this ambiguous antagonism in the next section.

A Decline of Mechachal and Christian Scrutiny of Muslims

As I discussed in Chapter 2, some Orthodox Christians associate the growth of a Muslim majority with religious conflict, oppression, and social breakdown, evidenced in civil wars occurring in Syria and Iraq. Likewise, a rapid increase in the Muslim demographic of a neighborhood is sometimes associated with a decline in mechachal in Orthodox imaginaries. I mentioned in the introduction that in Autoparko Muslims had purchased much of the property and taken residence in houses that had previously belonged to Christians. Many of these new residents are known as “laji,” which is Arabic for “refugee.” Many had fled Tigray to Sudan during the upheavals and civil wars of the Derg period and returned to Gondar once the situation became stable. The lajis that moved into Autoparko had allegedly become wealthy in Sudan. Many also had mastered Arabic, which accorded them high status in the Muslim community. They were most proficient in Tigrinya, the language associated with the Tigray province, north of Amhara, which made it difficult for them to connect to their Amhara neighbors. I sat with an Orthodox friend on a balcony overlooking Autoparko. Our conversation turned to the subject of religion. He started pointing to different houses in the neighborhood, saying "that used to be a Christian house, and now it's a Muslim house." He continued to point out up to eight former Christian residents that now have Muslim occupants. He said he could keep going if he wanted to. He then added, "Sometimes I feel like I'm living in Sudan." He said many of the new residents of the neighborhood grew up in Sudan, and they "come here and want to shut their doors." He added that Muslims used to invite Christians over on Muslim holidays, and offer them boiled beans, grain and wheat, but none of the laji in Autoparko extend such invitations. They brought with them the habits of non-Ethiopian Muslims, and this, along with their majority standing in the neighborhood, had led to a decline in mechachal.

While in the field between 2013 and 2015, I often heard Christians talk of a mechachal in decline—not unlike the talk Haileyesus (2011) encountered in Gondar a year after the 2009 conflict. Orthodox Christians like Teddy, Diborah, Hirut and Sami would tell me that Muslims invite fewer Christians to weddings than before; they visit and congratulate Christians on their holidays with less frequency; they do not eat with Christians as much, and are less likely to count many Christians among their friends. Moreover, some of these Christians told me that Muslims are more likely to have a wedding during fasting season, which means they serve Christians vegetable dishes instead of meat. Before, they told me, it was more common for Muslims to wait until the lenten fast season had passed so Christian guests could participate fully in the festivities. In Gondar, all Christian weddings cease during the 56 day lenten fast and some Christians expect Muslims to postpone their wedding plans as well. Diborah told me that a Christian who is invited to a Muslim wedding during fasting season would be "disgusted" at the indignity of eating vegetable dishes at a wedding. To put this in perspective, when aspiring grooms complained to me about the high cost of wedding feasts, I sometimes jokingly suggested they feed their guests shiro, a very common vegetable dish. This suggestion tended to provoke heavy laugher when the young men thought of how insulted the guests would feel if they were not served meat at the wedding. Some of my Christian informants feel similarly insulted and disregarded when Muslims do not take into account the Christian fast when planning wedding dates, though I have attended a Muslim wedding during fasting season and the Christian guests I observed seemed quite content on the surface while consuming their vegetarian feast.

Some Orthodox Christians transvalued what they saw as a decline in mechachal in Gondar as a manifestation of global Islamic extremism, which portended a future confrontation. Many Orthodox Christians knew the rumor of a Muslim caught importing swords from Sudan, and, in connection, noted the popularity of Tae Kwan Do and Karate classes among Muslims. After attending the Salafi mosque with Sadaam, he informed me proudly that all those who attend that mosque are "black belts," because, he said, according to Islam, you should "take care of your body," however, a great many Orthodox Christians see the massive interest in martial arts among Muslims as preparations for a future conflict. Haileyesus' informants voiced the same worry, with one person claiming that the training centers were intended only for Muslims, and that they ask for “high payment” for non-Muslims (2011: 60). Teddy gave credence to the rumor that Muslims were preparing for something, but dismissed the threat, stating that no matter how well Muslims can fight, Christians can still use stones, and added, “They must not have very many stones in Japan.” Many of my Orthodox Christian informants (and some of those interviewed by Haileyesus) talked about a decline of positive Muslim-Christian relations andan increased influence of Muslim extremism as if the two were linked. For example, one Orthodox woman Diborah interviewed said that she used to be very close to her Muslim neighbors, they were like her family, but now these same neighbors have become Wahhabīah and now no longer visit her.

Orthodox informants used their falling out with individual Muslims as exemplars of an extremism-induced decline in mechachal. In some of these accounts, a transformation occurs in the orientation of some Muslims between childhood and young adulthood. A young Muslim spends their childhood as a proper, tolerant, Ethiopian Muslim, submitting to the tutelage of their good, Ethiopian Muslim parents. Then they grow up and at some point encounter different tutelage, under religious teachers espousing Arab forms of Islam. They come out of this tutelage bearing the clothing and manners of a *Wahhabīah*, a pejorative term used for all Muslims who exhibit the features associated with “Arabs” and “extremism”—whether or not they are actually followers of Ibn-al-Wahhab. The Wahhabīah’s religious transformation also transforms their relationships with their Christian friends. The story Adanech tells of a falling out with one of her Muslim friends provides the basic schematic of these narratives:

> I had a friend who was a Muslim. Our friendship was very close. We studied together in the university. Our relationship was happy and peaceful. We never talked about religious issues. We did not discuss [religion]. We did not argue. When I went to the church and prayed, he stood outside, waiting for me until I returned. Also, I waited for him when he went to prostrate in the mosque. We respected each other. After that, we graduated from our education and were separated for two years. He lived in Addis Ababa and [one time] I went to Addis Ababa for work. By chance I ran into him and many things had changed. When we met before we would always exchange greetings and I hugged him. When I went to greet him at that time, he evaded and defended himself from me. I was very surprised…When I said, "What is this?", he said, "I am living a correct Muslim lifestyle." [I said] "What?! I am your sister, your friend." When I said this, he said, "In Islam it is forbidden." I grieved. I became angry. I said to him "You are an extremist. Your pants are shortened. Your beard is long.

At the beginning, the narrative recounts an ideal Christian-Muslim friendship, including the avoidance of religious discussion and quiet respect for the other's religious practices. Previous to his transformation both Adanech and her Muslim friend waited, notably without comment, for the other to perform their religious duties so they could continue to spend time together. After the Muslim undergoes his transformation, he turns that older relationship of mutual respect upside down by forcibly preventing Adanech from engaging in the most basic expression of mutual recognition: a greeting. In a society where it is considered ideal to feign good feelings so as not to injure and make an enemy—or at least express low esteem through subtle, ambiguous expressions, and passive snubbing—physical evasion of a greeting is an insult, a shock, the impact of which can undo the bonds that greetings forge.

In response to the refusal, Adanech reminds her Muslim friend of their former relationship "I am your sister"; he counters this claim to kin-like affinity with a religious injunction: "It is forbidden." Whereas before they stepped around religious boundaries to maintain a friendship, now the religious boundaries cut into the most basic of pro-social expressions. Once the greeting was refused, both abandoned their code of silence and engaged in a polemical religious argument. Adanech relinquished all tact and ambiguity when she made explicit reference to aspects of his religious attire she found offensive: long beards and short pants mark one as a Wahhabīah. She called him an extremist (*akrarī*), which is just short of calling him a terrorist (*ashabarī*). In the exchange that followed the above quotation, her Muslim friend started trying to convert her to Islam by telling her that Jesus was just a prophet. Ever more outraged, Adanech shot back with verbatim quotes of Quranic passages that, she claims, encourage violence, adding “You [Muslims] do not know mechachal!” She also confronted him with the claim that Allah is a moon god. Finally, she did a sort of cross-examination of him, leading him with a series of questions, nearly forcing him to admit the revelations of Muhammad were from the devil. Her once Muslim friend, stripped of all answerability, left in silent fury. He did not respond when she later called his cell phone to apologize. “After that,” Adanech said with some regret, “our friendship ended.” The Muslim extremist in the Christian imagination is a Muslim whose goals of purity and religious triumph is unbalanced by a concern for social harmony, who will choose strict religious adherence over positive interreligious relations. In a few Orthodox Christian narratives, the religiously-justified refusal to give a proper greeting to a good friend of the opposite sex exemplifies this singular focus on religious adherence over social concerns, demonstrating how “extremism” disrupts the routines that balance the concerns of religious hierarchy and social harmony.

Orthodox Christians, and many normative Muslims, conceive of Wahhabīah Islam as a product of Saudi money and influence and mark it as distinctly non-Ethiopian, which positions it as subversive to “indigenous” Ethiopian practices of mechachal. As I stated earlier, signs of decreased integration, such as lower numbers of Christians in Muslim social networks, fewer wedding invitations, and fewer visits during holidays, get marked as Wahhabīah, or least indexes of their influence. Likewise, many Gondaré mark tolerance practices as “traditional” (*bahelawī).* In some Christian and Muslim imaginaries, Wahhabīah oppose the tolerant orientations of *yedro saw,* “the people of olden days.” The way Gondaré Christians tell it, y*edro saw* nary knew religious difference. They celebrated holidays together. Muslims and Christians lived integrated lives with few marks of distinction. They even cooked their meat in the same pot, tying different colored ropes to their respective hunks of flesh to distinguish the Muslim meat from the Christian meat (Ebrahim 2013). Muslims were also known to side-step the alcohol prohibition in order to drink *ṭella* (home brewed beer) with Christians. One time I observed an elderly Muslim and Christian woman drinking ṭella together in a semi-public house restaurant. Both Christians and Muslims confirmed that this is common practice among the elderly. Yet, according to Christian narratives, *Wahhabīah,* once undergoing their transformation, aggressively oppose their parent’s integrative practices, accusing them of not being true Muslims. For example, Diborah told me that her elderly Muslim neighbor felt a need to hide her visits to Christian neighbors' homes, so as not to incur the ire of her “extremist” children. Precocious beards are iconic of how those called Wahhabīah are typified as usurping traditional hierarchies, and, by extension, traditional tolerance practices. Old Muslim men tend to grow long beards. Young Muslim men tend to follow the same facial hair styles as their Christian peers: mustache and/or modest goatee (See Chapter 3). A thick beard on a young man indexes Muslim extremism to the extent that even Christians will jokingly accuse other Christians with thick beards of being Wahhabīah.

To be identified as Wahhabīah is no small thing. For many in Gondar, the long beard and the short pants that typify Wahhabīah, or Salafi, persona opens up a vector of space-time, linking the intentionality behind the pants and beard to that dangerous Muslim essence that has fueled powerful threats to Ethiopian Christendom from Ahmad Gragn to ISIS. I can provide a few examples of when the Wahhabīah Persona provoked these kinds of links. Ibrahim, identified by others as Wahhabīah, worked as a coffee merchant in Gondar's dense market area. We sat and chatted in his shop on a number of occasions. He always greeted me in the ideal Gondaré fashion, with a wide grinned smile and a confident handshake. He did directly criticize Christians a few times in our conversation, but he did so while leaning in close and speaking in hushed tones. Ibrahim was proud and conspicuous in his display of the Salafi surface. Some other individuals I knew who were inclined toward Salafi interpretations wore modest beards—that are only a little wider or a little longer than standard Gondaré goatee—but Ibrahim had bushy curtain beard and a shaved mustache. Moreover, while some Salafis hem their pants to their ankles, Ibrahim wore his pants halfway up his calves. I regularly watched him sell bags of coffee beans to Christian and Muslim customers, during which both parties bartered and spoke respectfully to one another. Christian coffee merchants sat on both sides of Ibrahim's shop, but many Christians still bought coffee from the Wahhabīah. One day I was talking to a middle aged Christian coffee merchant down the block. Ibrahim, walked up and gave us both an enthusiastic greeting. Before moving on his way he told me he would come back to his shop in an hour, implying that I would want to come visit him. Once Ibrahim left, the Christian said, “Terrorists, what is it I-S-S?“ He then made a gesture moving his hand below his chin and cupping an imaginary beard, and added, “In Ethiopia, we want peace. We don’t like them very much.” I impulsively defended Ibrahim, “But he’s a good person.” When he saw my perspective was not fully aligned with his, the Christian backtracked, “He has good behavior.” He then abruptly changed the subject and began lecturing me on the origin of Amharic. As a further illustration of the kinds of links Salafis provoke, during my first few weeks in Gondar in 2013, I was walking through Piassa with a Christian young man I knew from my previous visit in 2010. We passed a young man in Salafi attire and the Christian pointed to him and said strikingly, “I would kill those people if I could.”[132] I asked why, and he explained it in terms of negative reciprocity: these “extremist” Wahhabīah want to kill Christians, he assumed, so he wanted to kill the Wahhabīah.

The Christian coffee merchant greeted Ibrahim as he would any other. However, juxtaposed with that expression of mutual respect was the quiet suspicion that Ibrahim was a “terrorist” who would coerce Christians to convert to Islam if he could. This impression was so strong that he could not help but express it to me once we were alone in our own secrecy bubble. Yet at the same time, the Christian man acknowledged that Ibrahim “has good behavior,” (*ṭeru beharī*) a statement that notes his surface comportment, and which conspicuously says nothing about the intentionality behind his “good behavior.” His reference to “behavior” qualified my more comprehensive statement that Ibrahim was a “good person,” (*ṭeru* saw) leaving room for disjuncture between surface expression (good behavior) and underlying intent (terrorism). When he found out I did not share his suspicion he did not seek to convince me but immediately changed the subject. He apparently had no evidence of Ibrahim's malicious intent. His could only admit his behavior was "good." Those who came to Ibrahim's shop respond positively to his respectful, gregarious behavior, however, this does not fully shake the suspicion, at least for one of his competitors, that there is more to him than meets the eye. Antagonistic and harmonic models juxtapose themselves in everyday life through this kind of nagging suspicion. Some Christians hold a suspicion of Muslim conspiracy quietly while engaging in expressions of mutual respect with their Muslim neighbors. Like any antagonistic discourse, they verbalize these suspicions in secrecy bubbles among pockets of like-minded friends and acquaintances, but they are never (well rarely at least) aired to those they suspect. Overall, indexes of the encroaching ascendency of the religious other (new mosques, changing demographics), and indexes of a growing intent to undo prevailing harmony (a market area scattered with short pants and young beards), intensify the antagonistic backdrop of shared space. My sense is that in some more antagonistically hued imaginaries, it is almost as if practices of mutual respect push weakly back against this rising tide of hostility in an ultimately futile effort to keep total fragmentation at bay.

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[132] I should say this was a very unusual statement to make.

The Ambiguity of Wahhabīah

As the discourses surrounding them indicate, Salafis provide an example of a stable sign of Muslim-Christian antagonism that has a regular presence in everyday life. However, they are an ambiguous sign because, with the exception of shaking the hand of the opposite gender, Salafis still engage in basic acts of politeness with Christians. They also tend to abstain from directly insulting them, and openly competing with them by building mosques with minarets like Sufi Muslims. I asked a Salafi Muslim in an interview why it is important to build mosques, and, unlike any of the Sufi Muslims I interviewed, he dismissed the importance of mosque construction, telling me that the important thing is for Muslims to recognize *tawhīd*, and act in accordance with, the oneness of Allah. Salafis I knew in Gondar were less interested in territorializing space, and more interested in territorializing individual lives, reforming persons into ideal Muslims.   Given a lack of interest in building conspicuous mosques, the Salafi movement often functions more as a scapegoat for violence and antagonism rather than a providing a clear impetus for conflict. While the Wahhabīah persona may provoke a range of negative affects, from mild suspicion, to a justly-felt, murderous desire, I have not heard of major altercations in Gondar involving Salafis as the principal antagonists. The Muslims I knew who attended the Kebele 14 Masjid near the Gabriel Church were Sufis. A student at the al-Nur Masjid in Autoparko told Fatima that at that mosque promotes the teachings of al-Habash (though I know from discussions I had with other students that not all of them count themselves as followers of the Lebanese movement). Moreover, the ulama at al-Nur evidence their Sufi ways with their all night khat chewing, du'a sessions and their defense to me of the Sufi doctrine that Allah is everywhere. This idea opposes the Salafi position I heard that Allah is above creation, sitting on a throne—as one Salafi informant put it, “Do you think Allah is in garbage? No!” Moreover, members of the al-Najashi Masjid, where the Shékh allegedly declared jihad in 2009, celebrate their own Mawlid and propound Sufi Islam. Even the minor incidents I discussed, like the confrontation on the path to Gabriel, appeared to involve normative Muslims, not Salafis. However, religious conflict and tensions tend to be blamed on the rise of Saudi-inspired Islamic “extremism,” an act of scapegoating which may in part be facilitated by the somewhat nebulous presence of “Wahhabīah” in Gondar.

Some Muslims in Gondar claimed that Wahhabīah do not actually exist, that the term was made up by the government. It was rare for me to find anyone who would claim the Wahhabīah identity for themselves, as it largely functioned as a pejorative way of referring to Salafism. However, once I became acquainted with many young men, I learned that some were willing to admit affinities to Salafism, which some more informed Christians and Muslims understood as another word for Wahhabīah, but often did not provoke the same kind of negative associations. However, few would claim to be a Salafi Muslim as a public identity that is equally objectified and identifiable as Sufi Muslims or Orthodox Christians. Rather, they would admit their sympathies to Salafism only when I asked them directly. They also tended to immediately attempt to strip the term of its particularity, claiming that Salafism simply means “correct Islam,” a similar de-particularizing and naturalizing move imams made when asked about al-Habash. I also, understandably, encountered resistance when inquiring about my interlocutors’ Salafi sympathies. While hanging out with a group of Muslim young men in Arada, I noticed one of them was not chewing khat. I asked naively if he was Salafi, abruptly, and a young man interjected, "John, how's the weather? Good?" to stop that line of inquiry in its tracks.

A stereotypical Salafi, or Wahhabīah, trait that is looked upon with amusement by Christians, and with contempt by some Muslims, is their disregard of halal restrictions (See chapter 4). Yet, despite their famed violation of this taboo, it was rare to see Salafi Muslims blatantly eating Christian meat. Sadaam, who secured my permission to enter the Salafi mosque, fits the Salafi stereotype in that he is willing to eat meat butchered and blessed by a Christian. However, one time the subject of a Muslim eating Christian meat came up when his Sufi sister was present, and he strongly asserted that he would never eat Christian meat. *"It's haram!"* (forbidden), he adamantly proclaimed. Later he told me that what he meant was that, while he would eat Christian meat in private with no regrets, he would never eat at a Christian *Séga Bét* (Meat House), and blatantly flaunt this taboo. We could compare this with my Pentecostal friend, Sissay, who begged me to take him to a Muslim butcher so he could feast on meat blessed in the name of Allah and openly display his break from Orthodox restrictions. Also reflecting the Salafi pattern of discretion, a well-known "Wahhabīah" mosque is nothing but a rented house. While their discretion is in part due to legal restrictions, from what I can tell Salafis care little about the lack of minaret. Unlike other rented houses that function as mosques in Gondar, like al-Nur, there was not even a small crescent on the gate of the compound. The mosque was invisible except for the stream of Muslims entering it on Friday around noon (*Jumma*). I had permission from the ulama of the Salafi mosque to attend, though the Christian owner of the house eventually objected to my presence there. When I attended I saw many Muslim young men I recognized, and who I never had reason to think had Salafi sympathies. An official from the Land Administration Office told me that in Gondar there are at least eight "Wahhabīah" mosques operating covertly in residential homes, but there are no landmarks of Salafi ascendance on the surface. All this is to say that, while it seems Salafis would be a target for Orthodox Christians seeking to defend "Christian Ethiopia," their boundaries, and their exact identity was often fuzzy. As I've touched on, many individuals who exhibited the Wahhabīah persona attended the Sufi mosque and many who gave the appearance of “normal Muslims” regularly attended the nearly invisible Salafi house-mosque, “Yewut’at Masjid,” “Youth mosque.” Of course, some have the reputation for being Wahhabīah because of their attire, but this is different than an open declaration of, say, ISIS sympathies.[133]

The different strains Salafism in Gondar adds to the ambiguity. The Salafi mosque I attended, as well as most of my Salafi informants, were affiliated with Ahl al-Suna, a movement that emerged in Ethiopia in the early 1990s. Al-Suna is known to be strict, but not nearly as strict as Takfir wal-Hijra, which was introduced in Gondar in 1992, but quickly condemned by the Muslim and Salafi establishment for its practice of calling Muslims who do not follow their interpretation apostates (Østebø 2010: 23). In 2009, followers of Takfir in southern Ethiopia announced that they would not carry national ID cards or pay taxes, to which the EPRDF responded with a heavy crackdown. They were also connected to conflicts that unfolded in connection with Ṭimqet festival in Jimma in 2006, during which churches were burned, and, according to an unconfirmed rumor, Orthodox Christians were forced to convert to Islam (Zalalem 2010). Østebø (2014) convincingly argued that most Salafis in Ethiopia follow a strain of the Saudi Salafi movement that is highly critical of Islamic political projects, like that of the Muslim brotherhood—even their trademark short pants evidence the influence an Albanian Salafi scholar who was a strong advocate of a Muslim retreat from politics. Nevertheless, while practices of ambiguity prevent particular individuals from being singled out unequivocally as “terrorists,” it also allows Takfir wal-Hijra, Ahl al-Suna, and more assertive Sufis to be tacitly grouped together.

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[133] One informant told me there was a nurse in Gondar University Hospital who claimed ISIS was “correct.” This is the only time every heard a rumor of a Gondaré Muslim making this kind of open declaration while in the field, and I was unable to verify it.

Tacit groupings notwithstanding, a major dimension of a culture that values discretion and secrecy is a norm of not trying to making a clarity out of something someone else is purposely keeping ambiguous. Codes of silence, norms of holding back incriminating references, is one force at work that keeps an individual from stepping forward, acting as a leader, and casting open blame at Muslim neighbors outside of private secrecy bubbles. So while the Salafi persona evokes Christian and Muslim insider discourses of incrimination—in which Salafis take on an ideal type of a terrorist, of Ahmad Gragn incarnate—*in person* they often present as merchants, as neighbors, as the ones who greet you on the street with a smile, the business partners, as people with “good behavior” who ambiguously blend in with those called “good Muslims.” Even Wahabias’ willingness to eat Christian meat is a source of confusion and amusement for Christians, as it does not seem consistent with hatred of Christians. As Hirut explained it, “Because Muslims and Wahhabīah do not like each other, they [Wahhabīah] say, ‘We will eat a lot Christian meat.’” I asked her if that was bad. She answered, “For *them*.”

Not to say Christians are simply imagining things when they talk of increased Muslim-Christian segregation among those influenced by certain strains of Islamic reformism, as some Salafi movements advocate separation from Christians and other Muslims (Østebø 2014), though I know enough sociable Salafis to reject the idea that they are the sole source of an increase in antagonistic feeling and harmonic decline. Christian resistance to Muslim movements from the margins, stronger assertions of Muslim identity among Sufi Muslims (Hussein 2006), such as processions at Eid celebrations, the nation-wide protests, and attempts to build a minaret in Autoparko, are just as likely to provoke a subtle feedback loop of antagonism on both sides—which could also lead to a net decline in interfaith greetings, invitations, wedding attendance and the like.

Conclusion: Antagonistic Relations and the State

Ambiguity notwithstanding, short trousers and young beards still suggest to many a hidden desire to overthrow the Ethiopian government, institute an Islamic theocracy and force all Christians to convert. However, this is not the same as being caught in the act of *minaq*. Salafis get caught up in religious polemics, to be sure, but they are much more concerned with what they consider illegitimate Islamic practices. Adanech confronted, and one could say, litigated, her recently converted Salafi friend, but only after he had actively performed *minaq* (denigration/disrespect). That is, she only mounted her verbal aggression after he had been caught in the act of performatively undoing their presumptive mutual respect. Only then did she make explicit reference to incriminating details of his appearance. Otherwise she would have ignored his apparel. When he defended himself by appealing to the rules of Islam, Adanech then “litigated” Islam itself, accusing and cross-examining him until he was, so to speak, convicted. The more common detailed stories I heard involving Christian conflicts with Salafis involve this exact same scenario: An Orthodox Christian becomes outraged at an old friend of the opposite sex when they refuse to shake their hand. Generally speaking though, because they tend to avoid being caught in the act of minaq (denigration), the presence of “Wahhabīah” on Gondaré streets is enough to evoke a vague sense of antagonism, sufficient to make them into occasional scapegoats in private conversations, but still subtle and ambiguous enough in most cases that everyone can still go about their day pretending not to notice the cracks in the harmonious veneer.

In this chapter, I have juxtaposed the ways Christians and Muslim elaborate Wahhabīah in the popular imagination with how Salafis, the lived referent of the anathema category, fit into the flow of social life. As I have shown that the way Salafis in Gondar tend to present themselves with sufficient ambiguity to prevent the exercise of spontaneous discipline from Christians, however, they are still a target of formal and informal surveillance. The objective of this surveillance is to get past the ambiguity of everyday life and find clear evidence of covert conspiratorial intent. For example, Yeshi, an Orthodox Christian woman particularly concerned with the influence of Muslim extremism in Ethiopia, told me she planned to plant a tape recorder under a table in a restaurant where some men she suspected of being Muslim extremists regularly sat. If she were to record them talking about secret plans to establish an Islamic republic in Ethiopia, she could turn it over to the government and the police would do the disciplining for her. As I discussed earlier, while the EPRDF government has in some ways expanded the rights of Muslims in Ethiopia, the last decade has also been marked by increased government intervention in the religious affairs of the Ethiopian Muslim community (Østebø 2013b). Through their espionage activities, the EPRDF claims to have discovered a groundswell of dangerous extremists in Ethiopia (Ficquet 2015) and has arrested many Muslim leaders who they assert promote terrorism. Moreover, a police record I read shows the local Gondar administration works to identify houses that, they claim, function as illegal, covert mosques (NGPD 2009g). The Land Administrator I talked to claimed many of these covert mosques function as meeting places for extremists. In short, the government has taken up the responsibility of uncovering and disciplining “extremism” and “terrorism.” The Christian citizen is tasked with living peacefully with his or her neighbors, even if that means ignoring the potential indexes of Muslim conspiracy in their midst.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have argued that there are different modes of intergroup relations in Gondar: relations of mechachal, relations of antagonism, and ambiguous mixtures of antagonism and mechachal that Gondarés are able to maintain unresolved while still working to coexist with the other. Gondar itself is neither an antagonistic, nor harmonic monolith—nor are there stable ad-mixtures of antagonism and harmony. Gondarés enact harmonic relations, here designated by the Amharic term mechachal (tolerance/harmony), through specific, self-conscious sets of practices that show respect to the other and evoke models of Muslim-Christian symmetry (see Chapter 4). They also push back against the forces that subvert mechachal with codes of silence that keep antagonistic discourses out of the earshot of the religious other (see Chapter 5). In addition, it is important to note that mechachal has greater reach in some territories and domains than others. This uneven distribution is not just reflected in the push and pull of antagonistic and harmonic discourses that can show up in a conversation between two people (See Chapter 5), but in the different distributions of routine practices of mechachal. As discussed in chapter 4, the survey Diborah conducted in Piassa and Arada shortly after the Christmas of 2015 suggest different neighborhoods are characterized by distinct patterns of intergroup interaction, and that some practices of mechachal interweave themselves into social life to a greater extent in some neighborhoods than others. I asked Adam, who, as we discussed, has a positive relationship with Christians in Autoparko (see Chapter 5), if he ever visited his Christian neighbors on their holidays. He answered that he does not because Christians do not visit him on Muslim holidays. It is not that Adam insisted on having poor relations with his Christian neighbors, quite the opposite, but on his block there was no a system of reciprocity in place with respect to holiday visits, so he felt no obligation to participate in the practice. Fatima, on the other hand, who lives on another block in Autoparko, told me four Christian women visited her home to wish her well on Eid al-fitr. So perhaps instead of trying to decide whether Ethiopia (or Gondar) is tolerant *or* intolerant, it would be more fruitful to look at the practices through which tolerance is enacted, as well as their distribution in different residential areas.

The Ethiopian government, and many of its citizens, have an investment in the image of Ethiopia as a "land of tolerance" (Dagmawi 2009; Ephraim 2008). Official discourses sustain this image by attributing antagonistic intergroup relations to exogenous forces, largely to Arab Islam and the "extremist" tendencies of Salafism (Desplat and Østebø 2013b). I have shown that in Gondar's religious conflicts there was something different going on than these narratives suggest. It is not that tensions arise just because the Muslim community has been infused with "extremist" passion and ideology. If this were the case we could explain the conflicts of 2009 by the Gondaré Muslim community's adoption of those hallmark qualities of divisiveness, absolutism, and irrationality, which some social theorists claim increase a religion's propensity to violence (Juergensmeyer 2003; Kimball 2002). On the contrary, I showed in Chapter 6 that Gondar's major violent conflicts were sparked when normative Ethiopian Muslims pursued their own values in a way that collided with Orthodox value pursuits, evoking larger antagonistic historical imaginaries, and resulting in Muslims being typified as subverting Orthodox goods (and vice-verse).

Normative Ethiopian Muslims share many sensibilities with Orthodox Christians, including the importance they place on maintaining ritual centers of deference and territorializing neighborhoods (see Chapter 3). In addition, many Orthodox Christians see Muslim territorializing projects that focus on formerly "Christian" neighborhoods as subverting their own value-work. Salafi's in Gondar, on the other hand, like Pentecostals, claim to focus their territorializing energies on reforming *persons*, and dismiss the importance of value-work not directly related to the project of rationalizing individual Muslim practice. Salafi activities, in combination with the state discourses about the threat of extremism, contribute to a subtle antagonistic backdrop that sometimes colors intergroup relations, but it lacks the explicitness to consolidate vague negative affect into collective anger. It also lacks the spatially-situated indexicality that would provide a clear target against which to direct anger. Moreover, Salafis tend to fall short of being *caught in the act* of value subversion with enough univocity to allow potential Christian agitators to forecast that their antagonism will receive a positive evaluation (see Chapter 7).

The growth of Muslim demographics can also provoke this sort of vague antagonism among Orthodox Christians, and, I think, this can at least in part be tied to religious values. I have drawn on Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of arborescent territorialization to argue that one reason Orthodox Christians and Muslims seek control of a certain area is to bring it within the purview of their divine hierarchies, that is, to effect resonances and redundancies of their respective ritual systems of human-divine mediation. Resonances of the Orthodox ritual center include regular feasting in the name of saints, answering a greeting with a praise to God, donning the mateb, religious rituals at funerals and weddings, fasting, blessings over the food, making the sign of the cross, kisses on the gates of the church and kissing priest's cross upon passing. These resonances are made redundant, of course, when numerous individuals perform these acts over and over. This is why having a dense population of Christians in a neighborhood is an important part of Orthodox territorialization. By contrast, at the micro level of everyday social life, respect flows back and forth horizontally, while at the higher scale religious level, embodied in the dense ritual microcosm of the church/Ark, respect is directed unidirectionally to a single transcendent authority. The forging of links between Orthodox macrocosm (trunk) through creating resonances and redundancies in quotidian life (branches) constitutes a large portion of Orthodox value-work. Also, in Gondar the Islamic tree shows up in dress, conversation, prayer calls, Quran recitations on ring tones, trips to the mosque for prayer, Madrassa youth carrying wooden planks with painted Arabic characters, preaching on Jumma heard throughout the neighborhood, and ad-hoc d'ua circles (see Chapter 3). In neighborhoods with high Muslim populations, these branches of the Muslim tree show up with greater density, while in neighborhoods with lower Muslim populations, they show up in a more piecemeal fashion.

When my friend said that he feels like he lives in Sudan, he is, in part, alluding to the proliferation of Muslim signs in Autoparko, which index a social life mediated by Islamic authority. Moreover, my Christian friend feels like he, as a Christian, is shut out from this expanding Muslim society, like one might feel as a Christian minority in an Arab country. He also attributed the demographic ascendance of Muslims, particularly, Muslims who have been influenced by non-Ethiopian Islam, with a decline in mechachal and the collapse of Muslim-Christian integration. However, I have never heard of an open relation of antagonism that was justified by shifting demographics alone, even if they are show up on the surface in a proliferation of hijabs, thobes and du'a circles.

For the most part, Christians and Muslims ignore increasing Islamic resonances and redundancies in their everyday interactions, keeping their discussions of grievances confined to secrecy bubbles (see Chapters 5 and 7). However, the attempt to build a mosque with a minaret in Autoparko brought the hidden antagonism out into the open. Though it was hard to pin down an exact date, I was told it occurred around the time of the 2009 Ṭimqet conflict. A house in Autoparko had been functioning discreetly as a mosque, known as the al-Nur Masjid, since 1997. I visited the al-Nur Masjid several times during my fieldwork and observed worship identical to that I observed in the large mosques at the center of town. However, most Orthodox Christians with whom I spoke about the mosque denied it was a mosque at all, instead they asserted it was a "*Quran bét*," ("Quran house") or "*Islam bét*", ("Islam house," i.e. madrassa). Notwithstanding Christian denials, the Muslim community of Gondar uniformly recognized it as a legitimate mosque. It was listed as a mosque in the local Muslim magazine *Sober* printed in the year 2000. Even so, its near invisibility gave Christians plausible deniability. The small crescent on the gate was the only indicator that the house served as a mosque for the neighborhood's Muslim population. Though Christians prefer this kind of discretion, many in the Muslim community want to move beyond the days when they had to avoid practicing their religion in public. Hence, the Muslim community purchased the house next to the al-Nur Mesjid and, I was told, obtained government permission to construct a large, visible mosque with a minaret in place of the small, discreet house. As I discussed in Chapter 6, when the cement trucks arrived Orthodox young men threw rocks at them.

Because of Christian complaints and the social unrest caused by the plans for the mosque, the government revoked its permissions. The act of throwing rocks at the cement trucks was not just a form of symbolic violence, in the view of some Christians, it was an action that put a stop to Muslim value-work—which itself was seen as undermining Orthodox value-work of maintaining the neighborhood's relationship with, and encompassment by, Gabriel.

I am returning to this conflict and discussing it in light of tensions over demographic shifts because it illustrates an overarching point of my dissertation: that religious conflicts often ensue in Gondar when certain hidden realities are "revealed," or made "clear" on the surface. As I said earlier, have not heard of Gondaré Christians raising a fuss about discreet mosques. Salafism is the most stigmatized form of Islam in Gondar, however, they worship in an unmarked house right across the street from the major Kidane Mehret Church. Though everyone in that neighborhood knows where the mosque is, Christians have not raised any major objections to it of which I am aware. However, when Muslims in Autoparko, who follow a properly Sufi, government-approved form of Islam, decided to build a minaret in a location some distance from the church—in a place Muslims have worshiped in and recognized as a mosque for over a decade—Christian youth gathered to throw stones at the approaching cement trucks.

All this is to say, this conflict was not an issue of extremism versus moderation, but surface versus secret, or clarity versus ambiguity. Insofar as the mosque was discreet, it could be ignored, like the person who picks up a rock on front of one's house without drawing attention to it. Christians can imagine that invisible mosques are contained by the Orthodox hierarchy, even as Muslims imagine the covert divine powers of Allah contain Christianity. In addition, individuals wearing hijabs and thobes eventually go home. They are not caught in the act, the significance of their presence is too ambiguous to lead to a recognizable transvaluation. However, the minaret, purposely visible from a distance, is more difficult to ignore. Its permanent position in the neighborhood vista, combined with the regular prayer calls, gives it a permeating presence in surrounding space, calling neighborhood residents to defer towards Mecca. Thereby, a mosque indexes the overt completion of the Muslim presence in an Orthodox neighborhood, a Muslim presence that is encompassed by its own independent trunk, its own ritual center, standing tall for all to see. The Muslim tree can be seen making branches of territory that had once belonged exclusively to the Orthodox tree and Christians react to this visible deterritorialization of Orthodox branches by attempting to cut the Muslim tree down or prevent it from taking root.

I should also note that my argument that the territorializing imperatives of both Muslim and Orthodox value-complexes can subvert one another, and give rise to conflict, should not be interpreted to mean the two ritual complexes are *inherently* antagonistic. In addition to having *potential* to create conflicts, there are also affordances in the two value complexes that facilitate coexistence. In Chapter 4, I explained how the similar ways Muslim and Christian blessing economies treat meat provides a means for Muslims and Christians to show each other respect by accommodating each other’s taboos at weddings. The terrain each must navigate in relating to one another is well mapped out (cf. Kockelman 2010). By contrast, Orthodox Christians are confused by Pentecostal consumption practices; they’re not sure if they can eat Pentecostal meat or not. This can create ambivalence when it comes to weddings, since Orthodox Christians are not sure if they can eat the food served there. Moreover, the strong boundaries between normative Ethiopian Muslim and Christian identities and worship spaces allows them to attend each others funerals and form close friendships without fearing one will try to convert the other. By contrast, many Orthodox Christians are afraid to attend Pentecostal funerals because they fear the Pentecostal hymns will either infect them with demons, or that they will like the music so much they will convert. I have also discussed how religious rituals enable Orthodox Christians and Muslims to perform acts of macro recognition to the religious other, like donating to mosque/church construction and sponsoring a wedding feast that serves the meat of the other. These acts of macro recognition perform and reinforce meta-narratives of religious tolerance. In general, each religious complex presents affordances for intergroup relations and, what we could call, “pressure points” that present barriers, and risks of tensions and conflicts.

I have also recognized the role of “conditions of antagonism” that precede and may increase the likelihood of open “relations of antagonism.” As the practice of Orthodox Christians donating to mosque construction indicates, not all Christians see a mosque as subverting their own values, or at least it is not subversive enough to justify antagonism taking priority over mechachal. However, the Christian who gives a generous donation to a mosque likely also finds themselves in a different socioeconomic position than youth from the less affluent blocks of Autoparko, who may feel economic resentment towards the wealthy Muslims down the street (perhaps in addition to resentment over the de-territorializing effects of shifting religious demographics). The difference made by the minaret is, it creates a “surface” that provides a recognizable enough offense that it can justify turning vague antagonism and secret resentment into public outrage.[134] By contrast, if Christians were to attack a random rich Muslim man walking down the street in a thobe, it would meet near universal condemnation and scorn. Attacking the cement trucks, on the other hand, came to be evaluated differently because it protected something most Orthodox Christians see as important: Gabriel's ownership of Autoparko. The point I want to make here is that the different social surfaces change the evaluative frame in which antagonism is placed, giving relations of antagonism a resonance with moral sensibilities in addition to, perhaps, a resonance with economic frustration. Antagonism becomes a more or less "clear" defense of Orthodoxy. The different evaluative frameworks at play in the context of a value subversion may explain why an Orthodox informant proudly told me *he* was one of the individuals who threw stones at Keña Bét during the 2009 incident. I cannot think of any other time an informant in Gondar voluntarily confessed a crime to me.

I argued that religious value-complexes can place relations of antagonism in a morally resonant frame because of the transvaluing effects of religious ritual. Rituals can frame the violence as serving a higher purpose because they forge a recognizable conduit between the here-now of ritual participation and a larger macrocosm, higher values, and hypostatic evils. Ritual is not unique, however, in its capacity for transvaluation. Mass mediated messages and images can also result in transvaluations that motivate violence. To further spell out the potential of ritual in constituting a relation of antagonism in these final pages, I will turn my attention to a transvaluation event that occurred towards the end of my fieldwork. I will contrast the 2009 conflict to Gondarés' non-violent reaction to the ISIS massacre of Orthodox Christians in early 2015.

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[134] We could also conceptualize this a movement from undefined affect to "emotion", like anger, which entails "a narrative element that moves the action ahead, taking its place in socially recognized lines of action and reaction" (Massumi 1995: 86); it is also "the conventional, consensual point of insertion of intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progressions, into narrativizable action-reaction circuits, into function and meaning" (88).

On April 19th 2015, ISIS released a propaganda film that culminated in the murder of dozens of young migrants in Libya. A caption in the film described the victims as "The worshipers of the cross belonging to the hostile Ethiopian church." It depicted ISIS soldiers shooting one group of young men execution style and marching another group of young men onto a beach where the soldiers decapitated them with large knives. The commentary of the film pitted Islam against Christianity and framed the executions as part of a broader, zero-sum religious war. It made *clear* that the Ethiopian Christians were being killed for religious reasons. They refused to convert to Islam or pay the *jizya* tax, the obligatory tax on all non-Muslims living under the Caliphate. Prior to the execution scenes, a masked individual stands behind the victims, holding a revolver, and addresses the audience "To the nation of the cross: we are back again." He then declares that this nation of the cross "will not have safety even in your dreams until you embrace Islam. As the prophet, peace be upon him, stated: 'I was commanded to fight people until they testify that there is no true god except Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.'" [135]

Here I want to point out that, while the ISIS commentary transvalued the massacre for its audience, depicting it in terms a broad global struggle between Islam and Christianity, it did not successfully link the perpetrators of that massacre, ISIS, to Ethiopian Muslims. If such a link were clearly established, it could have resulted in ugly anti-Muslim violence all over Ethiopia. Both Gondaré Christians and Muslims were utterly outraged, not only that ISIS killed Ethiopian Christians, but that they “butchered” them “like animals.” Hirut expressed her desire to torture the men who perpetrated the massacre with electric shock. Gondaré Muslims worried that Orthodox Christians would blame them, and, indeed, some Christians expressed their suspicion to me that many Gondaré Muslims were ISIS sympathizers. Ephraim estimated that may 50% of Gondaré Muslims were ISIS sympathizers, while shortly after the massacre Sami warned me not to attend the mosque, saying, “Be careful, ISIS is in there.” However, a few forces worked against the prospect of Orthodox Christians taking revenge on Muslims. One was the general norm of ambiguity and the taboo against making public, incriminating references about others without clear evidence (see Chapter 7). This may have worked against a desire some Orthodox Christians had to publically blame particular Muslims. In addition, the public speeches of clergy and government officials worked to actively de-link the ISIS massacre from individual Gondaré Muslims, and cast a judgmental eye at any who would react violently. This also worked against a violent Orthodox Christian backlash (see Dulin In press). We can contrast this with the public speeches politicians sometimes give elsewhere that explicitly link violent atrocities to specific local religious communities, typifying members of said communities as culpable perpetrators (Gassem-Fachandi 2012).

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[135] The film can be viewed in full at http://www.zerocensorship.com/bbs/uncensored/109383-isis-shooting-beheading-ethiopian-christians-graphic-video#axzz41ZF0GElR retrieved on 02/29/2016 For news coverage see Kirkpatrick (2015).

Unlike the 2015 massacre in Libya, the ritual events in 2009 did not leave a gap to be discursively filled between wider macro-cosmic conflict and local actors. That is, no public discourse was required to make a mutually recognizable link between high offense and local Muslim actors.[136] Rappaport (1999) argued that those who participate in a ritual index their assent to the moral order that ritual instantiates. Because the ritual changes the social context and changes the status of participants, it makes their obligations unmistakable to others. One who participates in a rite of passage for example, obtains a new status recognizable to all, even if they have no intention to act in accordance with that status. Likewise, a set of actors who are positioned as subversive agents in the ritual context get indexed as subversive, even if they have no subversive intent. Even in a society dedicated to maintaining ambiguity in the service of social harmony, certain ritual configurations, or certain conjunctures between two ritual performances, can cut through the ambiguous fog, narrowing interpretive possibilities and creating a scene of seemingly univocal antagonism, potentially identifying actors, buildings and cement trucks as the unequivocal offenders—catching them in the act. As Rappaport suggested, ritual's ability to cut through ambiguity stems in part from the fact that ritual is more than a symbolic expression, it is an action—an action, I might add, that unfolds in slowed down, formulaic, controlled space, which allows the action to have a fixed, recognizable value attached to it. The ritual context of Ṭimqet clearly identifies those who respect the Ark because the act of respecting the Ark is inherent to the practice of Ṭimqet. Likewise, in 2009 Orthodox Christians had little trouble identifying and agreeing upon what was *subverting* respect for the Ark, the tin mosque, and then targeting this subversion.

Overall, I have shown that religion can shape religious conflict by linking offenses to particular actors, which is enabled not just by the logic of religious cosmology, but by the capacity of ritual practice to index the place of actors within a wider macrocosmos. This kind of macrocosmic link is consequential in a conflict situation because it places self and other in a more direct relationship with higher values. This is important because higher values can evoke more intense positive feelings when realized than lower values, as well as more intense, widespread outrage when subverted. The higher the value, the greater its density of links to other goods, the more coextensive it is with the entire value-complex. One does not, for example, attack the Virgin Mary or her Ark, without attacking the entire Orthodox sacred hierarchy and its system of mediation. When I asked Gondaré Orthodox Christians about religious conflict in Gondar, they normally mentioned the conflict over the Lideta Mariam field, the khat dropped on the St. Michael Ark, and the conflict over the Kebele 14 Masjid built near Gabriel. These events have assumed a place in local mythology alongside other major conflicts that populate the Orthodox Gondaré historical consciousness, such as the military campaigns of Ahmad Gragn and the Sudanese Dervishes, and the travails of Am'ha Yesus' confrontation with the EPRDF (see Chapter 1). It may be a coincidence that out of all the conflicts between Gondaré Muslims and Christians that probably occurred over the last decade, the ones Orthodox Christians remember and talk about most involve offenses against Orthodoxy's three highest status mediators: Michael, Gabriel, and the Virgin Mary.[137] Out of all the Orthodox saints, images of these three mediators can be seen most frequently on car dashboards and in homes.[138] They were featured prominently on the Ṭimqet float and take center stage in major Bible narratives.[139] The high status of these mediators did not cause the conflicts *per se*, but they added another layer of valence, a higher intensity of good that could be subverted, and an intensity of offense that made the events memorable. At any phase in the conflicts, there was likely an impetus to elevate the conflicts to a stature and gravity suited to those high, heavenly beings who were subverted—thus also elevating the urgency of counteracting the subversion, making antagonistic actions more justifiable in terms set by the value of honoring Gabriel, Michael and the Virgin Mary.

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[136] Of course, as I showed, some Christians produced incriminating public discourses emphasizing Muslim culpability in 2009, but because of Amhara norms against explicitly airing antagonistic narratives, the culpability would likely have had to be clearly recognizable *before* the antagonistic discourses bubbled to the surface.

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[137] The conflict in Autoparko did not come up when talking to non-residents of the neighborhood. There was also violent conflict between Muslims and Christians over cemetery land in Gondar that never came up while I was in the field (Haileyesus 2011). There are likely other conflicts that have not taken hold of Gondarés' collective memory.

As a final word, I would like to clarify that my claim that antagonisms in Gondar are tied in part to endogenous tensions, that they cannot just be dismissed as a symptom of foreign extremism, does not mean that Ethiopia, or Gondar, is *not* a land of tolerance. I have argued here that mechachal is a value that orders Muslim-Christian interaction in Gondar through concrete practices. The existence of antagonism, open or otherwise, does not nullify that value. It is Gondarés' efforts to navigate tensions and antagonisms, to engage in practices of respect for the religious other despite them, that proves Gondarés' commitment to mechachal. Granted, there are contradictions in Gondar's social life that hit sensitive nerves. They will likely present challenges in the future. The intergroup symmetry Orthodox Christians perform with Muslims in the transient sphere of neighborhood social life provokes outrage when clearly extended to ritual sites of divine transcendence. The EPRDF and some of its Christian citizens have a clear sense of the threat posed by terrorism, but not a clear sense of how to fight terrorism without making their Muslim population feel terrorized. Muslims cannot be forced back underground under the current legal framework of religious pluralism, yet the movement of Muslim trees to the surface of shared social life can cut through the ambiguity that helps sustain everyday scenes of mutual respect. Harmonious ambiguity gives way to antagonistic univocity when Christians try to halt mosque construction in its path. In these instances, the macro-historical level meets the micro interaction. The Gondaré Christian neighbor can be typified as an Emperor Yohannes, seeking to push Muslims back to the margins of Addis Alem, while Muslims can be typified as an Ahmad Gragn, moving slowly towards total domination. In everyday practices of mechachal, these historical imaginaries are pushed into the background out of mutual respect, but a new mosque, in combination with Christian responses to it, can draw these imaginaries out into shared space and construe Muslim-Christian relations in their terms. The subversion of high values can help define relations in terms of high stories of the epic conflicts in Ethiopia's past. I hope I have shown how real these tensions are and how much potential they have to drive wedges between Muslims and Christians. Yet, it is also important to emphasize that the conflicts of 2009 were such a scandal, such a trauma, because mechachal sets the expectation. It defines the life Gondaré Christians and Muslims experience on a regular basis. The story here is not just about the antagonistic forces that haunt the work of Muslim-Christian coexistence in Gondar, but also about mechachal's resilience in absorbing these forces and carrying on with its work of mutual respect, love and coexistence regardless.

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[138] Many Orthodox Christian informants also verbally confirmed that these three mediators were the most important, but some were wary about ranking them, instead insisting, "All saints are equal."

[139] For example, according extra-biblical Orthodox literature Michael split the red sea for Moses (he also defeated Satan in the war in heaven), Gabriel announced the birth of Christ, and Mary, of course, was the mother of God.

Paragraphs on pages 301-302 was included in a paper titled “Transvaluing ISIS in Orthodox Christian Majority Ethiopia: On the Inhibition of Violence,” which has been accepted for publication by Current Anthropology.

Glossary of Terms

Abba	Father, a title given to priests
Awalīyya (plural) /Walī (singular)	Friend(s) of Allah
Besme Ab	In the name of the Father, an Orthodox blessing performed over food and in some other contexts
Buda	Evil eye, a person who can make you sick by looking at your or your food
Debtera	An Orthodox chorister, or a religiously trained practitioner of demonic magic (or, sometimes, ethically neutral magic)
Du'a	Optional petitionary prayer in Islam
Egzīaber/Egzīer	Amharic terms for God
Eid al-Arafa	The most important Muslim festival and second day of pilgrimage
Eid al-Fitr	Festival of breaking the fast, marks the end of Ramadan
Hayleña	Literally, powerful, also a difficult person
Haymanot	Religion
Injera	Sour pancake flatbread eaten with most meals in northern Ethiopia
Khat	Leaves chewed for their stimulant effects
Makber/keber	To give respect, to honor/ respect
Maheberawī Nuro	Social life
Masjid	Arabic for mosque, the term used in Gondar
Mateb	Thread necklace tied around neck at Christening
Mawlid al-Nabi	Muslim festival celebrating the birthday of the prophet Muhammad

Mechachal	Harmony/tolerance
Minaq	To denigrate, to shame
Mesqel	Cross, also refers to the Orthodox holiday, The Day of the True Cross
Salam	Peace, also used as a greeting
Salat	Requisite Prayer/prostrations in Islam
Ṣebel	Holy Water
Selet	Vow to a saint
Senbet kīta	Sabbath flat bread, blessed flat bread distributed in church compounds
Shékh	Honorific for a learned Muslim
Ṭeleq saw	Big person, an important, highly esteemed person
Ṭimqet	Baptism, also refers to a major Orthodox festival commemorating the Baptism of Christ, or the holiday of Epiphany
Zikkir	A meal to honor a saint on their commemoration day
YeSatan Joro	Satan’s ear, refers to a potentially hostile overhearer that might use information against you

I used Hoben’s system of Amharic to English transliteration in this dissertation (1973: xi).

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