

Yäsäw ጎጅ. Aggressive magic in Addis Ababa; Micro-conflicts in a changing society

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Abstract

Addis Ababa has been going through great changes during the last fifteen years, both structurally and socially. For some this creates an environment of opportunities, but for most people more social, economic and spiritual insecurity. In this time informants at centres of holy water healing in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church talk about an increase in aggressive magic, or in Amharic: *yäsäw ጎጅ*. That magic and witchcraft is rife during times of change has been discussed in research in other African cultures. In Addis Ababa, where this study has been carried out, the situation of aggressive magic is different. The Christian context influences the choices people make, and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church offers a solution to the misery and suffering of the afflicted which is: holy water healing.

KEY WORDS: Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Magic, Medical Pluralism, Development, Spirit Possession, Holy Water Healing

Introduction

No one reacts to the loud screaming. It seems there is nothing unusual about it. The people, most of them dressed in white, just stand there, waiting. Many shoes have been left near the gate of the compound. The cement path feels cold under my feet as I enter through the gate and try to make my way towards the prayer house. People move around, coming, going. The screaming and shouting come from the prayer house and from inside the showers. Women, and some men, queue up to shower or baptise² in the freezing cold holy water early in the morning.³ Between seventy and one hundred people

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² The verb *tät'ämmäqä* has many meanings, among them to be squeezed, to be brewed and meanings related to immersing something or someone into water, including to take holy water and to be baptised (Kane 1990). In this context I use baptise to reflect the religious meaning of the word used for a healing purpose in a spiritual context.

³ There is no existing statistics of holy water places within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Addis Ababa, but as there are 150 churches it is safe to say that there are approximately one hundred holy

sit and stand in the compound, drinking holy water, some finish, leave the yoghurt container, can or plastic cup they used to drink from in the basket near the distribution place and leave. New people keep coming. The *ṣābāltānyoč*⁴ (those who participate in the healing practices) are advised to go outside the compound if they need to vomit or use the toilet, says an information poster near the entrance. Jerry cans and plastic bottles are lined up to be filled with the healing water that the faithful take for use at home. A priest sits near the prayer house blessing people with his wooden hand held cross. One man, around 45 years old from Addis Ababa, seeks healing in this particular healing site. He is willing to tell me his story. He got sick because of *yäsäv ʾəǧ* (aggressive magic), caused by his stepmother.

I grew up in a neighbourhood in Addis Ababa. I went to school there until grade twelve. I used to be a good student, but then I became tired and lazy. That was because of *mädhanit* [literally medicine, in this case meaning harmful medicine] from the family. I changed my job and started a shoe renewal business. After a while I got a very disturbing movement in my stomach and could not work. I went to the hospital and they said I had several amoebas and so on. But they did not find my specific disease.

I started going to holy water, and kept going for three years. I baptised, drank, baptised, drank and so on, on a regular basis. Blood came out with my diarrhoea. That was a symptom of healing. What was in my stomach shrunk and was dying. I think it was big initially. It became smaller because of the holy water. Then at last it came out. It was a snakelike thing. It had arms and legs and was around 15 cm.

This happened approximately six years ago. I became healthy, started work and stopped going to holy water. But there were some eggs inside me still. I should not have started work so quickly. The eggs grew. 2-3 years afterwards the same thing came, and I returned to holy water healing. The first time when I vomited it was green. That was the shell of the animal. Then my vomit was yellow, and then it was like foam. The previous time it was also like that. I stopped my work completely this time. My wife left with my child. I could not make any money. They had renewed it [the harmful medicine]. The people do it to gain success themselves. While baptising the spirit in me told about the magic and who had done it. It was my stepmother. She paid the *tānqʷay* 1200 or 2000 birr⁵. I am now far from my family. But even if it is hard, I am really lucky, because now I am closer to God.⁶

Yäsäv ʾəǧ literally means “people’s hand”. It denotes a practice with the aim to harm another person, usually conducted by a “wise person” who knows the secret of pulling demons to harm someone. This practice may also be called *ʾəǧäsäb*⁷, *mätät*⁸, *mädhanit*⁹, *ʾasmat*¹⁰ and *dəǧəmt*¹¹. The fact that the practice has many names is an indication of its

water places as most churches have one. Among the 25 where I have conducted research at least seven are less than seven years old.

⁴ The transliteration system of Encyclopedia Aethiopia is used throughout the article when transliterating Amharic words (Uhlig 2003, xx-xxi).

⁵ Approximately 50 or 90 USD.

⁶ Interview made 22.4.2016 in Addis Ababa.

⁷ Gəʾəz, meaning people’s hand.

⁸ *Mätät* is explained by informants as the process of harming others by spiritual means.

⁹ Literally means medicine, in this context harmful medicine. *Mädhanit* also means health and redemption/salvation.

¹⁰ Literally means “names”, but may be referred to as magic.

¹¹ Of the verb *dəǧämä*, which means recite, in this case to throw magic spells on someone.

importance. Among my informants, all members of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC), it is frequently reported as one of the important reasons why people get sick or are involved in accidents. Often this explains the situation when people's lives fall apart, be it economically, socially or health-related, or a combination of these. Several informants have explained that they had to move away from their home place because of the risk of a renewal of the magic. Informants talk about killings related to this practice, or that the ultimate aim of the magic is death. Many informants claim that this problem is increasing and they explain it within a framework of rapid change, modernisation and globalisation. The other, even more common explanation is that we, according to EOC, are living in the eighth and last millennium and the end of time, a time in which people are losing faith in God. These two explanations are often interconnected by Ethiopian Orthodox Christians.

This article argues that *yäsäw ʾəǧ*, described as becoming a more common problem in Addis Ababa, has to do with social and psychological circumstances that are changing at a high pace in the Ethiopian capital; the population growth, secularisation, structural and social changes that are taking place, combined with the psychological effects these have on the population.¹² These explanations of disease and misfortune are closely connected with spiritual ideas and religious beliefs in a Christian context of the EOC. Finally this article argues that *yäsäw ʾəǧ* is similar to what is defined as witchcraft, magic or sorcery¹³ in other African cultures be they contemporary or historical. But in the Christian context in Addis Ababa the misery and suffering, which is the result of *yäsäw ʾəǧ*, is often transformed to a sense of existential meaning of getting closer to God and as part of fulfilling religious higher ends related spiritually to the eighth millennium and end of time.

Rapid Changes in Addis Ababa¹⁴

Like many other African cities, Addis Ababa has a high population growth. The government puts a lot of effort into constructing suburbs outside of the city centre and developing the city centre into a business centre in the name of modernisation. The way of living is quickly being changed by this policy, and currently whole living areas are being destroyed in order to construct modern buildings. Ethiopia has for more than a decade been Africa's fastest growing economy. Between 2003 and 2014 Ethiopia's economic growth was in average 10.3 percent per year, and more than twice the average in its region, according to the World Bank (Moller 2015, 22). Much of this growth is because of construction activity. In addition to buildings, roads are being constructed *en masse*. People are forced to move from their neighbourhoods to new areas far from the centre, and many who lost their home without compensation become homeless. An example of forced displacement is that caused by the construction of a light rail which has huge consequences for people's lives (Yidnekachew 2015). People express that the changes, be they positive or negative, make them experience life as unpredictable and insecure.

¹² This article is based on one year of field research conducted in 2015-16. The research is part of the PhD project within the Study of Religion on disease and healing practices in the EOTC, which I am carrying out as part of my work as PhD candidate at the Department for Archeology, History, the Study of Culture and the Study of Religion at University of Bergen, Norway.

¹³ These terms vary in the work of different scholars, see below.

¹⁴ The urban environment of Addis Ababa is to a certain degree constantly undergoing changes.

The way of life in compounds with several families, in fellowships, sharing and working together, is rapidly becoming less and less common, and a new living style in apartment buildings and individual compounds with tall fences is becoming the way of life; a more individualised and also a much more expensive life. The time for family and for maintaining relationships and neighbourhood is shrinking. Part of the population (middle class and above) have more opportunities and choices in today's Addis Ababa, and for most people life has become more complex. Informants talk about stress. Being stressed or disturbed is one of the diseases that have been frequently mentioned. All these societal changes influence relationships, which become looser and less interdependent, and at the same time people live close together in a city with higher and higher population density. When talking to Ethiopian Orthodox Christians in Addis Ababa about disease and healing, the issue of the end of time was often mentioned, and informants gave examples of which recent developments show that the end of time is near. This time is by many characterised by decreased faith and increased sin. Certain diseases are categorised as modern, like cancer, back problems, and diabetes. Moreover people claim that one gets more easily sick during this time. Some mention “big” developments like globalisation and modernisation, with which they assume increased competition to follow, when explaining what they claim is increased numbers of people suffering from aggressive magic and more people shouting at the holy water healing places.¹⁵ Some say that there are more people shouting, which means more are possessed by spirits, now. The spirits talk about how the person they possess was hurt by someone, and most often these are stories of how family, friends or colleagues harmed the individual through a process of *yäsāw ʾəǧ*. In a society where sick people depend on their family and social network to look after them, this represents severe challenges. Recently the church instructed priests serving at holy water healing centres not to ask spirits name names when telling how the spirit got to possess the afflicted person. Apparently this decision was made in order to reduce conflict between people. The urban setting of Addis Ababa has dramatically changed in the last years, and even if this is not historically unique, people associate it with a particular phase in history; the end of time or the “eighth millennium”.

***Yäsāw ʾəǧ*: A Disease**

The medical system in Ethiopia can be described as pluralistic, mixing biomedical medicine and traditional medical beliefs interlinked with spiritual and religious beliefs and practices¹⁶ (Wondwosen 2006, Otto 2002, Schirripa 2010, Levene, Phillips, and Alemu 2016). Ethiopian Orthodox Christians have a more holistic perspective to disease and the healing of it. Physical/natural, spiritual and existential aspects of disease, symptoms and reasons for them are interconnected while understanding disease and healing. This is opposed to Western views that tend to compartmentalise life more, and normally see spiritual and religious dimensions as irrelevant. The fact that Ethiopians do utilise alternative healing methods to a considerable degree is confirmed by many (Anderson 2007, Wondwosen 2006, Pankhurst 1990, Hannig 2013, Berhanu 2010, Hermann 2012), also in the considerable amount of medical publications in this field of study (Slikkerveer

¹⁵ The claimed increase of *yäsāw ʾəǧ* is difficult to verify, as aggressive magic has been part of Ethiopian society historically, both in rural and urban environments.

¹⁶ The term biomedicine is chosen instead of “Western” or “modern” medicine, in line with most research in medical anthropology. The term traditional medicine is here chosen to denote what is also denoted ethnomedicine or indigenous medicine, as it is close to the Amharic word used: *babəlawi*, which is normally translated as “traditional”.

1982, Kloos et al. 1987, Berhanu 2010, Fekadu et al. 2015). Biomedicine fails to answer the existential questions that come with disease, such as “Why me?”, and the culturally recognised responses to disease is the motivation for people to choose the traditional treatments rather than biomedical treatment (Wondwosen 2006). This, it seems, and not so much the fact that health services are poor and sometimes not as accessible, is the common reason why people continue to use traditional medicine, like holy water healing. Addis Ababa has the best developed health services in the country, but the parallel structure of the healing places of the EOC is growing and several new healing places have been emerging in the last seven or eight years. Biomedicine is also considered unable to heal disease believed to be caused by spirit possession, and informants explain that the spirits trick the doctors, hiding in different body parts creating different kinds of symptoms of diseases.

The Ethiopian *yäsäw ʾəǧ* is often translated to “bad medicine” in English. The aetiology of *yäsäw ʾəǧ* or what the anthropologist and psychiatrist Alan Young, who did extensive research in Gonder, calls, “people are poisoned by their enemies” is in some form described in the literature but not necessarily called *yäsäw ʾəǧ* (Young 1975:7, Wondwosen 2006). It is a spiritual practice used to influence others, often to harm others, and *qənat* (envy or jealousy) is generally mentioned as the main motivation for doing this. The practice can be used to exert influence in a positive way, for instance as was explained by one priest who had the wisdom of doing *mäsäjäfäkä*¹⁷, which he said he used to help couples to avoid divorce. Also the phenomenon of *buda* (evil eye) has a similar kind of negative connotation, but evil eye is often claimed to be a capability of a person normally belonging to a specific group of people who have evil eye (Reminick 1974, Freeman and Pankhurst 2003, Salamon 1999). *Yäsäw ʾəǧ* is normally categorised as a disease, but is however not curable in the biomedical health system.

Categorisation of disease in many areas of Ethiopia is of a fluid character and it is not easy to make clear cut distinctions (Slikkerveer 1982, Schirripa 2010, Wondwosen 2006, Otto 2002). My research in Addis Ababa confirms this view. However, it may be useful in order to get some grip of how Ethiopian Orthodox believers often understand disease to suggest a categorisation. In general it is possible to argue that Ethiopian Orthodox Christians split into three types of disease: Corporeal disease, mental disease and spiritual disease, but these categories are not mutually exclusive entities and, importantly, people’s understanding of disease is to a large extent interconnected with how they perceive the causes of diseases.

The Ethiopian Orthodox users of holy water in Addis Ababa that I have interviewed generally explain that there are four causes for disease, often combined. One is the “natural” or biological, the other is the aggressive magic or *yäsäw ʾəǧ*, the third is God’s desire to test a person and the fourth is God’s punishment. In general all diseases may be caused by evil spirits (*säytan, aganänt, ʾarkus mänfäs*) and all could also be a spirit possession.

Informants are not always clear in their use of the terminology of *yäsäw ʾəǧ*, *dəgəmt*, *mätät*, *ʾəǧäsäb* or *mädhanit*,¹⁸ and the terms may be used interchangeably, but the common point is that these are instigated by others to harm a third person. This is how a theologian in the EOC, Shitila Moges, explains it in his book when discussing the

¹⁷ Love magic, which is to make someone love someone else.

¹⁸ See above for explanations of these terms.

different kinds of evil spirits that harm people (Moges 2006).¹⁹ *Dəgəmt* he describes as a possession that is enacted against *people to ruin their peace, health, and love life*. Shitila Moges goes on to explain about the ʾəǧäsäb (or *yäsäv ʾəǧ*) as a kind of *dəgəmt*:

This one is a specially made medicine by the evil worshippers usually given to their targets as a form of food, beverage and also by sprinkling it on people's clothes. Like the other ones, its aim is to make people victims of various diseases. This one also works when put on daily pathways of targeted people and near places where they sleep. According to the Bible people who do this are usually murderers, sex addicts (adulterers), and evil worshippers. Such a type of evil act is demonstrated and witnessed in possessed people from whom various animals are excreted from their body.

Types and characteristics of ʾəǧäsäb disease: When a person is attacked by the ʾəǧäsäb spirit, he/she suffers from severe stomach and intestine pain as a result of creatures put there by the evil spirit. Among the reported things which the creatures do to victims are: making the victim lose his/her appetite, biting their stomach and intestines, growling loudly, running in the stomach and hiding itself while the victims undertake a modern check-up (Moges 2006, 22).

This explanation shows how biological symptoms of disease are mixed with spiritual causes and thus need to be cured by spiritual means. Normally, people who are subject to *yäsäv ʾəǧ* will show signs of spirit possession and will often shout while being baptised. But also there are spirits who do not shout and those are perceived as more difficult to get rid of. Even if people are possessed they may not be aware of it. It is not until they come to the holy water site they understand that they are possessed. In order to initiate a process of harming someone a person who is trained in these secrets has to be consulted. The practitioners of *yäsäv ʾəǧ* are in general perceived to be either the *ṭänqʷay* or the *däbtära*.

Ṭänqʷay

Ṭänqʷay is the traditional healer and “wise-man” who can also perform harmful magic like *yäsäv ʾəǧ*. *Ṭänqʷay* by several is described as being a general term denoting both *baläzar* (the one who is the master of a certain kind of spirits called *zar*) and *däbtära* (Bishaw 1991, Wondwosen 2006, Aspen 2001, Young 1970) According to Wondwosen the word *ṭänqʷay* is the general term for one category of spiritual healers (Wondwosen 2006) My material is rather more in line with Aspen's discussion on these terms (Aspen 2001:115ff). He describes how people denote the professionals working in this field according to which group they themselves belong to. For instance someone who is an active participant in the church will distinguish clearly between the *däbtära* and the *ṭänqʷay*²⁰. This is similarly how informants in Addis Ababa describe them. *Ṭänqʷay* is frequently mentioned by informants as a form of sorcerer who is different from *däbtära*, as the latter has his education in the church. The *ṭänqʷay* uses traditional medicine and other methods to help customers to harm others, among other services. The literature on medicine and healing in Ethiopia does not discuss in deep and does not agree on the role of the *ṭänqʷay*. This is in fact also the case among informants.

¹⁹ This book is in Amharic and not translated to English, used here in an unofficial translation.

²⁰ The debated role of priests and others who perform magic goes back to the time of the reign of Emperor Zara Yaqob (reign: 1434-1468). See for instance (Tamrat 1973, 235-260)

Däbtära

Däbtära is an unordained priest and formally the musician during church services in the EOC. He has generally many years of traditional church education (Otto 2002, Shelemay 1992, Young 1975). The *däbtära* has a multifaceted role as he is both formally part of the church serving as cantor, presenter of psalms and hymns of the mass and scribes and repositories for much of the church's learning, and at the same time he is a magician and healer (Shelemay 1992, Young 1975). According to Young, the lay notion of the *däbtära* is as a spoiled priest who is, among other things, a commander of demons (Young 1975:6).²¹ This is also how informants describe them, and many see them as dangerous. The reason for this is that they have insights in the spiritual sphere and church knowledge which the *Ṭänqʷay* does not have, and it has been explained thus: “they use your Christian name and holy books”.²² According to a *däbtära* informant they are trained in astrology and numerology and they have knowledge about herbs. He, and many others, started their career in the church as children, and their teachers infused herbs of different sorts into their skin in order to make studying easier for them, so that they would be able to memorise easily and study long hours.

People fear the *däbtära*, but also deacons are sometimes accused of having performed *yäsäw ʾəǧ*. The practice is not accepted by the EOC, but most priests and laity will acknowledge the existence of witchcraft and magical practices. Most representatives of the EOC as well as laity will say that those with church education that practise harmful magic are outside the church.

The Process of *yäsäw ʾəǧ*: Two Examples

As mentioned above envy or jealousy is often mentioned as the main reason for harming others. ‘Mesfin’ is a student in his twenties with a scholarship that he got as one of thirty lucky ones.²³ He started studying at a university, but after some time his notebook was stolen, and he thinks it was taken to the *däbtära* or *ṭänqʷay* who then put magic on it. After that, while as yet unaware of the aggressive act against him, he started to be very tired, and it became difficult for him to study. Finally, during his midterm exam, he saw only blank pages. His supervisor at his university advised him to go to a certain holy water healing centre in Addis Ababa. When I met him he had been there two months, and was soon ready to go back to his studies, but he was afraid that his co-students would renew the attack upon him. At holy water healing centres there are many similar cases. *Yäsäw ʾəǧ* is also used in the context of business in order to gain success.²⁴

Another informant, a man in his thirties, got his disease/spirit from food that was given to him by his colleagues.²⁵ There was a period of insecurity and competition at work, because the ministry that he worked in was going to fuse with another ministry. People were looking to get better jobs and even competing to keep their jobs. My informant explained that he was an appreciated worker and was promised a good

²¹ Alan Young's research is conducted in Gonder, but because of the scarcity of sources this is one of the important works on the topic.

²² Ethiopian Orthodox have a Christian name given to them during baptism and a “secular” name used in day-to-day life.

²³ Based on interviews conducted in Addis Ababa 19.3.2016, 23.3.2016, 25.3.2016.

²⁴ For an example of this from a Jewish context see (Levene and Bhayro 2005).

²⁵ Based on an interview conducted in Addis Ababa 24.3.2016.

position. This was why his colleagues, whom he discovered later, were former priests with contacts and knowledge, went to a *däbtära* to harm him. He fell sick and was unable to continue working. “I don’t eat or drink with people anymore. Only in the *mabbär* (association, in his case a religious one) and the *ʾəddär* (formal neighbour fellowship) I feel safe”, he explained. In Ethiopian society sharing meals is socially important, and non-participation may have serious social consequences.

Micro-Conflicts with Big Consequences

Renewal - Social Exclusion

As we have seen above there are several accounts of people who had to leave their home place because of the harm done by others. Some people stay away from family and home community for many years. Many start living in a holy water healing centre or near one. There is a perception that the evil spirits directed towards someone may turn and hurt the initiator of the harmful act if the initiator does not redo the *yäsäw ʾəǧ*. Even if you are better or cured of the symptoms, they may reappear. This is more likely if the one who was attacked practices his or her religion strictly. One male informant explained it like this:

At the same time if people, who do such bad things to others, do not return to God through confession, the *dəgəmt* they prepared for others will hurt them. Especially they will make the renewal if they feel like the person they want to hurt again is walking on the path of God. In addition, there is another thing related to the *dəgəmt*. If a person who was affected by it gets healed very fast they believe that it will hurt the person who tried to hurt that innocent individual by masterminding this *dəgəmt* and bad work.²⁶

Lifelong Healing Process

For the individual who has become a victim of *yäsäw ʾəǧ*, there is usually no easy way out, but if there is a way out, it is by devoting oneself to the “true faith” by practising what is understood as right. The informants who have told me in depth about their story of disease and misery have spent at least one year sorting things out. For several of them it is a life time process. Intense treatment with holy water combined with prayer, fasting, prostrations and other kinds of healing material like incense, ashes, and holy oil, is what most informants, both lay and clergy, describe as the way to good health. Many informants say that the spirits cannot resist when the possessed practice intensively. In the end the spirit will shout “It burns me, I cannot take it anymore”.

The treatment does not stop once the healing is assumed complete. Several informants say that they have to be dedicated and go to a holy water healing centre on a regular basis in order to stay well, and once they stop the religious practices they get worse. People say that they are healed, but that they are trying to be even better by continuing the treatment; or they feel that they need to continue out of fear of falling ill again. Paradoxically there are also many accounts of people getting ill once they start practising their religion more seriously. This paradox reflects the perception that Ethiopian Orthodox believers have of living in a constant struggle between good and

²⁶ Interview conducted 31.5.2016 in Addis Ababa.

evil. This conflict escalates in what they perceive to be a rapidly changing world in the eighth, and last, millennium.

Making Sense of “Modernity”: The End of Time

According to the EOC we are currently in the year 7508.²⁷ This is first and foremost based on the description of the apocalypse in the Revelations of John, but there are additional books used by Ethiopian Orthodox Christians that are not part of the Bible that further describe this last millennium²⁸. Informants mention the symptoms of the end of time as the increase of war, fighting between individuals, lack of love, broken marriages, envy, violence, sexual abuse, natural disasters and the like, and in general these are signs that the fight between good and evil is intensified. The practices of harming and healing take place within the EOC and are consequently influenced by the Ethiopian Orthodox worldview. Christian beliefs and practices are at the same time intertwined with biomedicine and what may be called traditional beliefs and practices more independent of Christianity. Within this framework people explain the fact that they become sick and they search for healing at holy water healing places in the EOC. The *yäsäw ʾəǧ* is also a symptom of this fight between good and evil. There are several things that you can do and must do in order to stay closer to God, so that you may not be harmed by others. The negative effect of the *yäsäw ʾəǧ* usually comes as a disease. It prevents you from doing what you would normally do, and hinders development and success. There is a perception that as Ethiopian Orthodox believers they are caught in the middle of a fight between good and evil, and people experience this in their everyday life. This fight is intensified as we are at the end of time. Even though witchcraft and magic, practices similar to *yäsäw ʾəǧ*, have been rife throughout history in most cultures, the claimed increase of the practices is in Addis Ababa explained framed in ideas concerning the end of time and the so called eighth millennium.

Witchcraft, Sorcery and Magic

The religious practices described above are similar to witchcraft and magical beliefs and practices we find in other cultures. In African countries these have had and have a great impact on people’s lives, and witchcraft, sorcery and magic are practices that have been debated for decades, most significantly starting from Evans-Pritchard’s work among the Azande in Sudan (Evans-Pritchard 1937). He makes the distinction between witch/witchcraft with inherent supra-normal powers and sorcerers who use techniques or “medicines” to harm others (Evans-Pritchard 1937). The distinction between witchcraft and sorcery is only sometimes applicable, and these phenomena have to be studied according to their local context (Moore and Sanders 2001). Witchcraft and magic in African religions and belief systems contain the notion that people are able to bring misfortune, disease and death upon others by the help of sorcerers, and try to interfere with other people’s success (Haram and Yamba 2009). Envy or jealousy is an important driving force in this and this has to do with the concept of limited good, which has as its consequence that if someone is rich, someone else is not (Bowie 2006). These forces are

²⁷ The age of the earth is 5500 years before Christ and according to the Ethiopian calendar it is in 2016 the year 2008, which makes 7508 years.

²⁸ There are several books describing the end of time, among them are *Mänəgädə’e Sämayə*, and *Fäkarä Yäsusə*. These books are published locally in Amharic.

ambiguous and can also be used in the opposite way, to ensure success, protect and reinforce authority (Geschiere 1997).

Research on witchcraft in other African countries show that witchcraft practices are symptoms of developments in society, and increase during times of change, increased competition and social insecurity and as a reaction to modernity (Geschiere 1997, Moore and Sanders 2001, Haram and Yamba 2009, Comaroff and Comaroff 1993). Others argue that witchcraft or sorcery and the magic that is performed more essentially has to do with relationships and social and psychological security (Westerlund 2006). That is to say that these phenomena increase in times of greater anxiety. Comparative perspectives from other African countries, where research shows that there is a shift from religious to human agents of disease and that witchery, as David Westerlund argues, is rapidly increasing hand in hand with modern changes (Westerlund 2006). According to Westerlund among the common reasons for disease in African religions is what he calls human causation of disease (Westerlund 2006). Mary Douglas in her more general theories suggests problems of human causation of misfortune are likely to be marginal among peoples with sparse and irregular social contacts (Douglas 2003). Westerlund argues that in cultures in which the emphasis on ascribed relationships has changed into a social system of achieved relationships are those where human causation increases. Those who hurt you are normally people who know you and they may be people who are very close to you, but the relationship is achieved in some way, rather than ascribed, as for instance are relationships between family members of full blood. In Addis Ababa life styles and relationships are changing. Informants in this study mention both social and psychological reasons to what they claim to be an increased prevalence of *yäsäw ʾəǧ*. It is safe to suggest that this could be considered to contribute to the frequent reports of *yäsäw ʾəǧ* in contemporary Addis Ababa in line with analysis from other contexts, such as witchcraft prevalence in other African countries.

But Ethiopian Orthodox Christians place the developments they find characteristic of modernity within the end of time-concept, and thus find meaning in what is going on. On a societal level they interpret what is going on in the eight millennium discourse, and believe that what is unfolding is simply what is supposed to happen during this time as the world is near the end. On a more personal level people also express thankfulness towards the person who has harmed them because that made them start seeking a true faith and a life closer to God.

Conclusion

People in Addis Ababa express that they go through a period where much of the society they used to know is changing. In this environment informants claim that there are more people harmed by *yäsäw ʾəǧ*, similar to what is found in other African cultures. We do not have the evidence to measure to what degree there are more conflicts or increase of *yäsäw ʾəǧ* now than, for instance, fifteen years ago or earlier. However, informants talk about an increase of aggressive magic and conflicts related to this, and that many people show symptoms of spirit possession at holy water healing centres. This is expressed as part of the discourse that concerns the change that they experience. This article suggests that these micro level conflicts and the idea of an intensified conflict between good and evil reflect the changes on a macro level that have severe consequences for people who suffer from lives falling apart. Still, within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, there is a way of handling the misery and the insecurity of *yäsäw ʾəǧ*. The afflicted can spend time

at holy water healing centres and, rather than suffer from social exclusion, can be part of a healing process within the church. This is one way of dealing with the rapidly changing, insecure and dangerous world and it is made possible with the framework of Christian beliefs of the good-evil dualism and the end of time. In this way people re-establish a safe and meaningful life and world order.

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