



The Faraqasa indigenous pilgrimage center: History and ritual practices.



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Thesis Submitted in partial fulfilment for the Degree
Master of Philosophy in Indigenous Studies
Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tromsø
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Abstract

The Faraqasa indigenous pilgrimage center is one of the most popular pilgrimage centers in Ethiopia. It was founded by a woman named Ayyo Momina in the first quarter of the twentieth century and it is situated at a place called Faraqasa, in Arsi zone of the Oromia region in Ethiopia. It is important to study this institution since it shades light on one of the indigenous beliefs and practices in Ethiopia. Having said this, how did this indigenous pilgrimage center come to such dominance in Ethiopia? What are the factors that contributed to this? In order to answer these questions, a fieldwork has been conducted and existing literatures has been researched. There are some reasons that contributed a lot to the coming into dominance of the Faraqasa pilgrimage center in Ethiopia. These are, firstly, the belief in the spiritual power of the leaders of the center. They are believed to have possessed supernatural powers of healing the sick and performing various miracles. Secondly, the belief that taking part in ritual ceremonies at Faraqasa is one method of getting relief from these worldly problems, such as physical and psychological illnesses. The practices at the Faraqasa pilgrimage center demonstrate the tolerance that exists among some adherents of different religious, ethnic, linguistic, and political backgrounds in Ethiopia. Hence, this work is believed to increase peoples' awareness of the values of tolerance and understanding.

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1. Research objective

This thesis, “The Faraqasa¹ indigenous pilgrimage center: History and ritual practices”, attempts to explore how the Faraqasa indigenous pilgrimage center came to regional dominance in Ethiopia and discusses the various ritual ceremonies and healing methods practiced. It is situated at a place called Faraqasa in Arsi zone of the region of Oromia in Ethiopia, situated 22 Kms to the northeast of Abbomsa, the capital of Merti *Woreda*², and 225 Kms south east of Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia.

The Faraqasa pilgrimage center was established by a certain woman, affectionately called *Ayyo*³ Momina, in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Her early life and religious background is controversial, and an attempt will be made to look into the various perspectives of the life and deeds of this controversial and significant woman, who died in 1929. After her death, the cult she founded flourished under the guidance of her closest followers and then her descendants. Despite becoming a prominent pilgrimage center, the center has faced various challenges, even since the time of Momina. Investigating these challenges and their causes will be dealt in the thesis. The pilgrimage center was not, however, of spiritual use only. What other functions does the center have for the surrounding society?

However, the primary and fundamental function of the Faraqasa pilgrimage center is spiritual. Pilgrims flock to Faraqasa at various periods to take part in a number of ritual ceremonies, some of which are annual while others are not. What are the fundamental characteristics of pilgrimages to Faraqasa? What are the driving forces behind this pilgrimage compared with other types of pilgrimages in Ethiopia? What made the Faraqasa pilgrimage center unique? Which periods of the year attract large number of pilgrims? What are the basic events that take place during the major pilgrimages? What is the justification for taking part in the spiritual ceremonies? One of the main practices during the major pilgrimages at Faraqasa was the handing over of votive gifts for wishes claimed to have been fulfilled, as well as for wishes to be fulfilled. What is the belief behind votive offerings? What do pilgrims expect in return? What are the things given as an offering? These are some of the issues that the thesis tries to address.

¹ It can also be spelled as Fereqesa, Farakasa, and Ferekesa.

² *Woreda* (also spelled *wereda*) is an administrative sub-division, or local government of Ethiopia, equivalent to a district. *Woredas* are composed of a number of *Kebele*, or neighborhood associations, which are the smallest unit of local government in Ethiopia. *Woredas* are typically collected together into zones, which form a *kilil* (Regional administration).

³ *Ayyo* is an Oromo honorary terming with an equivalent meaning of ‘mother.’

1.2. Research rationale

Why study the Faraqasa pilgrimage center? The Faraqasa pilgrimage center can be called an indigenous institution mainly because of its accommodating nature, its local development, and the indigenous nature of some of the rituals and healings practiced at the center. What is most fascinating about the Faraqasa pilgrimage center is that it is probably the only place in Ethiopia, if not in the world where the followers of the two universalistic and often competitive religions of Islam and Christianity meet together to venerate one belief. It is common to see Christians going to church and Muslims going to the mosque, but not both attending to a church or mosque together. The Faraqasa pilgrimage center is, however, not bound to religious, ethnic, linguistic, and political boundaries. It is this typical characteristic of the center that fascinated me and made me decide to study it. I found it necessary to increase people's awareness about this center as it suggests harmony and tolerance among the followers of different, and often rival religious groups.

1.3. Organization of the paper

The paper is divided into six chapters. The first chapter situates the Faraqasa pilgrimage center in Ethiopia. The second chapter elaborates issues related with the field work, the methodologies, and the challenges that I faced with regard to implementing the methodologies. This chapter also gives a brief description on my return to Ethiopia. It also deals with the methodologies that I employed. Some of them are participant observation, interviews, archival studies, library works, and taking still pictures. I tried to diversify the methodologies as each of them has their own specific advantages and circumstances in which they have to be employed. The last part of this chapter gives a brief description of the methodological challenges faced during the actual fieldwork and other aspects as well.

In the third chapter, the foundation for the topic under discussion will be laid. An attempt will be made to define the very concept of pilgrimages, the characteristics of pilgrimages, the motives for pilgrimages, describe the various types of pilgrimages that exist in Ethiopia and explain how the Faraqasa pilgrimage center differs from other pilgrimage centers. I also give a general overview of pilgrimages in Ethiopia and issues related to the study of pilgrimages in Ethiopia.

The fourth chapter deals with the background of the Faraqasa pilgrimage center and its founder, *Ayyo Momina*. I investigate the various controversial issues surrounding the origin, early life and career of *Ayyo Momina*. I will also look at the factors for the arrival of *Ayyo Momina* in *Arsi*, the establishment of Faraqasa as the principal pilgrimage center, and the development of the center after the death of *Ayyo Momina* and during her successors. Next, I discuss various challenges the pilgrimage center, the leaders, and also the worshippers encountered through time. Attempts

will be made to discuss the social significance of the pilgrimage other than its use as a spiritual center.

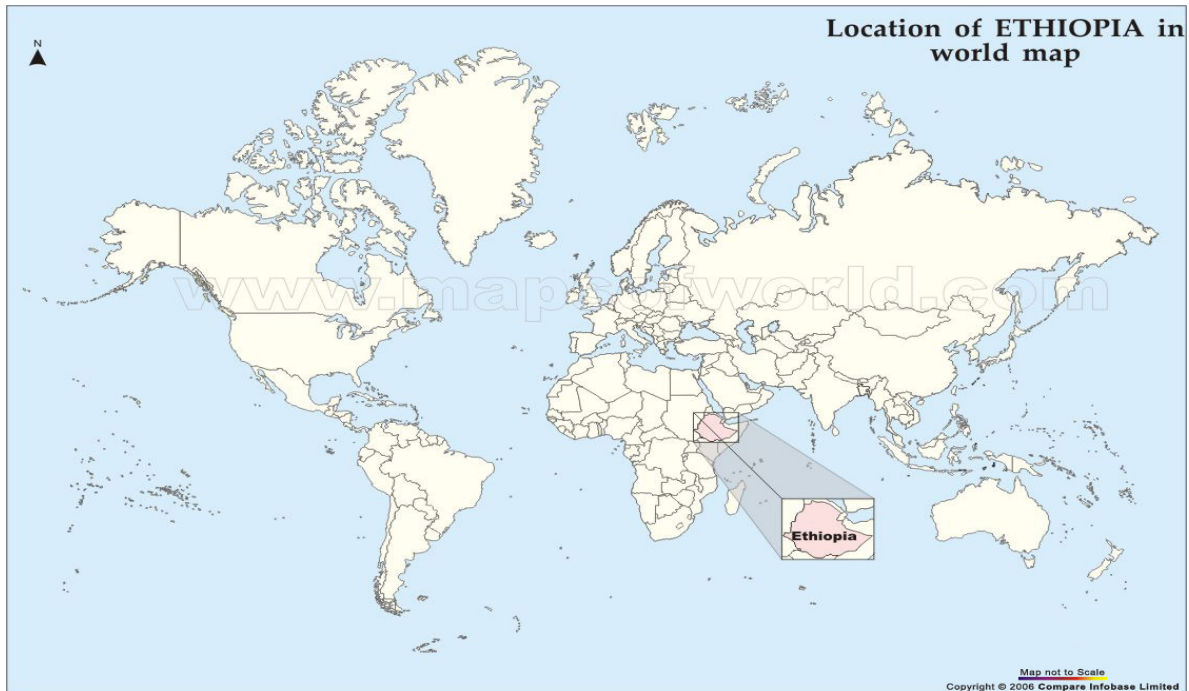
The fifth chapter addresses the various ritual ceremonies at the center such as the *Mawlid*, *Wadaja*, and *Arhibu* ceremonies. It also deals with the various healing methods, such as traditional medicines and the zar possession cult as practiced at the center. The final chapter summarizes the main points discussed in the preceding chapters.

This thesis is a result of a multi-disciplinary approach to the topic under discussion. The approaches used are mainly historical, anthropological and ethnographic. Hence, the third and the fourth chapter are the results mainly of a historical investigation, while the fifth chapter, which deals with the various ritual ceremonies and healing methods, is the outcome of predominantly anthropological study and ethnographic explanation. The data is collected mainly through fieldwork in Ethiopia from the first week of May to mid July 2006 and also from literature relevant to the topic under discussion. The literatures that I read are not only limited to topics in Ethiopia but rather, I have tried to find out if there are similar trends in the neighbouring countries such as Sudan, and even Egypt.

1.4. Situating the Faraqasa pilgrimage center in Ethiopia

In this section, I will provide some facts about the country, the zone, the region, and the area where the Faraqasa pilgrimage center is located.

Ethiopia is an old country situated in north- east Africa, generally called the Horn of Africa, as a result of the horn-shaped tip of that part of Africa projected in to the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. It is bordered by Eritrea to the north and north-east, Djibouti to the east, Somalia to the south-east, Kenya to the south, and Sudan to the west. Ethiopia has long been known as “Abyssinia” to the out side world. This name was probably originated from “Habashat”, one of the inhabitants of the area in the pre-Christian period (Bahru 2001:1). The term Ethiopia has its root in Greek language and it was used to refer to that part of Africa to the south of Egypt in the classical period and “the first known specific application of the term to the Ethiopian region is found in the Greek version of a trilingual inscription of the time of Ezana, the Aksumite king who introduced Christianity in to Ethiopia towards the middle of the fourth century.” (Bahru 2001: 1).



Map: Location of Ethiopia in world map⁴.

Modern Ethiopia is situated between 33 and 48 degree East longitudes and 3 and 15 degree North latitudes. Even if the country is situated close to the equator, the country in general is not a typical tropical country thanks to the elevated character of its highlands, which rise to more than 1,500 meters above sea level. This gives it a relatively cooler climate.

Ethiopia is the second in terms of population in Africa. It is the oldest independent African country and the second oldest official Christian state in the world after Armenia. It has been a melting pot between the civilizations of North Africa, the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa for a very long time. What makes Ethiopia unique among African countries is that it was never colonized throughout the “Scramble for Africa”, maintaining its independence, except for a brief period when it was under Italian occupation during the period 1936-41. However, even then, Ethiopia was not colonized, as the Italians only occupied some important towns and routes. Hence, the Italian period was regarded an "occupation" and not as colonial rule.⁵

Before 1996 Ethiopia was divided into 13 provinces, many of which on historical bases. Ethiopia now has a tiered government system consisting of a federal government, ethnically-based regional states, zones, *woredas*, and *kebele*.⁶

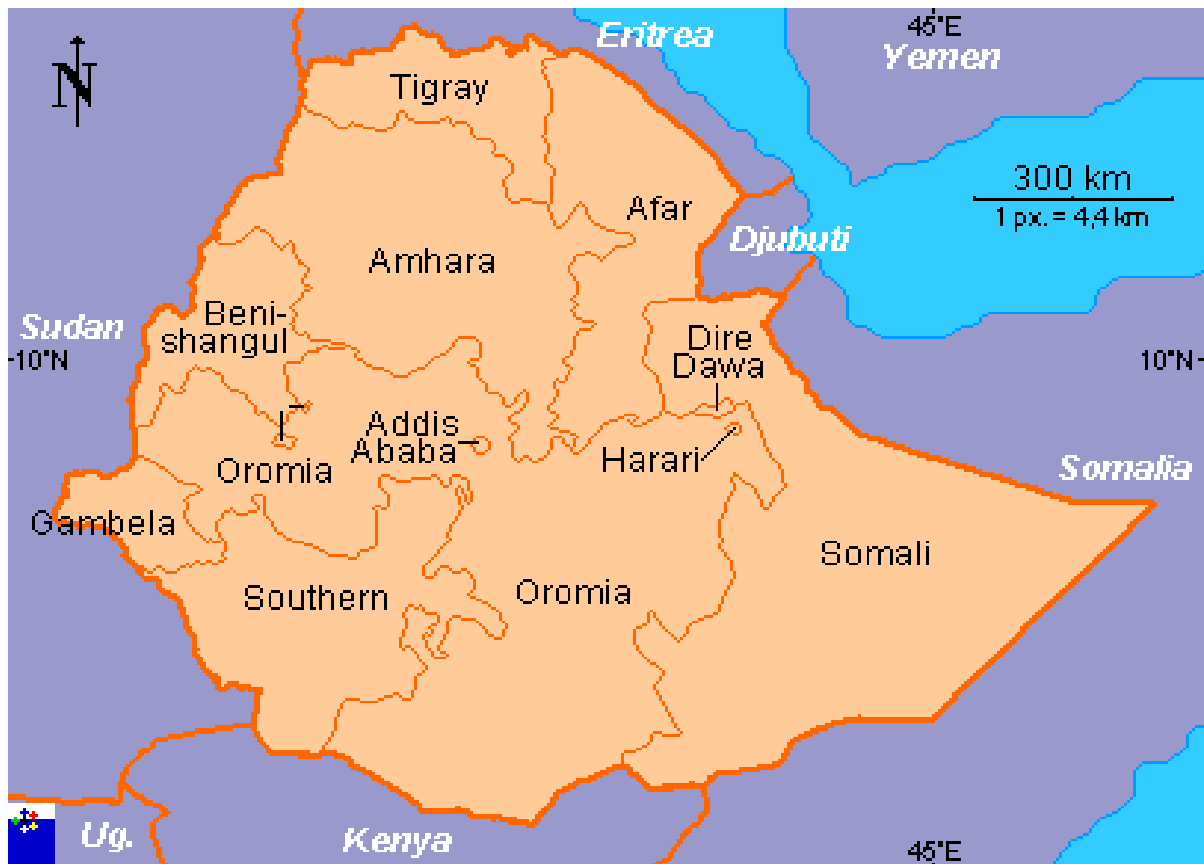
⁴Available at <http://www.mapsofworld.com/ethiopia/ethiopia-location-map.html>

⁵ Available at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopia>

⁶ A *kebele* is the smallest administrative unit of Ethiopia similar to a ward, neighborhood, or a localized and delimited group of people.

Ethiopia is divided into 9 ethnically-based administrative regions (*kililoch*, sing. *kilil*), and subdivided into 68 zones and two chartered cities (*astedader akababiwoch*, sing. *astedader akababi*): Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa. It is further subdivided into 550 *woredas* and six special *woredas*. The special *woredas* are part of a zone but they function as autonomous entities.

The constitution assigns extensive power to regional states that can establish their own government and democracy according to the federal government's constitution. Each region has its apex regional council where members are directly elected to represent the districts, and the council has legislative and executive power to direct internal affairs of the regions. Article 39 of the Ethiopian Constitution further gives every regional state the right to secede from Ethiopia. There is debate; however, as to how much of the power guaranteed in the constitution is actually given to the states. The councils implement their mandate through an executive committee and regional sectoral bureaus. Such elaborate structure of council, executive, public institutions is replicated to the next level (*woreda*)⁷.



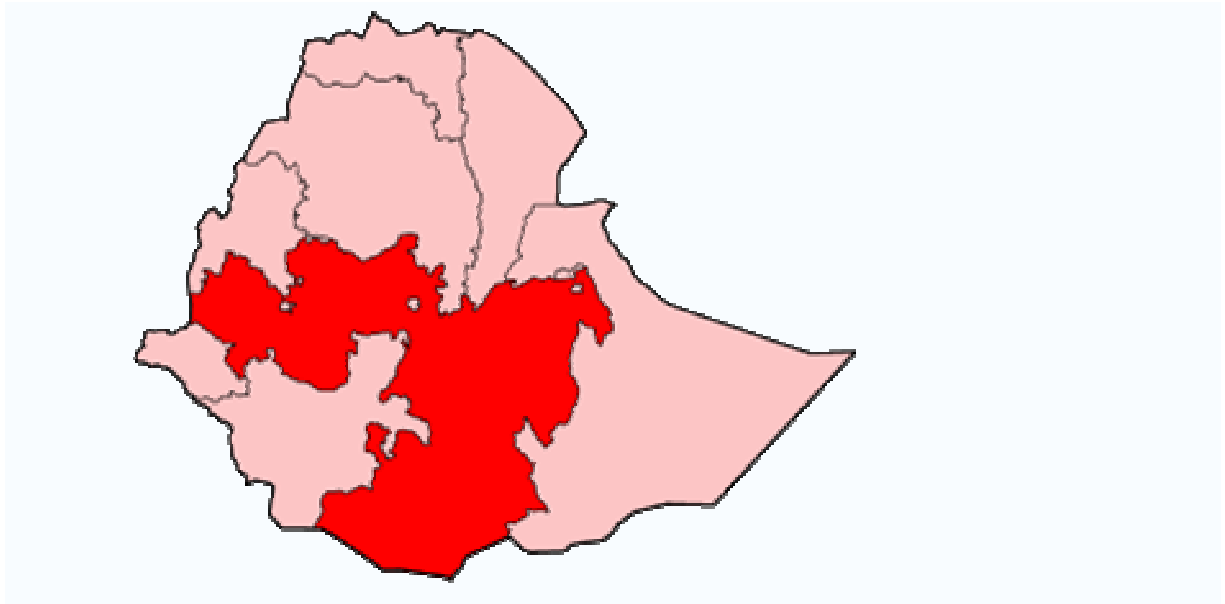
Map: Regional divisions of Ethiopia⁸.

⁷ Available at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopia>

⁸ Available at [http://fotw.net/flags/et\(.html](http://fotw.net/flags/et(.html)

The regions and chartered cities of Ethiopia numbered alphabetically are:

1. Addis Ababa (chartered city)
2. Afar
3. Amhara
4. Benishangul-Gumuz
5. Dire-Dawa (chartered city)
6. Gambella
7. Harari
8. Oromia
9. Somali
10. Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Region
11. Tigray



Map of Ethiopia highlighting the Oromia region⁹

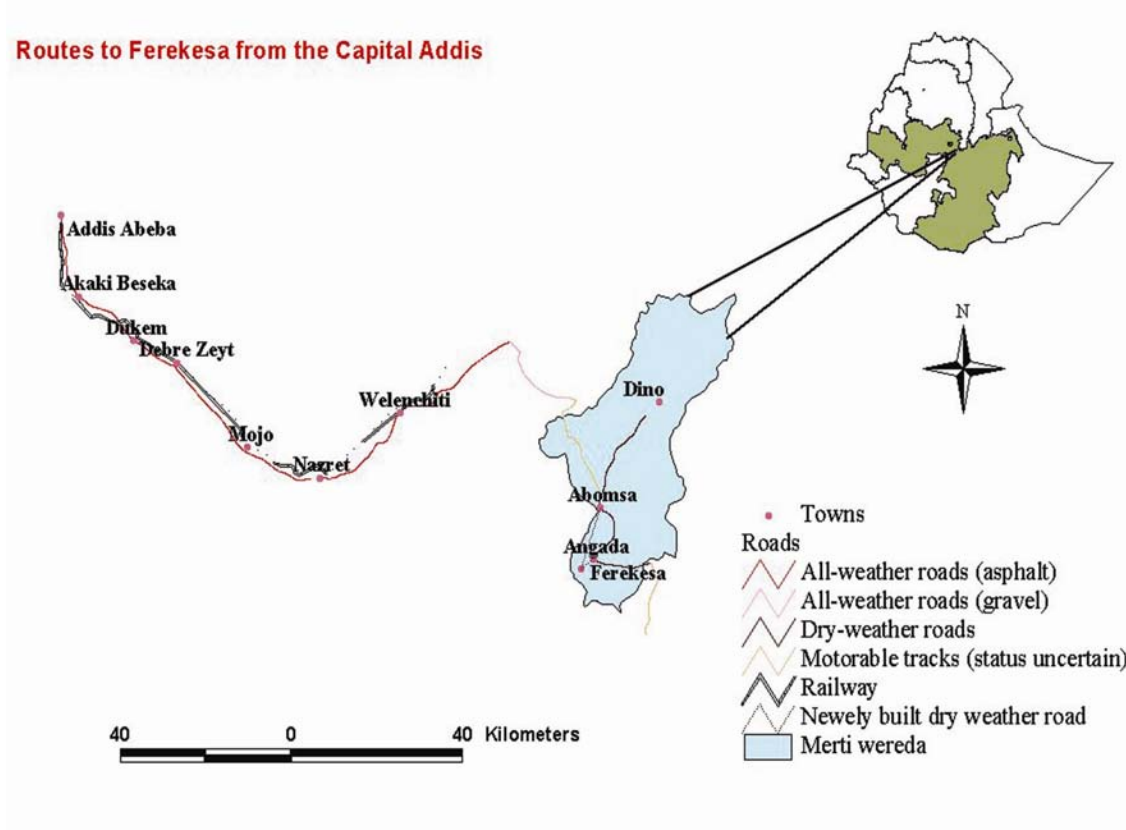
⁹ Available at http://encycl.opentopia.com/term/Oromia_Region



Picture: Some remnants of the dense forest around Faraqasa.

The village is located 22 kms southwest of Abbomsa, the capital of Merti *woreda*, and which is the nearest big town on the way to the pilgrimage center. Walking all the rugged rural way from Abbomsa to Faraqasa is one of the three possible means to get to Faraqasa. The other possibility is taking a bus to Angada, the second neighboring town to Faraqasa and then either walking for 1 ½ hour or hiring pack animals. The other choice is using a vehicle along the newly paved seasonal road that directly joins Faraqasa to Abbomsa. This is actually the most expensive of all choices, especially during the major pilgrimages; people are required to pay 20 to 30 birr for a mere 18 kilometers drive. The newly cleared road crossing various villages is good news for the local people as it brings prospects like access to modern transport and ease of crossing river Arba that used to inflict danger on animals and people during the rainy season with the absence of the newly constructed bridge.

Routes to Ferekesa from the Capital Addis



Routes from the capital city, Addis Ababa to Faraqasa.¹⁰

¹⁰ Available at <http://www.aau.edu.et/webnews/showbgstory.php?id=96>



Picture: The only and the “newly built” road to Faraqasa.

As June and July are two of the three rainy months in Ethiopia, the road is not used frequently. As a result, most of the time, people opt to walk or use pack animals such as horses and mules. When it is raining, walking is pretty tough as the path became very muddy. Hence, I rented a horse together with a guide for most of my visits to the pilgrimage center.



A tired pilgrim on her way to Faraqasa.



Picture: The author on horse back on his way to Faraqasa.

In the next chapter, I will describe the situation after my return to Ethiopia, the methodologies I employed during the fieldwork and reflect on the challenges that I faced applying a particular methodology, and some of the solutions that I used to overcome, or at least minimize the challenges.

Chapter Two

Field Work. Preparation, methodologies, and working in the field

2.1. Returning home

I was born and raised in Ethiopia, and am an Ethiopian citizen. We may thus say that I returned home to conduct my fieldwork, although I am not from Faraqasa, where I conducted the main research. Doing fieldwork in a foreign country is often discussed in anthropological method. Some attention is also given to studying ones own society. Here, I wish to address some issues related to moving between cultures, between studying abroad, and returning home for field research. I think this is important because of the way it affects the study. What was the expectation of the society on my return home? Were things the same after my return from Norway? What are the benefits that I got and the shortcomings that I faced when I conducted my research among my own society?

In Ethiopia, there is a viable tradition of welcoming someone who stayed away from the home town for a relatively longer time. Since I was away for about ten months, I had to pass through this procedure. I stayed at home meeting friends and relatives for one week. Many people who knew my parents also came to see me and congratulate my parents on my safe arrival. During this time, I had to answer many questions of how life had been in Europe. Everybody asked questions from his own perspective, which I had to reply patiently. As I am from that same community, I know the consequences of failing to answer and satisfy peoples' curiosity. Failure to do this would let the community brand me as a different person, being arrogant, than they actually knew a year ago. Some might even have thought that I was being arrogant looking down on them.

Yet, even if I tried hard to eliminate the above dangers, the first few days were uneasy for me. I found myself in cultural shock. For instance, during my stay in Norway, I had almost forgotten the tradition of shaking someone's hand and also giving hugs, as these customs are almost non-existent in Norway. However, in Ethiopia, failing to do this is a sign of arrogance and I had to try hard not to forget shaking hands and giving hugs for all who came to visit me. After the first couple of days, it became very easy to practice my original cultural way of greeting.

My success in attempting to keep and practice the norms of my community helped me get good response from the people. It became very easy to contact people and they were very open in their approach with me. Finally, some even dared to comment that I am just like the old days in Ethiopia-communicative, respectful, humble, and unchanged by life in the west.

This first week also gave me the chance to think of people who might help me, places where I might get information and list making telephone contacts with my possible interviewees. I will first try to explain my position in relation to my interviewees. This ultimately leads us to the

discussion on the issue of the position of the researcher as an insider/ outsider. I am more of an insider in relation to my interviewees. This position provided me with its own unique opportunities and constraints.

First, I will discuss the advantages that I got out of my position as an insider researcher. I was born and grew up in a relatively close proximity to the pilgrimage center and the surrounding areas. As a result, I have direct acquaintances to most of my informants and sometimes indirect acquaintances through my parents and relatives or through the relatives of my informants. I also have more or less a common culture with my interviewees and this provided me a favorable condition for gaining access, develop a relative trust, ask purposeful questions and reaching reasonable understanding. It also provided me with a mutually perceived common identity with my interviewees, which further improve trust and transparency throughout most of the project process. Especially at the start of my project, my insider status was found to be advantageous. It paved me the path for easy access to the society, knowing the nature of the language and how to forward critical questions without offending my interviewees. As a result, I had a long list of potential interviewees suggested by acquaintances.

My cultural bond with most of my interviewees helped me easily understand and grasp much of the information they provided me. Schutz states that,

The member of the in-group looks in one single glance through the normal social situations occurring to him and...he catches immediately the ready-made recipe appropriate to its solutions... For those who have grown up within the cultural pattern, not only the recipes and their efficiency but also the typical and anonymous attitudes required by them are an unquestioned 'matter of course' which gives them both security and assurance (Schutz 1976: 108).

Since I share the social world of my interviewees and the community at large, it helped me escape the likelihood of facing any significant "culture shock or disorientation" (Hockey 1993: 119). For instance, being member of the society, I can talk the language and I understand the culture. I know what to ask and how to ask. I was also able to get some important and confidential information as a result of my insider position.

While my insider position somehow gave me the opportunity for affiliation, trust, and easy access, it also placed me in the less powerful condition as a young man among my elder interviewees. For instance, one of my older informants told me about one miracle which is claimed to be performed by the founder of the pilgrimage center. I could not really believe it and I asked him about his opinion. Then he told me that it is only people with his age that understand, know and believe things like the above case and not the young like me.

I have more or less succeeded in avoiding other possible problems which could result from the inside status of the researcher. My extensive reading on methodology before I left for the field work was crucial. The potential problem that could have emerged as a result of my position, instead, is to develop close contact with interviewees or the community under discussion. I have tried to maintain a short distance from my interviewees and the community. I was suspicious that if the participants knew I am familiar with the topic under discussion, they might have thought that I knew the issue completely and as a consequence withheld some information. Robson warns the insider researcher against “preconceptions about issues and solutions” (2002: 535). I have also tried not to stick to what I know most about the topic under discussion as this might indulge me to approach various conditions with assumptions related to the group. It is better to take a general view of the situation at the ground (Senge 1998: 61).

Sherman and Webb suggested the idea of maintaining a very close contact with informants and groups under discussion “as nearly as possible as its participants live it” (1988: P.121). But I decided against doing so in case it had an implication on my objectivity as it is stated below,

...establishing close rapport may create problems for the research as the researcher may lose his or her distance and objectivity, over-identify with the individual or group under study, and ‘forgo the academic role’” (quoted in Hubbard *et al*, 2001:120)

By doing so, I have managed to get objective data on the topic under discussion. By keeping a normal relationship with my informants, I have kept myself free of sympathizing with them, which could have affected my objectivity and compromised my profession.

2.2. Methodologies employed

In this section, I will describe the methodologies I used for the writing of the thesis. What are the basic methodologies that I used? What are the justifications and rewards of opting to a particular methodology?

I have used various types of methodological approaches in my project. Each method that I used helped me show somewhat different facets of the same veracity. Berg states that “By combining several lines of sight, researchers obtain a better, more substantive picture of reality; a richer, more complete array of symbols and theoretical concepts; and a means of verifying many of these elements” (Berg 2004: 5). The Nachmias’ also strongly agree on the issue of diversifying our research methodology instead of sticking to only one or two types of methodologies. They aptly stated that it is advantageous to diversify our methodologies to test the same proposition whenever possible (Nachmias 1987: 207) Hence, for the purpose of looking at the pilgrimage center from

different angles, I have used five different types of methodologies. These are participant observation, interviews, archival studies, library works, and taking still pictures.

2.2.1. Participant observation

In this section, I will explain the various types of participant observation and the methodological advantage that can be obtained. Participant observation is the most important technique of data collection in contemporary field research. It refers to the procedure in which the researcher tries to get some sort of membership or close relationship to the group he or she is studying (Nachmias 1987: 289). Participant observation requires the researcher to take part in the social life of those he or she studies (Bryman 2004: 291). Participant observer engages himself or herself in a certain group for a certain period of time observing behavior, listening to what is said in conversations... and asking questions (Bryman 2004: 292). In the case of participant observations, the researcher can play some or all of the following four different roles. First, the researcher can be a complete participant. In this case, the researcher is an active member of the social setting he is studying and his real identity and agenda is not known to other members. Second, the researcher can be a participant-as-observer. Here, other members of the setting studied know the identity of the researcher and the researcher is immersed in regular interface in the daily lives of the people and the participants at the site. Third, the researcher can act as observer-as-participant. In this case, the researcher is mainly an interviewer. The researcher engages in some observations with little participation. Fourth, the researcher can be a complete observer. In this case the researcher is engaged in observation without involvement in the situation (Bryman 2004: 301).

During my field work, I had a role similar to the third group of researchers. I was mainly engaged in conducting interviews, combined with some observation, but engaged very little in participation as most of the activities there were new for me. I took part in some of the spiritual ceremonies at the pilgrimage center. I have attended and observed when pilgrims gave votive gifts as a result of their claimed fulfillment of their prayers, healing of patients, and the spiritual leader's mediation between the spirit and the possessed. I have also attended the coffee ceremony which was usually held three times a day. This helped me to meet some of the leaders of the different spiritual ceremonies. But it was not allowed to talk at all until the coffee ceremony was over.

The basic benefit of observation is its straightforwardness; it is easy for the researcher to study behavior in its entirety. The researcher may not ask people about their own or others behavior. He can directly observe them do and say things. This makes the gathering of first hand data possible (Nachmias 1987: 209). This method was particularly crucial during the various ritual ceremonies I attended. It was not possible to talk to worshippers while they were engaged in the

ceremony. Instead, observing the events was more convenient in order to keep track of events. Based on this observation I could later narrate it in my thesis.

2.2.2. Interviews

This section deals with interview as a research methodology. What are its benefits? How many types of interviews had been employed in the course of the field work? I have interviewed interviewees from diverse back grounds, from the leader of the pilgrimage center to his assistants who lead different ritual ceremonies, adherents of the center, and even people from other religions such as Christianity and Islam. I found this very important as it gives a diversified perspective about the center.

I have employed four different types of interview for this purpose. These are structured interview, semi-structured interview, unstructured interview, and group interview. Structured interview is the most commonly used methodology in survey research. It is the main data collection method in qualitative and quantitative research. The major purpose of interview in social research is to enable the researcher get all kinds of information including the interviewee's or others' behavior, values, attitudes, beliefs, and norms. Some preconditions of structured interviewing encompass asking questions per the interview list of questions, recording answers as responded by interviewees, presence of clear guidelines about the order of questions and the recording of replies (Bryman 2004: 109). I prepared questions, which I believed would enable me meet my research objectives and tried to follow them as much as possible. However, I kept developing the questions in the course of the interview because some of the answers given my interviewees gave birth to unexpected and further questions

In the case of semi-structured interview, however, the researcher has a set of general questions but he has the right to ask regardless of their sequence. He can also ask further questions based upon answers from the respondents (Bryman 2004: 113). When it comes to unstructured interview, the researcher has an interview guide or a list of issues that are typically covered. The interviewer uses informal way of questioning and he can vary the order and the wording of his questions from interview to interview (Bryman 2004: 113). In this regard, for instance, I used to ask some of the informants to tell me about any aspect of the topic under discussion.

2.2.3. Archival studies

I have also conducted archival studies in various administrative archives located in different parts of the country. Here I have managed to find some unpublished information pertinent to the pilgrimage center. Most of the archival resources I got deals with issues such as the relationship of the

pilgrimage center and its leaders with the various governments through time and the contributions of the pilgrimage center for the development of the area. The Merti woreda administration and the Merti woreda finance office archives are the archives where I got the information on the issues mentioned above.

2.2.4. Library works

I have also conducted library research to look for possible published sources which might help me to cross check and corroborate the sources which I got from my oral informants. Whatever scarce they are, the written sources on a topic related to the project are found in the library of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, situated at Addis Ababa University as well as the library at the University of Tromsø. I have also consulted other books written on related topics in neighboring countries, such as the Sudan and Egypt.

2.2.5. Taking still pictures

This section illustrates the methodological advantages of employing photography as one of my research methodologies. I decided to employ this method because pictures give a vivid view of the topic and its elements under discussion. Photographs help to construct and represent reality (Canal 2004: 36). Collier and Collier stated that "...the impartial process of the camera's vision...contain a sufficient number of nonverbal truths to allow the audience to reconstruct reality ... demonstrating the fact-presenting value of the camera" (Collier and Collier 1986: 8). They also further stated that "The nonverbal language of photorealism is a language that is most understood interculturally and cross-culturally. This fluency of recognition is the basic reason the camera can be of such importance..." (Collier and Collier 1986: 9).

I used photography as a method of documentation and illustration. This methodology proved to be crucial in representing the setting of the pilgrimage center, which is more expressive than the use of words. In describing the setting, words may not be as efficient as pictures as there is a tendency of overlooking some points while describing. For instance, I have taken still pictures of the various houses at the pilgrimage center, the pilgrims and other things which would have been difficult to express in words.

2.3. Methodological challenges and solutions

In this section, I will describe the various challenges that I faced while using the aforementioned research methodologies as well as the possible solutions I used to alleviate the shortcomings which might have resulted from the challenges.

Most of the time, I faced different challenges with regard to implementing the above methodologies. First, the mere fact that the project is concerned with religious beliefs and practices at a pilgrimage center is a major challenge. Many informants were reluctant in most cases to share their knowledge with me, and the devotees tend to exaggerate the significance of events and personalities. The various personnel at the pilgrimage center were also suspicious of the motive of my project. In both cases, I tried to overcome these problems by approaching them frequently through their relatives and friends. As the frequency of my visits increased, the communication barrier, which was usually caused by suspicion on their part, tended to disappear.

It was not easy to meet and talk to the spiritual leader who was also the great great grandson of the founder of the cult at the center. This was difficult despite his willingness to tell me whatever he knew about the history of the pilgrimage center and the various ritual ceremonies practiced. This difficulty arose by the very fact of his role at the center. He was constantly busy dealing with different issues, especially healing patients possessed with spirits from the evening until 4 or 5 in the morning. As a result, he spends most of the day sleeping. It was unthinkable for his attendants to try to wake him up. The only opportunity for me to speak to him was to wait until he woke up by himself. I solved this problem by visiting the center very frequently, especially on those days when there were not many pilgrims coming to seek his blessings and help.

Adjusting to local customs during participant observation can be hard. Together with a man who is very close to the spiritual leader, I was often invited to attend some of the spiritual ceremonies. These ceremonies usually took place in the evening, and sometimes they continued until 5 o'clock in the morning. In the houses where the various ceremonies took place, it was not allowed at all to sit with stretched legs, and it required a great deal of practice and experience to stay seated with folded legs for a longer time. To make things even more challenging, it was not allowed to leave the place in the middle of the ceremonies at all. As a result, sometimes I focused more on my pain instead of the ritual ceremonies. I tried to alleviate, at least minimize this problem by practicing sitting with folded legs.

Establishing contact with informants, and maintain contact can be difficult. In this case, there are two problems. The first was the difficulty to find well-informed informants in one geographical locality. Most of the informants lived in remote and often rural areas and it was almost impossible to meet them as they were involved in other social activities such as wedding, funerals, and mediating between families and groups who are not at peace. The other problem was different informants' conflicting account about the Faraqasa institution. Those who had affiliations with the center usually narrate positive things about it while others, especially "purist" Christians and

Muslims, tend to narrate in the opposing direction. For this reason, I have tried my best to cross check the narratives of the various informants and critically analyze the points of departure.

There were also some other problems at the early stage of the project in relation to interviewing. These were misunderstanding on the part of the interview and also memory problems on the part of the interviewees. I tried to solve these problems by creating a certain amount of order on the topic areas, so that my questions about them flow reasonably well and trying to use a language that is comprehensible and relevant to the people I was interviewing. I found group interviewing very crucial for interviewees with memory problems.

The other problem which exacerbated the problem that already prevailed in relation to oral accounts is the meager availability of published literature on the Faraqasa pilgrimage center. This made corroboration of the oral information very difficult. However, I have tried my best to make the best use of whatever available resources. In addition, I have read extensively on related topics in neighboring countries, such as Egypt and the Sudan. My readings therefore helped me to grasp some concepts about some of the spiritual ceremonies that took place at the center and helped me understand the underlying factors for the prevalence of similar ceremonies at different geographical localities.

Transportation also proved to be a big challenge during fieldwork. The road to Faraqasa cannot be used in the summer since it is an old walking path now used as a road for driving. In the summer it usually rains heavily in the area and the road become useless. The other option was walking or renting a horse. I was difficult to walk in the mud up the hill because it was very slippery. Then I decided to rent a horse. I have never mounted a horse back before and had to endure a great deal of pain in my two trips. As I used the horse more and more, it became fun instead of being a pain.

Looking for the scarce resources in various archives and libraries was challenging. The archives, especially at local levels were so disorganized that I had to spend a lot of time looking for information. Even if the personnel were willing to help me, they did not exactly know where they kept the documents I was looking for. They tried to find the right document for me but it took a great deal of their work time, and I had to step in and look for my self. I had to go through a bunch of dusty documents.

Taking still pictures presented its own challenge. Per request of the pilgrims, the center did not allow people to take picture of spiritual ceremonies. Worshippers tended to be shy when their picture was taken. Also, it was not also allowed to take pictures of some of the houses where important ritual activities were held. Despite all this I was allowed to take some pictures

To sum up, my fieldwork in my home country was an exciting, educational, as well as challenging experience. I have tried to solve the challenges that I faced in the field by using the aforementioned methods. It was also educational for me as I have gained a lot of personal experience and knowledge about the center. Even if I grew up in a small town only 22 kms away from the center, I did not have much knowledge about it. I believe that the final product of my project will shed some light on how an indigenous belief comes to dominance in Ethiopia.

Having seen this, we will look at the Faraqasa indigenous pilgrimage center, and relate it to such concepts as the definition, characteristics, motives, types and study of pilgrimages in Ethiopia.

Chapter Three

The study of pilgrimage in Ethiopia

In this chapter, I will discuss the Faraqasa pilgrimage center in relation to some general concepts such as definition, characteristics, motives, types and study of pilgrimage in Ethiopia and highlight its indigenous nature.

3.1. Definition of pilgrimage

In this section, the very term of pilgrimages will be defined as the topic under investigation is a pilgrimage center. But first, attempts will be made to shed some light on the very concept of pilgrimage in general, and in Ethiopia in particular. In general there seems to be a tendency of linking pilgrimages to religions of worldwide fame. When pilgrimage is mentioned, the first view that comes to one's mind is the travelling of Christians to Jerusalem, the flooding of Muslims to Mecca, and the wondering of the Buddhists in mountain roads. (ACF Newsource).¹¹ This is, however far from the truth. Stopford states that, pilgrimage has been practiced for thousands of years and has been a feature of every major religion and very many minor cults across the world. He points out that pilgrimage remains a popular practice today, and finds expression in both traditional religious and ostensibly secular spheres (1999: Introduction).

The view that pilgrimage exists in non-European contexts and that it is also a characteristic feature of every religion, including traditional religions, is shared by other writers as well. Webb aptly states that, pilgrimage is not a peculiarly Christian or European phenomenon, still less a peculiar medieval one. In one or another of its many shapes, it has been a feature of most of the world's religions, and its origins probably go back long before the written record. The apparently deep-seated human tendency to locate the holy at a distance from one's every day surroundings and to seek solutions to personal problems and the alleviation of suffering (or boredom) in a journey to such a place (2002: Introduction).

3.2. Characteristics of pilgrimages

In this section, we will look at the characteristics of pilgrimages. What are the defining characteristics that make pilgrimages unique from any other types of journeys? Pilgrimage, as religious phenomena is defined as a journey to a shrine or other sacred place undertaken to gain divine aid, as an act of thanksgiving or penance, or to demonstrate devotion.¹²

¹¹ Available at http://www.acfnewsource.org/religion/modern_pilgrimage.html

¹² Available at <http://www.britannica.com/ebc/article-9375272>

There are at least five major characters of pilgrimages which can be useful to demarcate the topic under discussion. First, we are basically talking about a journey. The separation from the usual area of residence constitutes pilgrimages. Second, the journey should be to some specified point of destination. Pilgrimages cannot be mere wonderings without a specific place of arrival. The point of arrival may be a shrine, residence of a cult leader, natural bodies such as a mountain, a tree, or a lake. Third pilgrimage events involve a particular date, period, or time during which pilgrims and other people travel to the site. Therefore, we may not consider sacred places where people travel to give presentations and gifts at any unspecified period, time or date as pilgrimage centers (Gesler 1998: 536). At Faraqasa, this fact was demonstrated by the fact that there are at least four major pilgrimage periods in year, which will be discussed later.

The ceremony connected to pilgrimages may be a single day, a few days, a specific week, a month or even a specific year, but the period must be defined temporarily. Fourth, the journey to the sacred place is not, at least in theory, for most pilgrims, for material benefits such as for commerce and food, but deliberately for spiritual purposes. Fifth, pilgrims in most cases involve groups of people instead of individuals. Pilgrims may travel individually, or in groups of different sizes, but large numbers of pilgrims have to come together for the events. These gatherings can include hundreds or thousands of people. As a result, we came up with a notion of a journey by a group of pilgrims to a specific destination, at a particular period of time and primarily for spiritual causes (Gesler 1998: 536).

It is also necessary to look into the social environments bounding pilgrimages. Pilgrimages are believed to produce tie among pilgrims. Social bonding is more boosted by the dissemination of religious concepts from the pilgrimage centers as believers return to their respective homes. Pilgrims came to the center from various places and different back grounds, which provide believers with a likely divisive local identity but the pilgrimage center usually helps to create a common identity (Gesler 1998: 536).

In general, religious centers have played a great social role since pilgrimages encouraged promotion of interests, paved the way for people to get to know other environments, customs, regions, and places.¹³

¹³ Jackowski, Antoni, and Soljan, Izabela, *Pilgrimages in world religions* available at http://sunday.niedziela.pl/artykul.php?nr=200409&dz=spoleczenstwo&id_art=00030

3.3. Motives for pilgrimages

In this part, we will look at the driving forces behind pilgrimages in Ethiopia. What are some of the fundamental reasons for people to take part in a pilgrimage? There are diversified motives for pilgrimage to various pilgrimage centres and even within one pilgrimage center. Not all pilgrims go on pilgrimage for the same reason. Even at a specific pilgrimage center it is possible to find people coming with various purposes and a single individual may travel on pilgrimage for a multitude of motives. The first motive for pilgrimages is that, in almost every religion of the world indicate a human aspiration for spiritual fulfilment. Since time immemorial, pilgrimage is a religious activity which made people travel for the sake of spiritual fulfilment and it is common to almost every religion. Every physical journey should have an element of spiritual element other wise a pilgrimage becomes “a vacation or an exotic diversion” (Osgood, Charles).¹⁴

Pankhurst also agrees that spiritual fulfilment is probably the main purpose of pilgrimage for many individuals and groups of people. Under certain circumstances, taking part in a pilgrimage changes the status of the pilgrim in the community. Sometimes, there is a belief that pilgrims bring blessings when they return from pilgrimages and this gives them a decisive role in their community. In various Islamic pilgrimages for instance, pilgrimage is considered as a life time spiritual fulfilment. Thus, pilgrimage can be regarded as rites of passages, especially when the pilgrim came from a distant place and if the travel has been strenuous. Similarly, in various Christian pilgrimages paying homage to the shrines is regarded as an act of devotion. Some pilgrims even claim that they go on pilgrimage as a result of some kind of inspiration after dreams and visions (1994: 947).

The second motive for pilgrimage is that, they can serve as an expression of group identity. The spiritual fulfilment in pilgrimage, discussed in the previous paragraph can be viewed as one feature of claiming group identity. In a study conducted in Ethiopia, pilgrimages can also be used as “occasions for the fulfilment of group rites of passages, such as age-set transitions and hand-over of spiritual power...” (Pankhurst 1994: 947-948).

The third motive to undertake journeys of pilgrimage is their use as faith healing centres. One of the basic factors for the triumph of any pilgrimage center is the healing power of the center, the event during the pilgrimages, the springs and also the spiritual leaders. Many pilgrimage centres have a *tabal*,¹⁵ holy water. In some cases, the source of the *tabal*, the holy spring, is situated down a hill at a long distance from the center and it is the task of individual or group of pilgrims to bring

¹⁴ Available at http://www.acfnewsresource.org/religion/modern_pilgrimage.html

¹⁵ *Tabal* is an Amharic word for a holy water, which is found in most of the pilgrimage centers. It is believed to have a curing function for various types of sicknesses ranging from headaches to intestinal parasites (Pankhurst 1994: 948).

the *tabal* to their needy relatives. Also, *emnat*,¹⁶ Amharic word for holy ash, is taken by pilgrims at all Christian pilgrimages for their sick relatives who drink it mixing it with water to alleviate their sickness (Pankhurst 1994: 948). This is perhaps the basic reason for significant number of pilgrims to flock to Faraqasa. Most of the pilgrims came to get relief from their physical or mental illnesses by drinking the holy water or using *emnat*.

There is also a belief that spiritual leaders at the various pilgrimage centres are vested with the power to heal sick pilgrims. For instance, *Ayyo Momina*, the founder of the pilgrimage center under discussion was believed to possess supernatural powers to the level of raising the dead. It is also a common feature of certain pilgrimage centres to attract people performing *zar*¹⁷ possession cults. Pankhurst further states that, “patron saints of pilgrimage centres are credited with performing miracles so that the blind see, the deaf hear, the disabled walk”. Faith healing is occasionally associated with conversion to another religion at pilgrimage centres (Pankhurst 1994: 948). For instance, at Faraqasa, the spiritual leaders since the time of *Momina* were believed to have possessed the power of healing various types of physical and mental illnesses, which will be discussed in the fifth chapter.

The fourth motive for pilgrimages is related with the idea of votive gifts. Under this ideology, we can observe the concept of reciprocal relationship between the supernatural and the individual. In this case, pilgrims promise to visit the shrine and bring votive gifts if their wishes are fulfilled and their problems solved. Some of the gifts offered for pilgrimage centres include food, cash, incense, candles, tapers, gold, butter, coffee, salt, paintings, umbrellas, etc. Pilgrims offer gifts not only to the center and its servants, but also to the large number of beggars who usually go to pilgrimage centres as a result of the tendency of pilgrims to be generous (Pankhurst 1994: 948-949).

The fifth motive to undertake pilgrimages is the issue of trade and extortion. Many people with business being their primary motive flock to pilgrimage centres during the major pilgrimages. Petty businessmen sell various types of commodities including food and drinks, bottled soft drinks, cigarettes, sweets, pens, matches, etc. but the most important commodities for sale at many pilgrimage centres are religious supplies such as religious literature, amulets, paintings, manuscripts, etc. and medicines. Retailers of traditional medicine such as incense, dried leaves, bark, and a variety of powdered roots are usual sights at many pilgrimage centres. The vast majority of the dealers however, also come for spiritual purposes. Pilgrimage centres and their events also

¹⁶ *Emnat* is a holy ash (Pankhurst 1994: 948) in Amharic. Informants state that it is obtained after burning incense.

¹⁷ *Zar* refers to the possession by the spirit as well as the ritual ceremonies. It is related with the whole experience of an individual possessed by spirits (Al-Adawi, *et al.*, 2001: 48, Natvig 1987: 670, Boddy 1989: 131, El Guindy and Schmais 1994: 107).

attract bandits and thieves. Thieves usually join the crowd and steal from pilgrims (Pankhurst 1994: 949). In fact, some of my informants mentioned that there were many instances when cars transporting pilgrims were stopped and robbed by bandits on their way to Faraqasa.

The sixth motive for pilgrimage is associated with recreation. This is especially the case when the center is found in proximity with towns and cities. People, usually the youth, which are couples and/or group of friends from the nearby towns and cities travel to pilgrimage sites as a kind of one day or weekend outing. The real motive of these groups of people is sightseeing with friends. They appreciate travelling to the caves and springs found at the sites (Pankhurst 1994: 950). This motive is, however, not significant at Faraqasa as there are no big towns or cities nearby. There are some people including journalists and foreigners who visit the pilgrimage center, especially during the major pilgrimages, without any purpose but to observe and recreate.

It is possible to find people with one or more of the above motives traveling to the Faraqasa pilgrimage center.

3.4. Types of pilgrimages in Ethiopia

Under this section, I will look at the different kinds of pilgrimages that exist in Ethiopia. There are many pilgrimage centers in Ethiopia. Some of these pilgrimage centers are confined to a single ethnic group only. A good example of this is the *Abba Muda* traditional Oromo pilgrimage. This pilgrimage attracts the Oromo from different political, regional, and ecological environments. The basic criterion of qualification to take part in this pilgrimage is to be a “pure” Oromo. This pilgrimage also alienates craft groups, slaves, Amharized Oromo, and hunters. There is a tendency of looking at the pilgrimage as “a contributing factor in the making and assertion of an Oromo ethnic identity (Pankhurst 1994: 937).

In the 19th century, however, the ethnic boundary of the pilgrimage retained its character of a purely Oromo nature, while the religious one disappeared. This was due to the association of the site with Sheikh Hussein’s site, a typical Muslim site in Ethiopia. There was a gradual change of adherence to the Muslim site until it surpassed the trans-Oromo *Abba Muda* pilgrimage center. However, groups like the Borana, Guji, and Gabbra, known as the “Southern Oromo”, continued to make pilgrimage to the *Abba Muda* site, which then became a crucial and unique ethnic identity of the above groups. Pankhurst states that, at the *Abba Muda* pilgrimage site, “sacrifices are performed and the pilgrimage involves blessings by spiritual leaders and are often the occasions for age-set transitions, and hand-over of spiritual power. Other than the Oromo, there are many ethnic groups who have their own shrines associated to their spiritual perception and identity (1994: 937-938).

Even if the above examples demonstrate that there are pilgrimage centers which are inclusive of only one group, there are some pilgrimages which cross political, religious, ethnic and linguistic boundaries. Donald Levine, in his book entitled, *Greater Ethiopia* made three explanations concerning pilgrimages: first, taking part in pilgrimages is a characteristic common to many societies in Ethiopia. He stated that “the very inclination to go on pilgrimage is a notable pan-Ethiopian trait. (1974: 50); second, the pilgrimages can be melting points for Ethiopians of different religious adherents. He observes that “Since both Islam and Christianity in Ethiopia have been highly syncretistic...their followers have not found it impossible to join in common religious observances...the major pilgrimages in Ethiopia provide a particularly dramatic vehicle for such communion” (1974: 44); third, pilgrimages can also bring people of diverse ethnic milieu together. (1974: 50).

Hence, these types of pilgrimages play a significant role as unifying institutions. In this regard, it is wise to consider Levin’s second and third proposition that pilgrimages in Ethiopia cut across religious and ethnic divisions, with regard to Turner’s assumption that pilgrimages can first develop on the basis of ethnic, cultural, or linguistic awareness but these precincts can be surpassed thanks to the natural spiritual integrative power of pilgrimages. Turner stated,

Any region possessing a certain cultural, linguistic or ethnic unity often corresponding also to an area of economic interdependence, tend to become at once a political unit and a pilgrimage catchment area. But since the *communitas* spirit presses always to universality and ever greater unity it often happens that pilgrimage catchment areas spread across political boundaries (1974: 179).

The explanation here is that, pilgrimages can be established on the basis of certain political, ethnic, or religious unit, but that as a result of the universalistic cohesive nature of pilgrimages, as mentioned by Turner, there is a possibility for pilgrimages spread and cross their boundaries. Turner, however, does not give any explanation about the conditions or situations in which such a circumstance emerges (1974: 209). The Faraqasa indigenous pilgrimage center is one of the best, if not the only, examples of the second category of pilgrimage centers, which cross different political boundaries.

When it comes to pilgrimages across political boundaries, we can identify three types of this category of pilgrimages. To begin with, there are people who cross international boundaries between two states for the sake of religious pilgrimages. The best example of this is the Borana who live in Kenya. They travel to the Ethiopian side of Borana land to visit spiritual leaders at the Borana ancestral shrines. The second category is where followers of a certain cult live in other nations forming their own faction and few of them came on religious pilgrimages to the original shrine. The shrine of Sheikh Hussein in Bale is the best example of this (Pankhurst 1994: 938). Eshetu states that pilgrims even came to pay their respect to the shrine from other countries such as

Somalia, Kenya, and even from Iraq (Eshetu 1973: 25). The third type is where the popularity of the pilgrimage center extends beyond the national territory drawing pilgrims from far places and other countries as well. The good example of this is the Faraqasa pilgrimage center in Arsi (Pankhurst 1994: 938). Some informants stated that pilgrims even came from the neighboring countries of Ethiopia, such as Sudan, Somalia, and even Yemen during the major pilgrimages.

Ethnically, there are situations where pilgrimages attract people of different ethnic milieu. There are two favorable conditions for this to happen. The first one is when there is a lucid religious feature in common and which surpasses ethnic differences (Pankhurst 1994: 939). For instance, Eshetu states that the shrine of Sheikh Hussein, situated in Bale zone of Oromia region attracts the different Oromo groups from various parts of the country. In addition, it also attracts other ethnic groups such as the Gurage, Sidama, Somali, and the Amhara (1973: 28). Braukamper also mentions the fact that many ethnic groups, such as the Oromo, the Somali, the Adare, and the Afar go to pilgrimages to many of the shrines of saints in the Harar plateau (1984: 156-157). The second condition for these pilgrimages crossing ethnic boundaries is where the pilgrimage is characterized in terms of loyalty to a syncretistic cult. The Faraqasa pilgrimage center belongs to this category where the pilgrims are loyal to *Ayyo Momina's* cult.

Pankhurst also recognizes that an important precondition for pilgrimages that take place crossing ethnic boundaries is a fluid nature of the religious identity and/or when the religious identity is characterized by loyalty to a syncretistic cult. The Faraqasa pilgrimage center is an important example of this type of pilgrimages. At Faraqasa, the cult leaders, first *Ayyo Momina* and then her grandson, Tayye, also known by the name Said Nur Ahmed changed between the two dominant religions, Christianity and Islam. In addition, they also appealed to both the Oromo and the Amhara in Arsi. The cult also appeals to peoples from the remaining parts of the country to a lesser extent. It is not possible to estimate the number of pilgrims from each ethnic group but the disparity in geographical location from the center probably contribute to the presence or absence in great number of pilgrims of one of the other ethnic groups (1994: 939). At Faraqasa, the majority of the pilgrims are from the Oromo ethnic group, since the majority of the inhabitants of the region, and the country for that matter, are the Oromo.

Pilgrimages can also cross religious boundaries. Pilgrimages crossing religious boundaries tend to be more usual than pilgrimages crossing ethnic and political boundaries. Two different apparently rival and competitive religious tendencies tend to be favorable to the emergence of pilgrimages crossing religious boundaries. The other situation for these types of pilgrimages is when a religion is usually accommodating and liberal, which is a case in both indigenous beliefs, Christianity and Islam. Here, there are cases when the indigenous beliefs are displaced by

Christianity and/or Islam. In such cases, relations between religions are usually complex. However, it is possible to identify a number of situations. First, one of the universalistic religions renovates the indigenous beliefs and displaces them, usually inheriting the surviving shrine and at times some of the previous practices. Second, the indigenous belief may survive integrating pilgrims who have a superficial or true adherence to one of the monotheist religions. There are also cases where two religions live side by side with some reciprocal influences. (Pankhurst 1994: 940-941).

The Faraqasa pilgrimage center belongs to a different category than the previously given explanations. In this case, a new cult comes into view which combines elements of several religious traditions even if one outweighs the other. Pankhurst aptly states that the Faraqasa pilgrimage center relies heavily on Islam. This reliance on Islam includes the veneration of the birthday of the Prophet [Mohammed], the use of words such as *masgid*,¹⁸ *qubba*,¹⁹ and *karama*²⁰ for spiritual power, the designation of Mumina as the spiritual leader, and donation of charity for pilgrims at the end of the month of Ramadan. The vocabulary used at the center is also influenced by Islamic expressions. The words *arhibu* as a gesture of welcoming the pilgrims, *wadaja* for religious gatherings, and *kaddami* for the attendants at the various ceremonies are good examples of this influence of Islamic vocabulary. The Faraqasa pilgrimage center, however, also assimilated some Christian elements. For instance, there are eight springs used as a holy water, seven of which are named after Christian saints²¹. In addition, the principal pilgrimage at the center is the anniversary of the death of Momina on the day of St. Gabriel in *Tiqimt* (1994: 942).²²

The incorporation of Christian and Muslim elements at the center can even be recognized from the family genealogy in which Tayye claimed that the founder of the center and his grandmother [Momina] had a Christian father who descended from Emperor Fasil²³ and a Muslim mother who descended from Ahmed *Gran*. The pilgrims are also composed of Muslims, Christians, and adherents of Oromo religious beliefs. At Faraqasa, it is also possible to observe some pagan practices which might probably be an influence from the Oromo beliefs long practiced in the area.

¹⁸ Pankhurst states that *Masgid* refers to the prayer houses in Islam as well as at the Faraqasa pilgrimage center (1994: 9429).

¹⁹ *Qubba* refers to the tomb of Momina at Faraqasa, which is now the center of the pilgrimage.

²⁰ *Karama* refers to some one's spiritual power (Pankhurst 1994: 942)

²¹ There are eight springs used as holy water. These are Abo, Michael, Gabriel, Kidane Mihret, Mariyam, Ghiorgis, and Amanuel, all named after Christian saints and the eighth one is named Zemzem. Even though there were springs at Faraqasa even before the advent of Momina, her followers claim that it was Ayyo Momina who converted the water into a holy water by her blessings and they also stated that the Zemzem spring gushed out after the arrival of Momina to Faraqasa.

²² The Ethiopian calendar (E.C.) differs from the Gregorian calendar by dating back seven or eight years. As the New Year in Ethiopia begins on the 11th of September (10th of September in a leap-year) the difference up to that date is eight years and after that date seven years. It has thirteen months and *Tiqimt* is the second month of the year.

²³ Also known as Emperor Fasiladas, was Emperor of Ethiopia from 1632-1667. He was the first Ethiopian emperor to establish a permanent capital city at Gondar in 1636. Before 1636 the emperors ruled the country from mobile camps.

For instance, Momina was referred to as *gifty*²⁴ Momina, an honorific term in Oromo language. Giant trees called *adbars* in the Amharic language are also smeared with butter and sacrifices are held under them. Then the blood combined with perfume was sprinkled around the shrine and the remaining was placed aside for the spirits. Hyenas were also given a feast not to attack the animals at the center (Pankhurst 1994: 942). I will return to this in detail when I discuss about ritual ceremonies and healing methods in chapter five.

There are three points which are crucial for many pilgrimages in Ethiopia. First, a character usually related with pilgrimages is the idea of symbolic exchange, in which pilgrims bring votive gifts and in return, receive blessings and at times symbolic gifts in the form of holy water, ash, incense, and plants. Usually, this goes hand in hand with the principle of votive wishes and the resultant offerings. People make promise to hand over gifts at the coming pilgrimage if their wishes are fulfilled. In some cases, the public announcement of such types of miracles comprises part of the event. Second, the idea of charity and giving alms is also related to the notion of offerings for the site, the leaders, and large number of beggars, which are the usual sight at various pilgrimage centers. A significant amount of the gifts, especially food, is redistributed to the pilgrims and beggars by the personnel of the sites. Third, there is a strong link of pilgrimages with peace. Pilgrims set out for the journey unarmed and get a lot of cooperation from the society in their way to their destination. Inflicting some sort of harm on people traveling for spiritual purpose is regarded as a sin. Yet, pilgrims are sometimes vulnerable for attacks and pilgrims with their pilgrims also invite thieves and opportunists (Pankhurst 1994: 934-936). Informants stated that petty thieves stole cash and other belongings of the pilgrims unless they are careful and cautious.

3.5. Studies of pilgrimages in Ethiopia

Under this section, we will look at the nature of studies conducted so far on pilgrimages in Ethiopia. What shortcomings do most of the studies have? What are the causes of these shortcomings?

The information on pilgrimages in Ethiopia is scarce as well as indistinct, and most of the sources have their own shortcomings. Travelers usually visit pilgrimage centers some days after or before the major pilgrimages and most of their information is therefore based on hearsays and usually with some bigotry. Some might even visit the center during the major pilgrimages and yet give us very little information on the events that took place during the pilgrimages. For example, Donaldson Smith (1987:52-56, 59-61) describes the site he visited and the saint venerated there, but he did not mention any thing about the various events of the pilgrimage.

²⁴ It is an Oromic term with an equivalent meaning of “queen”.

In their studies so far, anthropologists emphasize the explanation of various ritual ceremonies which focus on life cycle phenomenon and focus on narrow events. Even when they describe pilgrimages, they usually do not tend to give specific dates, frequencies of pilgrimages, number of pilgrims, social composition and motives for pilgrimages. In Ethiopia, most scholars who have written on pilgrimage did so as part of a broader study of religion. Trimingham is the best example. His study on Islam mention pilgrimage usually as a part of a discussion on saints and their shrines (1952: 177-184). In addition, the available scant resources focus on describing the history of the founders and leaders of the pilgrimage centers, and give very little information on the social composition of the pilgrims and the ceremonies in the pilgrimages (Pankhurst 1994: 936).

In the following chapter I will look at the backgrounds for the establishment of the Faraqasa pilgrimage center.

Chapter Four

The Faraqasa indigenous pilgrimage center: back ground

Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to the investigation of the establishment of Faraqasa as the principal pilgrimage center, and the controversial life of its founder, *Ayyo Momina*. What are the controversies surrounding the history of the early life of Momina, mainly her family, religious background, and career? What are some of the sequence of events that finally led to the establishment of the Faraqasa pilgrimage center? What are some of the developments after the death of Momina? What are the functions of the pilgrimage center for the people living around it and the pilgrims?

The Faraqasa indigenous pilgrimage center was established by a certain woman affectionately called *Ayyo Momina* by her followers. The establishment of this and other pilgrimages by Momina is an interesting phenomenon in Ethiopian history, as women did not play a significant role as founders and leaders of religious belief even today, let alone more than a century ago. This trend of the minimal involvement of women as founders and leaders of religious activities is not only limited to the Ethiopian case but it seems a general trend in other areas as well. Since time immemorial, women have been actively engaged with various religious practices and beliefs. However, they very rarely have assumed institutional leadership in world religions even if there are many women in ancient and present times who have acquired great position and prestige in their community as a result of their tremendous moral and spiritual authority (King 1993: 32).

According to a cross-cultural historical study of the task and position of women in various religions of the world, women have played a significant role in less institutionalized society and religion. When a religion becomes more organized, there is a higher tendency of neglecting and alienating women from religious power and authority. Generally, women exercise a tremendous authority and power in “archaic, ancient, tribal, and relatively non-institutionalized forms of religion (such as shamanism, possession rites, spiritualism, or in non-hierarchical groups...) than in the highly differentiated religious traditions with their complex structures” (King 1993: 37).

Spiritual authority, like secular authority, rests on men with the institutionalization of religious activities. In this case, various spiritual activities, such as initiation, teaching, blessing, sacrifice, and preaching tend to be males privilege all the time (King 1993: 39). Men have taken it for granted that spiritual power is granted to them, thanks to the tremendous help from the institutional structure and power of the office they held since the earlier times and this trend did not change a lot even today. In spite of this fact, there are many women who provided spiritual

leadership to their group, especially in less organized and non-hierarchical types of religious beliefs (King 1993: 89).

None of the founders of the world's major religious beliefs were women. However, women founders are found in newly established religious beliefs, mainly in sects and cults (King 1993: 38). Woodhead also aptly states that "Indigenous religion may... be a very potent resource for women, who may...derive considerable authority from their ability to act as spirit mediums (Woodhead 2002: 343). Localized kinds of religious beliefs are usually referred to as 'indigenous' and 'traditional' to refer to their difference from the world religions [Christianity and Islam]. These local religious beliefs encompass a complicated and diversified range of activities which do not usually conform to the religious, social, economic, political and judicial structures of Western institutional establishments (Gore 2002: 204). So, this vary nature of indigenous beliefs might have contributed for Momina's ascend to popularity as a result of the cult she founded towards the first quarter of the twentieth century.

4.1. Ayyo Momina: Origin, early life, and career

In this section, I will present the various perspectives concerning the origin, early life and career of Momina. What are the controversial views and perspectives concerning the origin, family and religious background, as well as early religious careers of Momina?

The reconstruction of the early life and career of Ayyo Momina was quite challenging to undertake. There are various reasons for the obscurity of, especially, the early life of Momina. The fundamental reason for this is that she was a very mobile person. She frequently moved from place to place for various reasons. According to informants, she traveled from one part of the country to the other because her spirit did not allow her to reside at a single place for a long period of time. We will look at this issue in detail in subsequent sections. Added to this is that there is lack of consensus among many of the informants on her religious and family background. This seems to originate from the informants religious background itself. For instance, the majority of Muslim informants stated that Momina was born Muslim, while Christian informants stated otherwise. As a result, the lack of informants who lived contemporary to her, fragmented oral information, and the availability of scarce written sources made the reconstruction of the early life and career of Ayyo Momina quite challenging if not impossible at all.

This challenge is, however, not limited to the study of the topic under discussion. For example, Gore clearly indicated that the majority of local indigenous kinds of religious beliefs and rituals depend on oral traditions, which makes it challenging to study their historical roots and the way changes undertook (Gore 2002: 207).

There are different traditions concerning Momina's origin, religious background, and ethnic identity. The first controversy revolves around her original homeland and family background. To begin with, some writers and informants claim that Arsi is her original homeland. For instance, Braukamper suggested that she is "... an Arsi woman who established the famous center of magic in Faraqasa..." (1984: 769). Habib agreed with this notion. He stated that *Ayyo* Momina was born, grew up and died in what is now Arsi Zone in the region of Oromiya (2002: 6). Some informants, especially her relatives, however, claim that her original homeland was at a place called Sanqa in the former Yeju province of Wollo administrative region, in what is today the Amhara region. Her father was a certain *Dejjazmach*,²⁵ Yimer Woldu. There is, however, a great deal of controversy about her mother. It has been a point of discussion for long. Some informants said that her mother was *Woizero*²⁶ Mersha Akalas. Some said that the name of her mother was Dinqitu Gedlu. One of the informants still claimed that a certain woman named Worqit Gedlu was her mother. Others claim that the name of her mother was Mersha Akalas, but, her relatives claim that her mother's name is Dinqitu.

Her genealogy is represented by the following diagram.

²⁵ It was a politico-military title with an equivalent meaning of 'commander of the gate' (Bahru 2001: 275)

²⁶ It is a term which refers to married women and it is an equivalent of "Mrs."

On her father's side

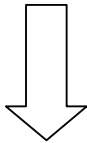
Emperor Fasil's brother



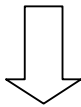
Mi'raf



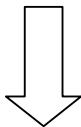
Bitderes



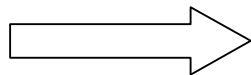
Sime



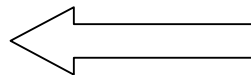
Woldu



Yimer



Shibbash (Momina)



Dinqitu

on her mother's side

Ahmed *Grag*'s²⁷ line

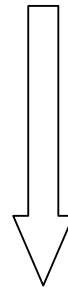
*Ras*²⁸ Tetemqe's sister



Wud Mariam Qewe



Getaw Lisige



Amele



Getaw Abuku



Diagram showing the family tree of Ayyo Momina.²⁹

The second controversial point is the date of her birth. The time of her birth was debatable and nobody seems to know the exact date of her birth. Habib states that Momina was born in the last quarter of the 19th century (2002: 7). But this does not seem plausible as most of the informants agree on the fact that the last quarter of the 19th century was the time when Momina came to Arsi land. The first name given to her, according to some informants was *Shibbash Worq*. Her father, *Dejjazmach* Yimer had 48 children from 3 wives according to some informants, and she was the

²⁷ It is the name by which a military expert by the name of Ahmad Ibn Ibrahim came to popularity. He led the Muslims in a number of victories against the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia from 1527 until his death in 1543 (Bahru 2001: 9). He was even referred to as "Attila of Ethiopia" (Sergew 1972: 18).

²⁸ It means 'head' and it is the highest traditional rank only next to the king (Bahru 2001: 276)

²⁹ This family tree was narrated to me by Hajji Siraj, the present spiritual leader of the center and he is the great great grandson of Momina.

last and the most favored of all. As a result, he named her *Ebbash*.³⁰ Most informants' asserted that *Shibbash* is the corruption of *Ebbash*.

The third, and yet the fundamental controversy is about her religious background. The religious background of Momina was a point of argument among the Christians and Muslims of the area. Infact, most informants agreed that she was a Muslim at the time she came to Arsi. The main controversy among informants was on the religion of Momina by the time she was born and at her early age. Some said that she was a Christian who later embraced Islam. Some informants, especially Muslim informants, stated that Momina was born Muslim. The majority of the Muslims in Arsi considered her as one of the Muslim saints. These informants even claimed that her father's name, Yimer, was the corrupted form of Umar, which is an Arabic name. Christian informants also agreed that Momina was a Muslim by the time she came to Arsi, but they opposed the notion that she was born Muslim as claimed by Muslim informants. They stated that Momina had a Christian background and she embraced Islam, according to them, at her later age. Some even mentioned that she was born on St. Gabriel's day, and as a result she took *Ehite*³¹ Gabriel as her baptismal name.

Whatever she was at the time of her birth, informants agreed on her conversion to Islam sometime in her age. Yet, they did not agree concerning the circumstances of her conversion and the place where she embraced Islam as her religion. Some informants said she was converted to Islam while she was living with her parents in Wollo. But this seems difficult, if not impossible in the Ethiopian context, where it is unthinkable to assume a different religion to one's parents while living with them. Some informants' elaborate that Momina embraced Islam while serving a certain Sheikh, Bar Ali Jami. They said that even her name, Momina, was given to her by this sheikh. Braukamper also states that she has served a certain sheikh named Aw Ali, one of the 19th century Ethiopian Saints who was based in Hararge, in Eastern Ethiopia until his death in 1890. Braukamper further states that this sheikh converted Momina to Islam at a particular place called Bishoftu in Hararge. According to him, the sheikh even blessed her and transferred his spiritual power to her (1984: 163).

Informants also seemed to agree on the notion that the sheikh had transferred his power to Momina while she was serving him as a *kaddami*³² (servants at the pilgrimage center). They told a tradition which finally led the sheikh to bless her with his power and transfer his spiritual power to her. According to this tradition, she was serving him as a *kadami* by preparing coffee. One day, she washed his feet and secretly drunk the water afterwards. This deed of hers, however, did not escape

³⁰ In Amharic language, it stands to mean 'the last or the final one'.

³¹ It is an Amharic word with the meaning of 'sister'.

³² It refers to the servants at the pilgrimage center. They are mainly responsible for preparing food, boiling and serving coffee.

the eyes of the sheikh who ultimately asked why she did so. She replied to him that she had great respect and appreciation for him and his activities of healing the sick. He then gave her his blessings and he prophesied that she would be the famous and most venerated woman in Hararge and in Arsi owing to her holiness and spiritual power. After this, informants claimed, she started her own independent spiritual center at a place called Gubbaqoricha in Hararge and begun the task of healing the sick, for which she became popular. Informants, however, did not know whether or not she started to exercise her independent spiritual practices after the death of Aw Ali.

Some informants disagreed on the role of Aw Ali on her conversion to Islam. They state that Momina embraced Islam by her own will while she was living in Gubbaqoricha in Hararge. They pointed out that the main drive after her conversion was the wish of her spiritual power which wanted her to be Muslim. They did not know when exactly this took place, but most agree that it is on the eve of Easter. Her spiritual power was recognized when she was at Gubbaqoricha and pilgrims began to flock to seek her help. Informants tell of a tradition that took place at this place involving *Ayyo Momina*. It was said that she cleaned her teeth with a *mafaqia*³³ and she planted it on the ground. This has become a big tree today, and served as a place of worship by the people of the surrounding areas and even pilgrims who came from another place.

From these traditions, we can infer that Momina's stay at Gubbaqoricha had an influence on the life of the people of the area and beyond. However, her stay at this place did not last long, as she traveled to Arsi land, where she finally settled and lived for the rest of her life. During her life time in Arsi land, she had established other minor pilgrimage centers which will be discussed briefly later.

4.2. The advent of *Ayyo Momina* to Arsi: two different perspectives

As it is pointed out in the previous section, there are two divergent views about the original homeland of *Ayyo Momina*; Arsi on one hand and Wollo on the other. Most of the informants and all her relatives, however, agree on her Wollo origin and her ensuing migration to Hararge and finally to Arsi. If we also agree on her Wollo origin, we will face one major unavoidable question: Why did she leave Wollo and went to Hararge and then to Arsi, where she settled for the rest of her life? What historical events took place at the ground at the time that compelled her to flee her homeland?

³³ In Amharic it refers to a twig for cleaning teeth.

There are different approaches to answer the above question for it seems that the factors for her migration from Wollo are as obscured as her original religion and place of origin are. Some informants attribute her migration to her *Karama*.

They said that *bala-karama*,³⁴ like *Ayyo Momina*, cannot stay at one place permanently because of a tremendous pressure from the spiritual power they possess. Yet, others attribute her migration to the political situation of the country at the time. During the reign of Emperor Yohannes IV (r.1872-1889), the Muslims of Wollo were ordered to abandon their religious belief and adhere to Christianity or confront alienation of their property and land rights. The reaction of the people of Wollo to this order was diverse. Some, especially the ruling elites, renounced Islam and embraced the Orthodox form of Christianity. Others declared that they were converted just to escape persecution and became Christians praying to Christian God in the day time and Muslims praying to Allah in the evening. Others, however, opted to exile (Bahru 2001: 43-49). Informants put *Ayyo Momina* in the later group of people who opted to exile instead of forced conversion to Christianity. However, if her migration from Wollo was a result of the last factor, then she must have been a Muslim at the time of her birth and so were her parents and descendants.

There is also another account for *Momina's* flight from Wollo. It was said that *Momina* was very beautiful. A certain *Girazmach*³⁵ Wolde-Ghiorgis, who was claimed to be the nephew of Emperor Yohannes IV and who was serving the governor of Hararge at the time, asked to marry *Momina*, known by the name *Shibbash* at the time. He got the permission from her family and finally they were married. After the marriage, *Shibbash's* sister advised Wolde-Ghiorgis to take his wife to Hararge in secret. She offered him this advice because *Shibbash's* brothers were warriors and she was afraid that they would not allow him to take their sister far to the south-east of her homeland. As a result, they abandoned Wollo in secret and went to Hararge, where they settled. A few years later, she conceived and gave birth to her only daughter, *Bayyanach*. By the time her daughter was five months old, *Momina* abandoned her home and family and went to a place called *Bokke* or *Bishoftu*, situated in Western Hararge. Here she began to serve a certain *Bar Ali Jami*, a well-known sooth-sayer. Her daughter continued to live with the father and by the time she reached the age of five, her father brought her to her mother, who was in *Arsi* by the time.

Before finally settling at *Faraqasa*, *Momina* is said to have traveled to and stayed at different places in *Arsi*. Informants state that *Ayyo Momina* left Hararge and came to *Arsi* in the last quarter of the 19th century. She came to *Arsi*, accompanied by her *kaddamis* (servants at the pilgrimage

³⁴ It refers to some one with a *Karama* or spiritual power.

³⁵ It was a political and military title with a meaning of 'commander of the left' (Bahru 2001: 276).

center) and *aggafaris*³⁶ (those who supervise work at the pilgrimage center) around 1884/1885 and settled at a place called Gado-Galama, also known as Bulto, which lies 12 kms south-east of Abbomsa, capital of Merti *woreda* in Arsi zone of Oromia region (Gemechu 2003: 23). According to informants, she started to perform miracles the very moment she arrived at Gado-Galama. The day she arrived at the place, she was sitting under a small acacia tree and she saw some people carrying a lame. She asked them to bring him closer to her and they did. She ordered him to stand up and walk. The guy instantly stood up and started to walk while the tree under which she sat collapsed to the ground taking the shape of the legs of the lame. That tree is now a giant tree and it is used as an *adbar*.³⁷ This miracle helped her to acquire instant respect among the local people.

Then she asked the local *balabbats*,³⁸ (hereditary possessors of land) to give her 40 *sidaja*³⁹ for use by her and her followers. The *balabbats*, however, did not know what she was asking at the moment. They discussed over it for three consecutive days and found out that she was asking for a land to build a house where she and 40 of her followers could stay and pray. The *balabbats* did not like the idea of giving land to her but one of them thought that she might curse them if they declined, and he gave her a tract of his own land. After her acquisition of the land, the people living in the area constructed a residence and a religious hall, where the various spiritual practices and healing of patients took place. Her popularity spread in the neighboring areas and people began to come to seek her help for their personal problems and to get her blessings. She was able to get a large number of followers in Gado-Galama and the surrounding areas soon after her settlement. The name “Ayyo” was even given to her while she was at Gado-Galama (Habib 2002: 14).

Ayyo Momina, however, did not stay at Gado-Galama for long, and she continued with her movement. She went to a place called Badu and stayed there for a while as well. Nobody knows why she abandoned Gado-Galama despite warm reception by the people around. Informants always attribute her frequent travels to the influence of her spirit, which they say ordered her to do so. She also abandoned Badu after a while and went to another place called Ittisa. She similarly abandoned this place and proceeded to a place called Zaliba, in what is now Bale zone of Oromia region. She established pilgrimage centers in Bale at two places called Barbare and Zaliba. She then came back

³⁶ It refers to those who supervise work at all the pilgrimage centers established by Momina. Its singular form is *aggafari*. They have played a crucial role as intermediaries between pilgrims and local officials on one hand and Momina on the other hand. This tradition persisted even after the death of Momina and her successors. They are also responsible for receiving guests who came with different types of votive gifts. They also facilitate accommodation for the pilgrims.

³⁷ It is a big tree under which pilgrims worship. They smear it with a lot of butter.

³⁸ Bahru states that *balabbat* (plural *balabbats*) referred to the hereditary possessor of a *rest* land. *Rest* was hereditary method of land possession granting usufruct privileges to the owner, but which in the twentieth century came to refer to complete private ownership. *Balabat*, however, came to refer to the hereditary ruler of the southern people of Ethiopia since the nineteenth century (Bahru 2001: 275-276).

³⁹ *Sidaja* is an Oromo corruption of the Arabic word *sajjada*, a skin used for a prayer.

to Arsi through a place called Gololcha and she also founded one pilgrimage center at Sole-Qawe (Mohammed 1998: 21). After her return from Bale to Arsi she settled at Guna-Gannate, where she ultimately established a pilgrimage center.

The establishment of the Guna-Gannate pilgrimage center can be seen as a turning point in the later career of Momina. While she was at Guna-Gannate her popularity increased, but not as much as while she was at Faraqasa, as it will be discussed later. Informants claim that it was while she was at Guna-Gannate that she was given the power by God to cure the sick, the blind, the crippled, and also to raise the dead. It was also while she was at Guna-Gannate that more people started to believe in her spiritual power than ever before.

The next destination of Momina from Guna-Gannate would be Faraqasa, which became the apex of indigenous pilgrimages in Ethiopia and where she stayed for the remaining part of her life. Her arrival at Faraqasa was, however, superseded by a sequence of events, which were related to oppositions to her and her activities by different parties, which finally led to her exile, and which will be discussed in the next section.

4.3. The establishment of Faraqasa as the main pilgrimage center

In this section, we will look at the final settlement of Momina at Faraqasa, which became the principal pilgrimage center for her followers. Even though Faraqasa today is the most powerful of all pilgrimage centers established by Momina, it was actually the last of the major pilgrimage centers to be established by Momina. What were the reasons for Momina to finally settle at Faraqasa? What are the reasons for the coming to dominance of the Faraqasa pilgrimage center, despite its late establishment, compared with other centers?

At the beginning of her career, Momina co-existed more or less peacefully with other religious groups and political administrators and did not face strong opposition because of her religious activities. She even had a good relationship with some of the provincial administrators. Challenges and oppositions started to flare up from time to time from various groups as her popularity increased (Gemechu 2003:27, Mohammed 1998: 24, and Habib 2001: 16). The first and the most significant of all the oppositions came from settled soldiers, the *naftannas*⁴⁰ and the local administrators as a result of political grievances. When the power and influence of Momina increased among the local community, the reputation of the aforementioned groups declined tremendously and their orders were no longer accepted by the people. They considered her growing

⁴⁰ It was derived from the Amharic word, *naft*, which means rifle and later it was given as a name for Emperor Menelik's soldiers of Northern Ethiopia origin who later settled in the conquered parts of Southern Ethiopia (Bahru 2001: 277).

influence as a potential threat to their authority and decided to act against it and tried every possible means to regain their influence and to undermine Momina's reputation. Yet, they did not take any action by themselves. Instead, they opted to accuse Momina to the highest authority of the region of inciting rebellion to undermine the government and pressed for a swift action before the condition got at a level of no return. The authorities, however, did not act immediately. Almost all the informants, however, stated that politics had never been on her agenda and she did not try to incite any opposition against the authorities. Neither were the Arsi Oromo, the majority inhabitants of the region, powerful enough to challenge the power of the central authority at the time, since they were already under the firm grip of the imperial regime as of 1886 (Darkwah 1975: 103).

The imperial government conducted six extensive campaigns from 1882-1886 to bring about the final subjugation of the Arsi Oromo (Bahru 1991: 62). As a result, there emerged a different socio-economic and political structure, totally hostile to the Arsi Oromo (Abbas 1982:44). For instance, until its occupation by the imperial regime, land belonged to the community in Arsi (Bizuwork 1994: 534). After its subjugation, however, the Arsi Oromo were alienated of their communal land and it came under the control of the few, mainly the subordinates of the government. The other futile consequence of the occupation was the introduction of the *gabbar*⁴¹ (plural *gabbars*) system in Arsi. Most of the fertile land was taken away from the Arsi Oromo and given to those who collaborated or helped the regime at some point during the course of the occupation. As a result, the majority of the Arsi Oromo became *gabbars* (tribute payers). The *Gada*,⁴² the socio-political system of the Oromo, based on age grades, was also undermined and the administration was replaced by the imperial administration manned by the state (Gemechu 2003: 9).

⁴¹ It refers to a peasant who pays tribute (Bahru 2001:275).

⁴² It is a socio-political system of the Oromo and it is based up on age grades (Bahru 2001: 275). It is the law of the society, a system by which Oromo administer, defend their territory and rights maintain and guard their economy and through which all their aspirations are fulfilled. The *Gada* system has served as the basis of democratic and egalitarian political system. Under it the power to administer the affairs of the nation and the power to make laws belong to the people. Every male member of the society who is of age and of *Gada* grade has full rights to elect and to be elected. All the people have the right to air their views in any public gathering without fear. The *Gada* grades (stages of development through which a *Gada* class passes) differ in number (7-1 1) and name in different parts of Oromia although the functions are the same. The following are the *Gada* grades:- *Dabballee* (0-8 years of age), *Folle* or *Gamme Titiqaa* (8-16 years of age), *Qondaala* or *Gamme Gurgudaa* (1 6-24 years of age), *Kuusa* (24-32 years of age), *Raaba Doorii* (32-40 years of age), *Gadaa* (40-48 years of age), *Yuba I* (48-56 years of age), *Yuba II* (56-64 years of age), *Yuba III* (64-72 years of age), *Gadamojiii* (72-80 years of age), *Jaarsa* (80 and above years of age). The *Dabballee* are sons of the *Gada* class who are in power. At the *Folle* grade they are allowed to go further away from their villages and to perform light work. At the *Qondaala* stage they may go long distances to hunt and perform heavy work. In the *Kuusa* grade, they are formally installed in office, although they do not yet assume full authority except in their own group. On reaching the *Raaba Doorii*, members are allowed to marry. The *Gada*, is the most important class of the whole system Here they attain full status, and take up their position as the ruling *Gada* class. The *Yubas*, after passing through three separate eight-year periods, are transferred to the *Gadamojiii* class. Then they enter the final grade called *Jaarsa* and retire completely (available at: http://www.oromoamerican.org/oromia_brief.htm).

According to some informants, this forced subjugation and its subsequent consequences infuriated the Arsi Oromo who became hostile to the orders of the administrators imposed on them by the state. It also seems plausible, the Arsi Oromo began to follow Momina's cult as a means of opposition to the religion of their conquerors, which was Christianity. Lanternari aptly stated that "...if the indigenous way of life has been subjected to misery, persecution, and other adversities, the people seek relief from their frustration and sufferings in religious was in many cases even before attempting to do so by political means." (1963: 4).

The other opposition against Momina was motivated by economic grievances. As it is stated above, most of the Arsi Oromo were now *gabbars* working on the field and in the house of their subjugators. Instead of working on the field and in the house hold of their masters, the majority of the Arsi Oromo started to spend most of the time in the religious houses of Momina and working on the land given to her by the local people. As a result, the income of the local administrators started to dwindle. The *gabbars* also failed to fulfill their tax obligation on time as they spent most of their time off the field. In addition, some of the conquerors' own families started to visit Momina and this made the local officials even more determined to undermine Momina's influence among the local people.

The *naftannas* and the local officials, who therefore felt that they were politically and economically disadvantaged by Momina's popularity, took their complaint further to the central government led by Empress Zewditu⁴³ and Tafari⁴⁴. The representatives of the *naftannas* and the local officials did however not inform of their economic and political grudges against Momina. Instead, they used another pretext to accuse her. The people of the region had given her different affectionate names, such as *Ayyo Momina* "Mother Momina", *Ye-Gunaw Nigus* "King of Guna", and *Ye-Arusiwa Emmebet* "The Lady of Arsi". The representatives of the *naftannas* and the local officials used this against her. They appealed to the imperial regime that a certain woman of unknown identity has emerged as a significant political threat against the government and had started to claim that she was the king in the area.

In addition, the local Christian priests and fanatic Muslim clerics were also opposed to Momina and her activities in the region. They tried to undermine her by attempting to convince the Christians not to pay homage to Momina's pilgrimage centers and not to take part on any of the spiritual activities. They also made it illegal for any Christian paying homage to Momina to be

⁴³ She was the empress of Ethiopia from 1916-1930 with Tafari as heir to the throne and she ruled the country jointly with him (Bahru 2001: 128, 300). She was the daughter of Menelik II, Emperor of Ethiopia between 1889 and 1913 (Bahru 2001: 293).

⁴⁴ He was appointed heir to the Ethiopian throne in 1916 and ruled the country with Empress Zewditu. He became *Nigus* (king) in 1928. In 1930 he was proclaimed Emperor Haile Sellasie I and ruled the country until his deposition in 1974 (Bahru 2001: 128,289,297)

buried at a number of church grave yards. Informants also state that one of the local priests put a fire to Momina's religious house and everything burned down except the pillar of the house.

As pressures against Momina mounted from different opponents, the government in 1923 sent a committee to Arsi to investigate the accusation labeled against Momina. Based upon the report made by the committee, the government finally expropriated her property which included cattle, extensive tracts of land, gold and silver, money and other items obtained from pilgrims in the form of votive gifts, and detained her at a place called Guna. Then the local Christian priests, with the permission of the central government, used the confiscated property for building a church at the site of Momina's destroyed religious house. What was left, mainly land, was divided between the state, the local officials, and the church. Momina was soon released from her detention and ordered to leave the area as soon as possible never to return to the area again. In addition, she was warned not to resume her activity anywhere henceforth.

Following this incident, she went to a place called Araya, where she subsequently stayed for four years as an exile. According to informants, the local people were not happy about the act of the government against Momina and they secretly opposed against this move of the government. They did not try to protest openly because of the presence of strong government troops at the place. The people sympathized with Momina, whom they felt had done nothing wrong except trying to reduce the suffering of the local people. When she finally left the region, the local people contributed what they have and gave her different items including cattle, which she took to her place of exile. During her exile, her life remained obscured for most of the time. Informants did not really know much regarding the developments at her place but some of them still stated that she had established two pilgrimage centers at places called Araya and Ticho while in exile. Yet, her popularity declined at her new place for unexplained reason. It seems, however, that she did not want and attempt to increase the number of her followers at her new place probably as a result of the ultimatum she was given by the central government. Informants, however, claimed that Momina did not abandon her activities. Even in her absence, her followers at Guna continued to gather and worship her in secret. There are also reports that some of the devotees went to Araya confidentially to pay homage to Momina at her new place.

In 1926, the central government sent an order to the regional officials to restore to Momina all the land confiscated before. As a result, she regained all the land except those already given to the churches. Many informants are short of information when it comes to why the government sent this order reversing its previous decision. One informant, however, stated that the government reinstated Momina to her former estate as a result of her close relationship with the government through the help of influential people in the state structure at different levels. The state therefore

returned Momina's property, a decision which infuriated some of the officials. Even if Momina was reinstated to her property at Guna, she was not yet allowed to go back to the place.

Momina complained to the government that the place where she was exiled was not conducive for her health and asked to be allowed to move and settle at another place. She was allowed to choose any place in Arsi except Guna, where she had been popular, and she decided to settle at Faraqasa. The main reason for this, informants stated, is that she had land in Faraqasa ever since, even before her exile to Arya and while she was at Guna. This land was given to her by a certain *balabbat*, whose son was cured by Momina while she was at Guna. It is said that Momina had prophesied that she will ultimately settle in Faraqasa. The government finally approved her settlement at Faraqasa and she established the pilgrimage center which has been popular until now. The inhabitants of the area built her religious houses and the belief was revived again. Her followers began to flow to Faraqasa en masse and continued the various spiritual ceremonies and Momina's power of making miracles continued. Her final settlement at Faraqasa was attributed to her ability of working miracles. Some informants stated that the government finally reinstated Momina fearing the dire consequences of her spiritual power. According to them, even the *naftannas* and the local officials who antagonized with her regarded her return as a miracle and indication of her power and they began to pay homage to Momina. Some of these people even gave their land to Momina.

In her attempt to live with the local officials and the clergy cordially, she began to give gifts obtained from her pilgrims such as umbrella, incense, carpets and others to the churches and mosques in the area. On 29 October 1929, however, she died of sickness only after two years of stay at her newly established center, which became a popular pilgrimage center. On 30 October she was buried at the highest ground at Faraqasa. Informants did not agree on the story at the wake of her burial. Some said that a fire of ball was seen surging from the grave to the sky while the people were covering her grave with the soil. Others said that while the people assigned to bury her on the day after her death went to the place where they kept the body, they did not find her body on the bed where she died. According to one informant they buried the blanket within the coffin and they did not inform any one about this incident. After her burial, a *qubba*, her memorial, was erected at her burial site by a certain Yemeni Arab constructor, Maulia. The expense for this was covered mainly from the income of the pilgrimage center obtained as votive gifts from the pilgrims.

As we will see later, the presence of her tomb at Faraqasa, made it the dominant pilgrimage center of all founded by Momina.



The *Qubba*: the burial and memorial of Momina became the genesis of the pilgrimage at Faraqasa.

4.4. Spiritual successors of Ayyo Momina

Under this section, I will treat developments at Faraqasa after the death of Momina. The death of Momina did not deter pilgrims from visiting her shrines at different places and the number of pilgrims increased through time. The presence of the *Qubba* at Faraqasa increased the importance of that particular pilgrimage center in the eyes of the pilgrims compared with other pilgrimage centres established by Momina. Those centers are now considered as branches of the Faraqasa pilgrimage centre. October 29, the day in which she died, became the anniversary and the major festive day at all her centres. She was regarded as a saint by her followers and they began to flock in large numbers to all her pilgrimage centers. They would especially go to Faraqasa four times a year, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. In this regard, Holt stated that it is usual for famous religious leaders to be considered as saints and that doing of miracles were associated with them. As a result their tombs became pilgrimage areas (Holt 1970: 18). After Momina's death, all the rituals were continued to be observed under the supervision of her loyal and closest aides until the 1940's.

Informants said that long before her death, Momina had prophesized that one of her descendants would inherit her *karama*, and became her heir as a leader. She said that her heir would be much more powerful than she. Accordingly, her great grandson, Tayye Meshesha, became her heir. It was said that he was born around 1918/19 while Momina was at Guna. His father was

Qannazmach Meshesha and his mother was *Woizero* Ye-ilfinn Indale, the granddaughter of Momina. With the exception of Momina, who spent her life as a Muslim after her conversion, most of her relatives remained followers of the Orthodox form of Christianity. Hence, Tayye was baptized within forty days of his birth. Momina, who had converted to Islam at early age, had already predicted that he would inherit her spiritual power and became her heir, strongly cautioned his family against his baptismal. Tayye's parents continued with the baptismal process despite Momina's warning. Tayye's father died when he was young and his mother married another man. As a result, Tayye was brought up by Momina until her death, and after Momina's death his guardians began to nurture him at Faraqasa.

At the beginning of the 1930, Tayye went to Addis Ababa because of disagreement with his guardians. He stayed in Addis Ababa but came back to Faraqasa after a while due to sickness. He then returned to Addis Ababa and served in the Imperial Body Guard for some time, and returned to Arsi at the time of the Italian occupation of Ethiopia⁴⁵. During the occupation, Tayye spent most of the time hiding and wondering from place to place as the Italians were in pursuit of him because they suspected that he had hidden weapons. In 1938 he was finally caught and imprisoned at Guna after eluding the Italians many times until then. The Italians released him after retrieving and confiscating some of his arms. He was again imprisoned as the Italians suspected that he had hidden more arms. The Italians then discovered the weapons he had hidden and they sentenced him to death, which they later changed to imprisonment in Mogadishu. He was imprisoned there for two years, until he was released on the wake of the liberation and returned to Addis Ababa.

Tayye then went to a place called Gojjam, in what is now the Amhara region, to meet Emperor Halile Sellasie on his return from exile in London via the Sudan. He was then given land in compensation for his imprisonment by the Italians, and he rejoined the Imperial Body Guard. He was given the title of *Qannazmach*⁴⁶ in April 1968. Some informants stated that this title was given to them as a result of the cordial relationship he managed to establish with the Imperial regime at the later time.

Tayye, however, did not stay long in the Imperial Body Guard. He was seriously sick, which informants associate to the inheritance of Momina's *karama*. He became particularly very sick in 1947. Consequently, he started to visit all the pilgrimage centers established by his great grandmother in Arsi, Bale and Hararge. Tayye was welcomed by the people in the above mentioned places as a result of Momina's reputation. Later, around 1952, Tayye publicly announced that he had accepted Momina's *karama*. Informants attribute his acceptance to an order by the Prophet

⁴⁵ Ethiopia had been under the occupation of Italy from 1936-1941 (Bahru 2001: 150-176).

⁴⁶ It was a political and military title with a meaning of 'commander of the right' (Bahru 2001: 276).

Mohammed to do so. Tayye then finally went to Faraqasa and built his residence close to the resting place of Momina. He began renovating the religious houses and engaged in the rehabilitation of all the branch pilgrimage centers and the appointment of *aggafaris* to run them. Shortly afterwards, he converted to Islam due to a certain sheikh and changed his name to Said Nur Ahmed. He soon received wide acceptance among his followers and all forms of miracles began to be attributed to him. He had many wives and hence many children.

Tayye's spiritual power, especially exorcizing evil spirits, was said to have exceeded even his great grandmother. When doing so, he did not have direct contact with the possessed. He used his *aggafaris* as an intermediary between himself and those possessed by evil spirits. He gave orders to his *aggafaris* who then shouted orders to the possessed. This is still the method prevailing at the center today.

Tayye also tried to spread his cult to some of the big towns like Nazareth, and Dire Dawa, by establishing his own centers there. He managed to organize his own army for a reason most informants did not know. Some informants, however, stated that it was for security reason since he was travelling from one pilgrimage center to the other.

During the time of Tayye, the Faraqasa pilgrimage center and its branches were reorganized structurally. Different houses were built for different spiritual ceremonies and other purposes. There are three basic houses with their own function. The first is the *Saganat* which is used as a resting place for guests and some of the pilgrims close to the family, for holding the coffee ceremony and for submitting votive gifts during the major annual ceremonies. The second important house is the *Hadra-bet*. This house is used as a healing place as well as for religious assemblies. The third is called *Qur'an-bet*. This is where the Qur'an is read. In addition to these houses, there are numerous houses used as kitchen and resting places for some of the pilgrims. In general, the 1950s and 1960s saw the apex of Tayye's power. He became famous throughout the country and thousands of pilgrims came from all corners of the country to receive his *baraka*⁴⁷.

⁴⁷ Informants refer to the blessings of the spiritual leader as a *baraka*.



Picture: *Saganat*: It was said that Tayye personally led the construction of this house from the designing to the finishing stages.

In the 1970s and 80s, however, he and his institution faced different challenges. The first of the sequence of problems was reported by him in the early 1970s, when his center at a place called Robe was robbed. He filed a complaint to the local officials and then to Emperor Haile Sellasie on the absence of any reply from the local officials (File no. M/F/1-76).⁴⁸ The Emperor ordered the then Ministry of the Interior to write a letter to the administrators of what were then Arsi and Bale provinces. The letter from the ministry referred to the complaint filled by Tayye and ordered the governors of Arsi and Bale to protect Tayye and his institutions from any illegal abuse (File no. 2787/37/16.76).⁴⁹

However, even if there was no physical abuse against him and his institution after this order was given, verbal abuses against him and his institution continued, especially from the educated elites on the wake of the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution. They continued to criticize and ridicule Tayye personally and his institution as well. The teachers in the area, even those who taught at a school

⁴⁸ In this letter to Emperor Haile Sellasie he stated that, “My prayer mosque and the land which I inherited from my grandmother Woizero Shibbash was robbed in Robe *Woreda*, two of my servants were killed and there was also a plot against my life. They were disturbing me all the time from praying to my country and my emperor. I held up our green flag, bow down under our throne and beg our majesty to give orders to Bale and Arsi provinces to stop the forceful actions against me and my possessions”

⁴⁹ This letter states that, “I hereby notify that the Emperor had ordered that no illegal action should be taken against him [Tayye] and that the governors of the two provinces should take legal actions to deter any illegal act against him.”

founded by him began to spread rumours that Tayye did not have any power of making miracles and his fame was the outcome of propaganda by his staunch supporters and devotees of the cult.

The most protracted challenge to Tayye and all his institutions came mainly after the outbreak and spread of the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution. In October of the same year, the first incident of a series of problems started. On that date, thousands of pilgrims were gathered and Tayye was leading the ceremony of the anniversary of the death of Momina. He was disarmed in front of his believers. This infuriated his followers, some of whom gathered together and filed a complaint on 22 October 1974 (File no. M/F/ 1-1976).⁵⁰ Their complaint was rejected by the local court. In October 1974, however, the decision for confiscation was changed and all the property belonging to Tayye, as well as all the pilgrimage centers, was restored except for his personal property in Addis Ababa. Following this incident Tayye left Faraqasa and went to Nazareth, never to return. He lived in Nazareth, Addis Ababa, Dire Dawa and Wollo until 1981 when he was finally imprisoned by the military regime, The *Dergue*.⁵¹ The executive committee of the *Dergue* decided to confiscate all the personal property of Tayye and the institutional properties of all the pilgrimage centers.

Tayye then appointed one of his sons, Qale-Ab, to take over the responsibility of looking after the Faraqasa pilgrimage center and all its branches. The final fate of Tayye was full of speculation and nothing has been heard of him since his imprisonment in 1981. Although Tayye had left Faraqasa in 1974, the income from the pilgrimage center, collected in the form of votive gifts from pilgrims used to reach him wherever he was through his representatives at each pilgrimage center. As a result, the government took control of the pilgrimage center in 1980 and all the income from the pilgrimage center was put under the control of the Ministry of Finance, through a public committee established to deal with this matter. In 1984 however, the government considered the Faraqasa pilgrimage as a remnant of the feudal regime and abolished it. It was closed down and pilgrims were forbidden to visit it.

⁵⁰ This letter of complaint states that, “while thousands of Christians and Muslims gathered from the different provinces of the country to celebrate the anniversary of the death of his [Tayye’s] mother [Momina] on 29 October of this year [1974], and hand over offerings of votive gifts, and while we the Muslims were praying at the place, police men from Arsi province showed up. They entered the mosque where the God anointed *qannazmach* Tayye and other Muslims pray with their shoes. They stood on our Qur’an and profaned our mosque. They also robbed a large sum of money from *qannazmach* Tayye. Hence we ask that strict measures should be taken against those who disrespected our mosque, revered since the time of our great grand fathers. would also like to bring to your attention that the blind and the poor who had been helped by *Qannazmach* Tayye are suffering from hunger as a result of his absence from the place”

⁵¹ *Dergue* mean ‘committee’ and it was a new inclusion in Amharic political lexicon in the 1970’s. It represented the Marxist regime that ruled Ethiopia from 1974-1991 (Bahru 2001: 234, 243).

All the property belonging to the pilgrimage center was taken to Abbomsa, where a big hall was built and the property was put in auction. Informants said that all those who bought items and who supervised the selling of the property belonging to the pilgrimage center, were faced with dire problems such as sickness, losing their personal property, and becoming destitute. They said that some of the buyers finally returned all the things they had bought on the trade fair. The center remained closed between 1984 and 1987. Yet, pilgrims continued to visit the center secretly. The government organized local security men to deter pilgrims coming to the place. This measure did not stop the pilgrims from paying homage to the pilgrimage centers but it reduced their number drastically.

Qale-Ab applied to the central government for the reopening of the Faraqasa pilgrimage center on a number of occasions. It was finally reopened in 1987. The most important factor, in addition to the application for the reopening of the center, was the gradual departure of the revolution from its extreme form through time. Some higher officials in the military regime finally decided to be flexible on religious institutions. Qale-Ab remained as the responsible person for Faraqasa and all the branches until his death in 2001. After his death, the responsibility passed over to his brother, Sirak Tayee, who took the name Siraj on his conversion to Islam. He went to Mecca for pilgrimage and he has now the title of *Hajj*. Since the fall of the *Dergue* regime, things improved for the center and its believers. Nowadays, the local police department even assign police patrol during the major pilgrimage to protect the pilgrims against petty criminals.

4.5. Social values of the center for the community around

This section investigates other values or functions of the pilgrimage center to the community around other than its spiritual value. The Faraqasa pilgrimage center, like any other pilgrimage center has spiritual, social, economic, and developmental values. Spiritual fulfilment is the primary function of pilgrimages (Pankhurst1994: 947). Socially, it facilitated dialogue and understanding among people of diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds united by their devotion to the center and its leaders. One of the components of any pilgrimage is ritual ceremonies, which are learned and culture specific. Dissanayake stated that these rituals encourage social solidarity of the larger group. He also further stated that ritual ceremonies are communicative and they convey cultural values and inform something to their participants. Rituals are very crucial for the existence of social structure as rituals strengthen social bond (Dissanayake 1979: 28). At Faraqasa this can be witnessed by the fact that pilgrims share tents, food, and coffee and that they take part in the various rituals as a group. In addition, during the time of its establishment, there were only few people living in the area. During the time of Tayee, more and more people started to live in Faraqasa.

Apart from the local people, people from other places, who have claimed to have been cured at Faraqasa, settled to live there permanently. As a result, Faraqasa developed from few homesteads to a bigger village.

The center also has economic values for the people in and around Faraqasa. Businessmen flock to pilgrimage centers as a result of the centers ability to gather large crowd of pilgrims (Eade and Sallnow 1991: 25-26). The pilgrims need a place to sleep, drink, and eat (Mack, Alexandra).⁵² During the main pilgrimages the people around Faraqasa thus made business in various fields. Some people sell drinks, food items, *chat*,⁵³ coffee, cigarettes, candles and other commodities. The majority of the pilgrims sleep outside in their own tents or turfs provided by the center. Some of the pilgrims, however, want to stay comfortable and opt to rent a house. As a result, there is a big demand for rooms and the people around the pilgrimage center built houses and rent them out or rent part of their own house to the pilgrims in need. As the pilgrimage center is barely accessible by car, draught animal owners rent their animals and earn money. Some car owners even take the risk of driving on foot paths turned in to road and earn money by transporting pilgrims from Abbomsa. The center also supports poor people around the area, especially by providing them with food.



Picture: A trader and his commodity at Faraqasa.

⁵² Available at <http://www.colorado.edu/Conferences/pilgrimage/papers99/Mack.html>.

⁵³ Also called Khat, (*Catha edulis Forssk*, Celastraceae) is a small tree which is found in great amount in the highlands of Ethiopia and Yemen. Unlike the tea shrubs, it is not grossly in appearance. It is grown for its small leaves and buds which are very stimulating and mildly euphoric when chewed and ingested in small amounts, and intoxicating when consumed in large quantities. In *wadaja* large quantities of khat are eaten, and most of participants became intoxicated (Brooke 1960: 59-59).

The Faraqasa pilgrimage center is also a development partner to the people in the area and sometimes to the region of Oromia. For instance, in 1963, Tayye established an elementary school at Faraqasa for the people around. All the expenses for the construction and the salary of the teachers were covered by him. The school was administered by his representatives until the mandate was transferred to the then Ministry of Education and Fine Arts in 1973. The center also constructed dry weather road and therefore pilgrims can use cars to go to the pilgrimages.



Picture: A bridge linking Faraqasa and Abbomsa: the bridge is a gift from the government but the expense for installing it and the subsequent construction of the road was covered by the pilgrimage center. When the river named Arba is full in the rainy season, it was difficult for the people on the other side of the river to come to Abbomsa for market, school, health center, and many other private businesses. The construction of this bridge however alleviated all these problems of the people living in and around Faraqasa.

Under Hajji Siraj, the pilgrimage center continued to cooperate with the people living in Faraqasa. For instance, a generator and television was bought and given to the primary school in Faraqasa. The center also gave money to farmers in the area to buy seed, ox, and corrugated iron for their houses.

In the next chapter, we will look at different ritual ceremonies and healing methods practiced at Faraqasa since this is the fundamental function of any pilgrimage center, and this one in particular.

Chapter Five

Ritual ceremonies and healing methods

Introduction

In this chapter, I will describe different ritual ceremonies and healing methods as practiced at the Faraqasa pilgrimage center. It is evident that every major religion in the world has its own ritual ceremonies and diverse claimed ways of healing the sick, so also at the Faraqasa pilgrimage center. There are some popular beliefs among the believers of the cult which attract thousands of pilgrims to the center on a number of occasions annually. This continuum flow of pilgrims as a result of the various popular beliefs is the corner stone for the continuation of the ritual ceremonies and healing methods at Faraqasa.

There are no official records of the number of pilgrims who visit the center each year. Informants said that on the 29th of October of each year, at least 30 000 pilgrims visit the center. In terms of sex ratio, women took the upper hand over men and informants do not know the reason for this. Even if the leaders at the center are Muslims nowadays, the majority of the believers are Christians. Most informants did not explain the factor for this pattern. Some Muslim informants, however, associate this to the curse of Momina. The Christians gave Momina a hard time especially later in her career. As a result, it was said that Momina cursed the Christians and their descendants to be followers and servants of the descendants of Momina. However, I will later suggest that it was the flexible and accommodating nature of Christianity and Islam in Ethiopia which resulted in this trend.

The tradition of going to pilgrimage in Ethiopian has a long history. All the pilgrims who visit the Faraqasa pilgrimage center and its branches for that matter, and take part on various ritual ceremonies are together known as *Jama'a*. Of all the periods, it is on the 29th of October, the anniversary of the death of Momina, that the largest number of pilgrims visit the center. The number of pilgrims during this time is estimated to be more than 30,000. There is a popular belief among the pilgrims that Momina was a Muslim saint. It is probably this point that attracts large number of pilgrims to Faraqasa to commemorate the anniversary of her death. Trimmingham aptly states that when dead saints got well built tombs, the tombs became popular cult centers and that pilgrims visit them during the anniversary of the birth of the death of the saint under discussion (1952: 248).

The ritual ceremonies, which took place during the various pilgrimage events, as it is practiced at Faraqasa, are the anniversary of the death of Ayyo Momina on 29 October of each year, *Mawlid*, *Wadaja*, *Arhibu*, and the zar possession cult. All of these share most of the defining

characteristics of a ritual. According to Grimes, ritual has five defining characteristics. First, ritual is repeated and it took place at some time of each year. Second, it is sacred and related to the sanctified with the greatest significance. Third, it is formalized composed of fixed and unchanging actions such as kneeling and bowing. Fourth, it is traditional claiming an ancient history or authority by myth. Fifth, it is intentional and it is done with a specific meaning or intention (1982: 541). These ritual ceremonies will be discussed in relation to the following issues:

1) Mediation of the saint, in particular, the power of the spiritual leaders. How is the spiritual leaders viewed by their followers? What are the powers attributed to the spiritual leaders? How was the spiritual power of the leaders, especially that of Momina, presented?

2) Healing methods: What are the fundamental healing methods practiced at Faraqasa? What items are used to heal patients? What are they supposed to achieve?

3) Traditional medicine: what is traditional medicine? What are the items used at Faraqasa as traditional medicines to heal patients? How are these medicines prepared, obtained, and applied?

4) The possession cult, zar: What is the possession cult zar? Where and how did it originate? What does it refer to? How do spirits possess humans? What are the distinguishing features of possession by spirits? How do spiritual leaders heal patients possessed by spirits?

In general, spirit possession and healing are related topics at Faraqasa. Spirit possession rituals are usually undertaken with a view of healing illness or to give protection against spirits which might cause various types of sickness and bad lucks (Platvoet 2000: 86). Spirit possession rituals can be viewed as a process of presumed communication between unseen beings and humans, for the devoted believe that the unseen beings communicate with them by possessing one or many of them (Platvoet 2000: 87). Jennings has stated that, "Ritual performance is a display of the ritual and of the participants in the ritual to an observer who is invited to see, approve, understand, or recognize the ritual action" (1982:113). This observer is believed to be the god to whom the community performing the rituals associates itself with (Jennings 1982: 122). Metaphorical and symbolical uses of words and objects are the basics of ritual ceremonies while their emotional effect is enhanced by circumlocution and figurative and unusual ways of expression (Dissanayake 1979: 28).

5.1. The power of the spiritual leader

In this section, an attempt will be made to investigate the power attributed to the spiritual leaders at Faraqasa especially that of the founder, Momina, whose power still lives in the minds and memories of the believers. How is the spiritual leaders viewed by their followers? What are the powers

attributed to them? How was the spiritual power of the leaders especially that of Momina presented?

The spiritual leaders, especially Momina, are believed to have supernatural powers and they are viewed with the utmost respect by their followers. Informants stated that as a result of this respect and reverence, the pilgrims do not even look straight into the eyes of the leaders. The basic reason for this is the leaders and the center's power of solving various social problems, healing the sick and performance of miracles. The fundamental and most popular belief about the establishment of the Faraqasa, as well as the branch pilgrimage centers, is that Momina and her descendants who succeeded her as spiritual leaders, possess the spiritual power to solve various problems of their followers; heal the leper and the crippled, the infertile, and prosperity for the poor. Some even claim that faith may help to raise the dead. Pilgrims therefore flock to all the shrines established by Momina to get one of the above benefits for themselves and for their relatives. It is not always necessary to visit the pilgrimage centers to ask for help. Believers may ask for help wherever they are by invoking such names as *ye Tayye Karama* "Tayye's *karama*", *Ennate Momina* "My mother Momina", *Ye-Arusiwa Emebet* "The Lady of Arsi", and *Ye-Shibbash Karama* "Shibbash's *Karama*", and other affectionate names given to Momina and Tayye, her great grandson. The other popular belief among the devotees is consideration of Momina's and the other spiritual leader's words as a *baraka*, that is, blessing.

It is also widely believed that all the spiritual leaders can help and love their followers. There seems to be a mutual relationship between spiritual leaders and their believers. The allegiance which the believers show by attending the various ritual ceremonies and votive offerings helps them to win the favor of the leaders whose power protect their followers from various catastrophes and endow them with children, health, and wealth while some kind of misfortune can be inflicted up on their enemies miraculously. Informants claimed that anyone who dare to attack these spiritual leaders or any of the shrines will be cursed, and a bad luck will befall up on them and sometimes even on their descendants. For instance, informants mentioned many individuals who challenged Momina and ultimately faced the wrath of her spiritual power. They stated that one of the men who took part on the confiscation of Momina's property died as a result of biting by bees while the other, together with all his descendants, died as a result of Momina's curse.

These remarkable stories are presented and popularized in hymns sung at the center. The hymns are therefore presented metaphorically and should not be understood literally. They indicate a deeper meaning and transmit a stronger message than they tend to appear. Informants could not tell the original composers of the hymns. What is known is that they were there since the time of Momina. Some informants said that there are new hymns added from time to time. Yet, they were

not able to identify the original composers. Hymns like this which revolve around the leaders' spiritual power and making of miracles contributed a lot for the success and coming to regional dominance of the Faraqasa pilgrimage center and its popularity in Ethiopia. These hymns are usually sung when pilgrims gather to take part in the various annual and other ritual ceremonies at Faraqasa. The pilgrims sung them together from memory. Part of this is illustrated in a hymn that goes as the following:

When Momina spent the night in the forest
Lions and tigers guarded her
Her enemies discussed to kill her
They went to the forest together bragging
The people with her were terrorized
She told them 'do not be scared
Allah is with us and their spear will not harm us'
She looked at her enemies and they were turned to still figures like stone.

The above hymn looked at metaphorically, shows that Momina was a remarkable woman. First, it is too dangerous for an ordinary person to spend the night in a forest. Second, it is also equally risky to be surrounded by wild animals. But as we can see from the hymn she had spent the night in the forest, and animals which are supposed to be dangerous stood guard for her. The hymn also shows the power of Momina, that she turned her enemies in to still figures only by gazing at them.

The other popular belief among the devotees was the belief of obtaining salvation in the next world through the intermediary of Momina's *karama*. The other common belief among the believers is the belief in the power of the spiritual leaders to make miracles such as giving children for the barren, raising the dead, and heal different kinds of illnesses, especially those related with spirits. As a consequence of the aforementioned popular beliefs, thousands of pilgrims flock to Faraqasa and its branch pilgrimage centers in a number of occasions annually to take part on various ritual ceremonies and get remedies for different earthly problems of theirs or that of their relatives.

The spiritual power of the leader is deeply venerated at Faraqasa pilgrimage center. Even if other people became spiritual leaders at Faraqasa after her death, she still remained an important persona of mediation between her followers and God. Pilgrims would mention the names of the leaders while making wishes and they use it as an intercession with God. The name of *Ayyo*

Momina stood above all the others in this regard. Pilgrims mention her name whenever they want their wishes fulfilled and their problems solved. Even if she was dead physically, pilgrims and her followers believe that she is still watching over them.

Once, on my way back from the center I met a woman pilgrim on her way back as well. I was on a horseback and she was walking. She was tired and taking a rest when I caught up with her. She was over weighted and immersed in her own sweet. The hill made her journey tough. Later in the day, I met her in Abbomsa, my home town, and asked her why she opted to walk instead of renting a pack animal. She told me that she had pledged for Momina that she will walk all the way to and from Faraqasa and that Momina will look up on her. From this incidence we can say that Momina still lives in the memory of the pilgrims and her followers.

One of the many hymns composed showing the power of Momina of making miracles and helping those who reach for her name and ask for help, goes as follows:

There was one woman at Abdul Bereket
She lived with her husband for many years
It was said that they were poor at the beginning
Later, they became rich with lots of wealth
When the husband saw the extent of their wealth
He begun to nag his wife for lack of children between them
He forgot his former misery
He pestered his wife at every opportunity
She asked her husband, 'what has happened to you?'
That you nag me any time you come and leave the house'
He told her that he did not hate her
That he was sad as they do not have a child
She told him not to use a child as a pretext
That Shibbash's [Momina's] *karama* which gave them wealth
Will never fail to give her one child
He told her, 'your wish is fruitless
A mule will even give birth if you give birth to a baby
When you got old where do you think will the baby come from?
You stay at your home and I am going to marry a fertile one
I am going to marry a fertile one not to lose a heir.
She was so frightened and very angry

'I was a virgin when I was married to him
How did he call me an old woman?'
Suddenly she remembered Momina
She begged Momina to give her a child
'If you give me a child until next year
I will eat a piece of a fire'
Believing that she will not get it as her husband told her
Her husband came back from the field together with the cattle
He tied the cattle and entered the house
They slept together that very night
She became pregnant
All her neighbors knew about her it
Her husband was going to divorce her because of her bareness
Shibbash's *karama* gave her a child
The pregnancy proceeded and reached the ninth month
On the final month, the labor started
It became long and painful
She screamed to Shibbash Yimer for help
'You gave me pregnancy and the labor is irresistible
Help me with the labor as well my mother
Please, do not let me die before I see my child
I do not want to die before I see this creature'
Her scream was heard at the house of Momina
While Momina was at her shrine in Guna
That day, Momina was talking with the pilgrims
About the past
Suddenly, Momina kept quite and stopped talking
All the pilgrims also kept quite for an hour
She reached swiftly to help the woman with the jet of her *karama*
On the fortieth day of her delivery
The woman together with her baby came to Momina
To fulfill her promise of eating a piece of fire
Momina summoned the woman in front of the *jam' a*
And asked, 'what did you promise and what did you get?'

‘I gave birth to a baby and I came to fulfill my promise
Of eating fire if I you give me a baby’
‘Why did you make such a calamitous promise?’
‘Why did not you promise of some other thing?’
Momina asked the *jam’a* to judge over her
All of them decided she should eat the fire
‘Why should I let her eat fire?’
Give her porridge off from the fire’

This hymn shows that Momina’s spiritual power is not believed to be bound by geographical disparity. She supported her followers and those who called out for her help regardless of the distance between them. According to the hymn, by the time the pregnant woman called for help, Momina was at a remote place chatting with her aides in one of her centers but she heard the voice of the woman in the middle and her spirit went to help the woman, which took an hour. If taken for granted the content of the hymn shows that Momina was not an ordinary woman. It is not usual for ordinary people to bestow wealth and children upon those who look for their help. Hymns like this are sung at the Faraqasa pilgrimage center whenever pilgrims gather in a larger number.

Some of the hymns composed give warning to those who dare to challenge the spiritual power of the leaders and the center, and narrate the dire consequences of criticizing or mocking Momina and the whole establishment. It seems that hymns like these are composed to protect the center and the believers from mockery and to warn those who try to do so, as the following extract of one of the hymns show:

Those who criticized her did not survive
Even the saints did not escape
Her power has no limit
No survival for those who are cursed here [Faraqasa].

Momina’s power of making miracles was not only limited to human beings. Informants claim that she even understood animals’ language. How can wild animals adhere to an individual and ask to be a servant? Informants attribute all this to the gift and spiritual power of Momina. One of the hymns sung narrated that wild animals had paid homage to Momina and part of the hymn goes as follows:

Giraffe and Rhinoceros prays for you
Python fetched water for you
Tiger asked to serve you

The power of the spiritual leaders, especially that of Momina, was historically constructed and culturally transmitted in a way that express their supernatural power and the miracles they performed.

As indicated in the previous chapter, as well as in the above section, most of the stories about the leaders revolve around their ability of solving diverse social problems, healing and making of miracles. Therefore, as it is clearly stated by McGuire, it is possible to suggest that religious leaders acquire the basis for their authority or leadership from religious claims (2002: 251). In addition to the religious claim, the contribution of the charisma of the leaders is of tremendous importance as a foundation for the authority of the leaders. Weber suggests that charisma refers to “a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with...specifically exceptional powers or qualities...which are not accessible to the ordinary person” (Weber 1947: 358-359).⁵⁴ The above explanation about the charisma of the leaders is also applicable at Faraqasa. Informants stated that the leaders have a special way of staring at people, especially those possessed with spirits during individual treatments. When they talk with the possessed, this is actually with the possessing spirits; they look directly at the possessed individuals’ eye. This by itself is said to have a calming effect. For instance, one informant told me that it was not possible to look straight at Momina’s eyes. He said that the light that emanates from her eyes was so intense that it was impossible to look directly at her eyes.

This authority of charismatic leaders, as explained above, is based on the upheaval of the claim by their followers and the willingness of the followers to undertake and fulfill the practices, orders, and wishes of the leaders (McGuire 2002: 252). This is also a case at point in Faraqasa. Pilgrims continued to practice and uphold the various beliefs and practices of the spiritual leaders up to now. At Faraqasa, this story about the power of the spiritual leaders is culturally transmitted from generation to generation through oral stories and hymns sung especially during the major pilgrimages when pilgrims gather in large numbers.

⁵⁴ Quoted in McGuire, p. 252.

5.2. Pilgrimage dates and events

This section deals with periods and events of pilgrimage. What are the main dates during which pilgrims amass at Faraqasa? What are the reasons for gatherings? What are the major events that take place during the major dates of pilgrimages?

One of the most important dates during which large number of pilgrims gather at Faraqasa, is October 29 of each year. It is the celebration of the anniversary of the death of *Ayyo Momina* and it is an annual ritual ceremony. In addition, one of the informants claimed that October 29 is celebrated at Faraqasa because it was the day when *Momina* arrived at Faraqasa. Whatever the reasons for the celebration are, this is one of the times when large number of pilgrims flock to Faraqasa. The other periods which attract a large crowd of pilgrims from all over the country are rituals associated with Islam such as *Mawlid*, the Prophet Mohammed's birthday. Bosworth and others defined *Mawlid* as "a term for the time, place, or celebration of the birth of a person, especially that of the prophet Mohammed or of a saint" (1991: 895). Another period is the day of *Id al-fitr*, which is the festival of the breaking of Muslim fast (Lewis *et al.*, 1986: 1008). In addition, there is *December 28*, the month of *Pagumen*,⁵⁵ and May 27. In addition to these days pilgrims around the pilgrimage center also visit the center at any time.

In the 1960s and the 1970s, October 29 was also celebrated in relation to the Christian saint Gabriel. Informants claim that there is no genuine connection between the celebrations of the day of Saint Gabriel and *Momina's* death on this very date. Perhaps it is just part of syncretism, as most of the followers of *Momina* and her cult are Christians, and they might have left their own imprint on the belief. Even if the largest numbers of pilgrims are Christians, it is nevertheless, probably misleading to refer to the day as Saint Gabriel's day in our discussion on the significance of the day.

During the major pilgrimages, such as the *Mawlid* and the anniversary of the death of *Ayyo Momina*, pilgrims gather from all corners of the country and all walks of life to take part in rituals and perform various kinds of activities. These are, for instance, singing of hymns praising *Momina* and *Tayye* and narrating the miracles they performed, reciting the Qur'an by the *Darasa*,⁵⁶ praying, fasting, and exorcising spirits.

5.2.1. Votive offerings

Another common practice during the major pilgrimages is the handing over of votive offerings. In this section, we will look at issues associated with votive offerings, such as: 1) what does votive

⁵⁵ The Ethiopian calendar has thirteen month and *Pagumen* is the thirteenth month. It is made up of only five days and it has six days every four year.

⁵⁶ It is an Arabic word meaning 'to study' (available on <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/madrasas>). Informants' asserted that it also refers to young Muslim religious scholars.

offering mean? 2) What items are handed over as votive offering at Faraqasa? 3) What is the purpose of handing votive offering? 4) Is there any consequence for not handing over the promised offering? Votive offering is defined as “an act of the virtue of religion by which the offerer expresses recognition of God’s supremacy and, at the same time, submits to his will” (Meagher, *et al.*, 1979: 3695). The rationale of any kind of votive gift is to give emphasis to some one’s prayer. The gift is not intended to induce God but as an incentive to promote the feeling of proper prayer in the minds of the offerer. This is also a view shared at Faraqasa. Informants stated that gifts are offered to show devotion and to give weight for their prayers.

At Faraqasa, pilgrims present offerings in the form of money, oxen, joss stick, incense, perfume, carpet, gold, silver, umbrella, butter, honey, milk, coffee beans, and other items, for the favor they claimed to have received from their prayers using Momina’s or Tayye’s *Karama*. Pilgrims also offer gifts when they make a wish at the center. However, a wish for some kind of misfortune on another individual is not welcomed at the pilgrimage center. For instance, when I was there a certain woman stated that her husband was torturing her and made a wish for the disappearance of her husband. The people responsible for the blessing and acceptance of the offerings told her that the house [the pilgrimage center] did not accept such a mean wish. Instead, blessings were made that Momina’s *karama* would calm down her husband. Some of the oxen obtained from the pilgrims are slaughtered for the occasion and they are chosen for their color. The most favored colors are red, grey, white, and black. Informants, however, did not mention the reason for this color selection. Some of the blood from the oxen was mixed with perfume and sprinkled around the area while the rest was kept in a little hut near Momina’s shrine for the spirits. There was also a kind of feast for the *Darmu*⁵⁷ and part of the meat was given. In return, the *Darmu* will not harm the pack animals of the pilgrims as well as the pilgrims who sleep on the open space in the evening.

The purpose of offering votive gifts at Faraqasa is to get some kind of material or other benefits such as children, wealth, and health. When pilgrims’ prayers are fulfilled they bring the votive gift they promised and hand it over publicly announcing the miracles, which are referred to as *aja’bat*. Some times, pilgrims who promised to offer gifts on the fulfillment of their wishes may not be able to show up during the pilgrimage events due to various personal, family, and social problems such as sickness, funerals and so on. Under these circumstances, they can send the gift to a relative, a friend, or any pilgrims going to the center. The delegated pilgrims then publicly announce the miracle and offer the gift. If pilgrims failed to hand over the promised gifts for their

⁵⁷ A hyena is referred to as *Darmu* by the people in the area.

fulfilled wishes, it is widely believed that some misfortune will befall on the individual who failed to fulfill per the promise or one of his relatives. One of the hymns composed clearly indicates this, and it goes as follows:

The woman pledged for Momina
To give her a baby and not to live barren
And if she give birth to go to the area with her baby
Before he even got a name and its hair shaved
Soon she became pregnant
No one has ever lost begging Momina
Unless he/she betrayed after calling her [Momina's] name
The woman soon gave birth
In a period of less than a year and with out any suffering
Some people are loyal until their wish is fulfilled
When she gave birth, the woman forgot her promise
Postponing it day after day and a year had passed
Before she bring the baby to our mother's [Momina's] house
The work of the saints is very surprising
They take care of what belongs to them and they save from ablaze
She laid down the baby and she went to the neighborhood
Neighbors came to remove some of her property
Let alone to remove property, they did not manage to approach [the house]
They retreated back in fear of the blaze
When the mother of the baby heard [the news]
She was worried and she came running
She wanted to jump on the raging fire
And die together with her baby
People around stopped her
There were many elders together with her
And they rebuked her saying,
“What is the problem if a baby dies?
God will replace it in the future”
She suddenly came to her senses
And remembered our mother, Momina

“I asked you to give me a baby and not to burn it
Do not make all my weariness fruitless”
As she knew that her baby could not survive the fire
She told the people “look for it
In case its bone survived the fire
Bury it for me properly
This is better than staying there”
When the fire finished burning the house
The roof and the wall collapsed to the ground
The house was totally consumed and there remains the smoke only
They begun to search for the baby
The blaze did not let them close
And they did not know how the baby could survive
After a while, the fire was extinguished
And they began to search to find the baby
Shibbash’s karama distinguished the fire
And the baby was found well asleep
Immersed in sweats as a result of the heat from the fire
It was saved even with out his cloth being burned
The work of the *Woliyis* is very surprising
The mentioning of their name saves from a lot of misery
There is nothing more frightening than fire
Their name saves from fire
That boy survived the fire
Protect us as well Momina.

The other event during the pilgrimages is the burning of incense and joss stick by pilgrims under giant trees called *adbars*. They also smear the trunk of these trees with butter. It is widely believed that Momina once sat under these trees, which grew to be giant trees through time, healed the sick and performed various forms of miracles. It is also believed that many ancient spirits have resided on the *adbars*. These *adbars* are so revered that worshippers have to take off their shoes before coming too close to them. They have to bow down and kiss the ground under the trees and they also kiss the trunk of the *adbars*. It is believed that this is a demonstration of devotion and

respect for the beliefs and practices of Momina, and which they believe would help their prayers heard by Momina's *karama*.



Picture: A pilgrim smearing the *adbar* with butter.

5.2.2. *Wadaja* and *Arhibu*

The other events which gather pilgrims together during the major pilgrimages or at any time are the *Wadaja* and *Arhibu* ceremonies. At Faraqasa, *wadaja* is a religious assembly at one of the houses called *Hadra Masjid*. The *wadaja* ceremony is led by the *Hadra-Mari*⁵⁸ who beats drum on the occasion. Even if informants did not verify the origin of the term, it seems, however, evident that the practice existed among the Oromo even before the advent of Momina. Trimmingham stated that the *wadaja*, which is the principal religious phenomenon of the Oromo, is a type of family or communal prayer gathering which go along with a feast, coffee and sometimes sacrifices of sheep (1952: 262). However, at Faraqasa it refers to praying, chewing *chat*, drinking coffee, singing of hymns, reading the life history of Momina and Tayye, and also their miraculous deeds, which are referred to as *qissa*. One popular belief about the *wadaja* ceremony is that seriously ill people will get remedies for their sickness and other earthly problems by reciting the names of Momina and Tayye. On this event, spirits such as *buda*⁵⁹ and *jinni*⁶⁰ are exorcised and zar is harmonized with the possessed.

⁵⁸ *Hadra-Mari* is an Amharic word which means the leader of the Hadra or the religious assembly.

⁵⁹ It means evil eye. In this case, misfortune is blamed on envy, especially, 'the fear of envy in the eyes of the beholder (Helman: 1994: 108)

Arhibu is a call made by the *kaddamis* to welcome or summon the pilgrims to drink coffee which is a three times a day event in the morning, mid day, and evening. Coffee is prepared by males only and there was absolute silence during the whole ceremony.

5.3. Healing methods

This section deals with the various methods or ways of healing illness at Faraqasa. Healing has a significant place in all religions of the world. It is the most important characteristics of any religious tradition (Mircea 1987: 226). What are the fundamental healing methods practiced at Faraqasa? What items are used to heal patients?

As it is discussed in the previous section, the spiritual power of the leaders, usually considered as saints, is crucial for healing. In addition to the intercession of the saint, there are various forms of healing methods, like traditional medicine and the possession cult, zar. Spiritual leaders at many of the pilgrimage centers are believed to have possessed the power to heal the sick, give children for the barren, wealth for the poor, and even raising the dead. One of the reasons why pilgrimages appeal to pilgrims is the healing power of the sites and the events that took place at the place, the springs, and the leaders (Pankhurst 1994: 948). At Faraqasa, for instance, the founder of the center, Momina was thought to have supernatural powers to alleviate the earthly problems of her followers and even to the level of bringing people and animals back from the dead (Pankhurst 1994: 948). One of the hymns composed indicating Momina's power of raising the dead goes as follows:

This is Shibbash Work Yimer, Momina
Allah has endowed you with the power of raising the dead
The goat died before being slaughtered
Momina ordered the *qalicha*⁶¹, “go and recite on her
Wake her up with the blessings of the Qur'an”
He said, “I am not able to raise the dead”
Even if he recited all the chapters of the Qur'an
Momina told him again
“Tell her [the goat] that I ordered her to wake up”
When he told her that, “you are told to wake up [by Momina]”

⁶⁰ Plural *Jinn* also called *Genie*, in Arabic mythology, a supernatural spirit below the level of angels and devils. *Ghul* (treacherous spirits of changing shape), *ifrit* (diabolic, evil spirits), and *si'la* (treacherous spirits of invariable form) constitute classes of *jinn*. *Jinn* are beings of flame or air who are capable of assuming human or animal form and are said to dwell in all conceivable inanimate (<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9043660/jinni>)

⁶¹ He is regarded as a holy man who is in touch with the ancient spirits that reside on the *adbars*. He may not be touched, not even to shake hands. He is respectfully referred to as “Master of the Sprit” (Messing 1968: 92).

The goat rose from death.
When she [Momina] raised the goat from dead with out being asked
How will she ever forget us while we beg her?
Come quickly mother
Heal the sick and feed the hungry.

If we look at the above hymn, it shows that even the mentioning of Momina's name is believed to raise the dead. In the hymn, Momina did not directly involve in the raising of the dead goat, rather it was the mentioning of her name by the holy man that raised the goat. By looking at the message and content of the hymn, one can see the tremendous spiritual power attributed to Momina.

There are various opinions on the methods Momina and her successors used to heal the sick. One group of people considered Momina as a sorcerer and a witch while others perceived her as a mediator between God and men, who used her *karama* to intermedate in their different pleas from God. Others claimed that Momina and her followers were not engaged in magical activities such as preparing amulets, throwing stones, and looking at left over of coffee in a cup and trying to predict the future. They claimed that the leaders relied on prayers in the name of Allah so that Allah would bestow mercy on the patient. This is also one of the things that I witnessed on my observation on 27 May, 2006. I was sitting in the house named *Saganat* with the people seated there to offer blessing and receive votive gifts. Many pilgrims were in a line waiting for their turn to offer their gifts. On their turn they came to the main door and stated the purpose of the gift. Some stated that they were offering the gift because their wishes had been, fulfilled while others offered gifts in order to make a wish. The people receiving the gifts told the pilgrims may "Allah fulfilled their wishes" for those making a wish, and congratulated those whose wishes were fulfilled on the name of Allah.

5.3.1. Traditional medicines

This section treats the traditional medicines used in Faraqasa to heal the sick. An attempt will be made to address the following questions. What is traditional medicine? What kind of traditional medicines are used? How are they applied or used by the pilgrims?

Traditional medicine is defined as the sum total of the knowledge, skills, and practices based on the premises, principle, and experience native to different customs. It is used in the maintenance of health, and the prevention, diagnosis, enhancement, or healing of physical and mental sickness (WHO 2000: 1). There are many kinds of traditional medicines used to heal patients at Faraqasa.

These are *tabal*, *emat*, and *hawza*. The first of these is *tabal*, holy water. *Tabal* is found in many of the pilgrimage centers and it is believed that it can cure various forms of sicknesses including headaches and intestinal problems (Pankhurst 1994:948). Informants also claim that it can also be used to cure possession by evil spirits such as *buda* (evil eye). The springs in which the holy water can be found are situated in a remote place from the pilgrimage center in Faraqasa. It usually takes more than an hour's journey to fetch the water to be used as *tabal* from the springs which are located in a deep valley. There are people who look after the springs. Pilgrims then either drink it or wash themselves with it as a medicine. When I was at the springs, I saw many people dipping themselves in the springs. Pilgrims have to use the holy water during their stay at the center only. It is not allowed to take the holy water to their homes. Informants said that it was very recently that it was forbidden to take the holy water away from the pilgrimage center. Previously, pilgrims used to take the holy water for themselves, as well as sick relatives and friends. Some informants said that the reason for the restrictions is that, some people started to sell the holy water.



Picture: pilgrims on their way back from the springs. Note the pilgrimage center on the top right corner of the picture.

The second item used as a traditional medicine is *emat*, which is obtained after burning incense and mixing the ash with water, usually holy water. Pilgrims use this as a medicine either by drinking it or applying it externally on their faces, and or body. They can also bring it to their sick relatives who could not manage to come to the center. The third item used as a traditional medicine is *hawza*, which is prepared from boiled water mixed with *chat* and drunk by sick as well as healthy pilgrims at the center as a medicine.

5.3.2. Spirit possession cult: zar

This section investigates the spirit possession cult zar and tries to address the following questions. What is the possession cult zar? Where and how did it originate? What does it refer to? How do spirits possess humans? What are the distinguishing features of possession by spirits? How do spiritual leaders heal patients possessed by spirits?

Belief in the presence of spirits is the precondition for belief in spirit possession (Klass 2003: 67). Belief in spirit possession exists throughout the world (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 47, Bourguignon 1995: 71). Even the Old and the New Testaments of the Bible bear evidence of spirit possession. It is believed that it exists in 52 percent of the world's societies. Other writers, however, give a different figure on the prevalence of belief in spirits. The idea of spirits possessing human body temporarily prevails among 90% of the world's population (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 47). In sub-Saharan Africa, belief in possession exists among 66 percent of the society (Bourguignon 1995: 71).

The tradition of belief in spirits and their capability to possess human beings has its roots in the ancient time, and its influence and significance continued to spread well in to the twentieth century (Lewis 1984: 419). Other writers however, challenged this view of the origin of zar in the ancient times. But the oldest scroll mentioning the term zar goes well in to the sixteenth century (Natvig 1987: 677).

What is zar? The word Zar refers to the possession by the spirit as well as the ritual ceremonies. It is related with the whole experience of an individual possessed by spirits (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 48, Natvig 1987: 670, Boddy 1989: 131, El Guindy and Schmais 1994: 107). The zar cult refers to a religious group where the criterion for membership is possession by a zar spirit, and where regular ceremonially provoked spirit possession is the basis to maintain meaningful and long lasting relationship with the possessing spirits (Natvig 1987: 670). Zar is a type of dance performed with the purpose of healing and it is widely practiced in Egypt, the Sudan, and its country of origin, Ethiopia among Christians, Moslems, and Jews. Regardless of the countries where they are practiced, rhythm and ritual ceremonies remained important distinguishing characters of a zar dance (El Guindy and Schmais 1994: 107).

The origin of the term zar itself is debatable. Many scholars assume that the word zar derived from Persian and not Arabic language just by looking at the word etymologically. Another suggestion is that it derives from Amharic, the official language of Ethiopia as a consequence of the long standing existence of the cult in Gondar and the surrounding areas. It is generally believed to be a corruption of *zahr*, an Arabic word meaning "he visited" (Boddy 1989: 132, Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 48, El Guindy and Schmais 1994: 107).

5.3.2.1. Origin of zar

In this section, we will look at the historical origin of the zar. The origin of the belief in the Zar spirit is debatable.⁶² It is widely believed that zar originated in Ethiopia and at the beginning it was related with the cult of a pagan god which was reduced to the position of demon after the population embraced Christianity (Gerda 2003: 89). Based on an Abyssinian myth other writers also agreed that zar originated in Ethiopia⁶³ and then spread to other areas such as Egypt, the Sudan, Iran, the Middle East, and even Nigeria (El Guindy *et al.*, 1994: 107). Natvig mentions the spread of the zar even into Djibouti and Eritrea (1987: 669).

According to my informants, the story about the origin of the spirit conforms to the literature. Accordingly, they stated that the story of the origin of spirits was the Garden of Aden, where Eve lived with her 30 children. One day God disguised himself as a human being and came to visit Eve and her children. Eve was, however, unwilling to show him her beautiful children and she showed him the ugly ones only. Then he asked her whether she had hidden some or not but she told him that she did not. God knew that she was hiding half of the children he gave her. He then cursed the hidden children to be invisible and hostile to the children she showed him. Zar is therefore believed to be the descendant of those children turned to spirits by God.

5.3.2.2. Zar related cults in other parts of Africa

This section briefly mentions the presence of other zar related cults in other parts of Africa as well. There are similar cults to Zar in other parts of Africa as well. These are *liban sheitan* in Chad, *bori* in Nigeria and North Africa, *shaitani* among the Digo of the coast of Southern Kenya, *shetani* among the Segeju of Tanzania, *Masabe* in the Tonga of Zambia, *jnun* in Hamadsha region of Morocco, *hauka* among the Songhay, *trumba* and *patros* in Mayotte, Comoro Island, *takuba* among the Ndembu of Zambia, *saka* or *pepo* among the Wataita of Kenya. All these cults centered on alleviating sickness and other problems caused by alien spirits (Boddy 1989: 132-133).

⁶² There are different views with regard to this. The first group of scholars state that it originated in Ethiopia and spread to the Middle East and other parts of North Africa through the Nile valley. (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 48). It was suggested that this belief in possession by zar originated from the name of an ancient pagan god in Abyssinian myth (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 48-49). The second group of scholars argues that the belief originated in Iran (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 49). The third group still argues that this belief in possession by a zar spirit originated in the Sudan (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 49). Others still believe that it originated in Zanzibar (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 49).

⁶³ According to the Abyssinian myth, the story of a zar spirit goes all way back to the narration of the Garden of Eden, where it was assumed that Eve had lived with 30 of her children. According to this narration, one day God came to visit the Garden of Eden and asked Eve to show him her children. Eve was afraid that God might take her children and decided to hide fifteen of the most beautiful and successful of her children. God however found out what she did and decided to turn the children that she hidden in to unseen spirits which became active during the night time only (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 53, El Guindy and Schmais 1994: 109). The zar spirits are believed to be the descendants of these children turned to spirits by God. Even if they were given immortality and other powers, they are taught to be jealous of the other children (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 53).

5.3.2.3. The ethnographic data on zar

At Faraqasa, zar refers to the spirit as well as the ceremony to harmonize the spirit and the possessed. Having seen this, I will turn to my own observation of the zar ceremony at Faraqasa on 27 May 2006. I was sitting in the *Saganat*. Present were Hajji Sirak, the great great grandson of Momina and now the cult leader, his family, my assistant, and many attendants of the pilgrimage center. Around 7:30 in the evening, the sound of a drum begun to echo on all corners of the pilgrimage center. Simultaneously, in the house where I was sitting, people begun to pour perfumes from bottles into a large bucket. I was told that the sound of the drum enables possession by the spirits, while the perfume would be used as a feast for the spirits and a way of identifying the evil spirit from the guardian spirit.

The noise outside gradually grew louder and louder. Pilgrims possessed by all types of spirits were running to the compound from different corners. They were shouting and screaming as a result of the possession they experienced following the sound of the drum. Informants claim that the sound of the drum activates the possessing spirits. This was the time to deal with people possessed by the spirits. I was invited to go out and watch the event. I stood close to Hajji Sirak to be able to hear what he said. He did not directly talk with the possessed and give orders. He told the instructions or orders to his closest aide and it was this man who shouted orders to the spirits possessing the individuals.

The *aggafaris* shouted out orders as given by Hajji Siraj. The pilgrims were in trance possession and dancing the zar dance, and orders were given for the *buda* and *jinn* spirit to be separated from. Threats of being burned were given for failing to do so. Meanwhile, some of the aides at the center brought the perfume to the possessed. They sprinkled the perfume on all the people with a fly whisk. The people were sitting there calmly on instructions to behold and sit silently. I was told that the perfume was a feast to the zar spirit. I saw some people asking the people who sprinkled the perfume to sprinkle them some more. According to my informants it was the zar which asked for more, as it was not satisfied at the beginning.

Some people started to scream when the perfume touched them. These were people possessed with *buda* and *jinn*, which are believed to be evil spirits. The belief is that these evil spirits do not like a good smell, but they are not immune to it. I was informed that the perfume burns these evil spirits and defeats them, hence the screaming. It is believed that it was the spirit which was screaming using the body of the possessed as a medium.

The people possessed with the evil spirit were then identified and taken apart by the *aggafaris*. The rest, who were considered to be possessed by the guardian zar spirit stayed, and were told to “play without bumping into one another”. This meant to continue the zar dance,

revolving the head and shaking the torso. The amazing thing was that, even if there were many people at the event, there were no incidents of bumping in to each other during the zar dance, even if the possessed were revolving their head and shaking their torso violently.

Then orders were given for silence. Every order was directed to the spirits again. The spirits were told to receive offerings, usually sacrifices of animals of different colors once in a year. The spirits were also told not to trouble their human “horse” until next year, to leave him and stand by his “horse’s” side. Blessings were made for peaceful meetings next year, and for peace for the country and family of all those who were present there. On each blessing the pilgrims simultaneously said “amen”. Finally order was given to the possessed. They were told to offer their spirit what they used to offer it before. Then the spirits were told to mount their “horse” and play at their respective places. With this instruction, the possessed left the compound and dispersed into their camps. This whole ceremony did not take more than half an hour. This is the zar cult at Faraqasa, the most influential method of healing at the center.

5.3.2.4. Ways of possession by spirits

I now turn to a discussion of the ethnographic description. The first issue that I will address is the question of possession. How does a spirit possess humans? There are diverse views of how one can be attacked or possessed by a spirit. Human beings of all sorts are believed to be exposed to being possessed by a zar spirit of one sort or the other (Messing 1958: 1121, El Guindy and Schmais 1994: 110). There is, however, individual variation in terms of the extent of exposure to attack by a zar spirit.

5.3.2.4.1. Natural conditions

The chance to be attacked by a zar spirit is more likely under certain conditions. There are some natural conditions that attract a zar and some of these are geographical areas, particularly bushes. Here, it is assumed that, is where the spirits live riding the wild animals, milking them, and also defending them from hunters (Messing 1958: 1121). Informants also stated that individuals going to places like this alone at midday or midnight can be attacked by the spirits who consider this an intrusion.

5.3.2.4.2. Inheritance

Another suggestion is that, a zar spirit can be inherited (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 49). Research has shown that some people encourage this inheritance intentionally, especially, if the spirit has been changed to some kind of protective spirit (*Wuqabi*) and this can be achieved through promises of

future devotion (Messing 1958: 1121, El Guindy and Schmais 1994: 110). This possession by spirits hereditarily usually passes through the female members of the family such as mothers, aunts and grandmothers (El Guindy and Schmais 1994: 111). This story of inheriting spirits is also a case at point at Faraqasa. However, at Faraqasa, the spirit can possess any member of the family regardless of their sexes. For instance, after the death of Momina, it was her great grandson who inherited her spirit, and then her great great grandson, who is the spiritual leader at the moment.

5.3.2.4.3. The spirit's own choice

A third suggestion is that zar spirits usually possess people of its own choice (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 49). Some zar spirits may possess people for certain good qualities, such as their beauty or the beauty of their voice (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 49, Messing 1959: 1121). Sometimes, however, people with weak personalities are usually targeted by zar (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 49). An individual can also be possessed by a zar spirit accidentally. Sometimes, zar can also be transmitted to an onlooker on ceremonies intended to exorcise zar, particularly if the spectator try to ridicule the ceremony or doubt the reality of possession by zar or the ceremony to exorcise it (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 49). Informants said that at Faraqasa, a zar spirit usually possesses young females. However, they failed to mention the reason for this trend. Zar also attacks people who mock the worshippers as well as the whole institution. Apart from possession, mockery may result in very serious sickness. According to informants, once there was a woman who ridiculed and questioned why people go to Faraqasa and bow down. The next morning, her neck was twisted aside. She was taken to a health station but she did not get any remedy. She told relatives what she said about the center. She was advised to go to Faraqasa or its branches and apologize. She did finally apologize and her neck returned to normal.

It is widely believed that the zar may cause a very serious problem even causing death if the individual resists possession. The possessed have to pass through a series of ritual ceremonies to exorcise the spirits (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 49). Resistance to possession is very risky at Faraqasa. The people resisting possession usually had to be tied up not to hurt themselves by throwing themselves hard on the earth. For the spirits to be exorcised or appeased, the possessed have to take part in various ritual ceremonies under the auspices of the spiritual leader.

Spirit possession is considered as social protest made by women and men with low status (Lewis 1984: 419). Zar possession is the dominant form of spirit possession in Ethiopia and its significance exceeds protests by resentful individuals. Spirit possession prevails among many ethnic groups in Ethiopian such the Amhara of the Gondar and Menz area, the Oromo of Arsi, Guji, Jimma, Wellega, and Borana, the Sidamo, Konso, Somali, Kafa, Gurage and others as well.

Al-Adawi suggests that women are especially exposed to spirit possession as a result of their low status in the community. In most cases the afflicting spirits are, however, males (2001: 54). Lewis also states that the bases of most possessions in Ethiopia are associated with various forms of psycho-social deprivation such as feeling of inferiority, and low status in the society. He further assumes that possession by spirits may help women and people of low social status or people who would like to improve their social or economic status. (1984: 419). Men are generally hesitant to acknowledge the existence of a zar spirit. This led to the assumption that the zar experience is exploited by men to exercise their authority over women minimizing the risk of facing a serious opposition from them. In the short-term, the women will also benefit from the zar phenomenon. (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 54). This explanation about women possession, however, is not fully applicable as it is practiced in Faraqasa. Here, zar tend to possess people of both sexes and all social and economic backgrounds.

5.3.2.5. Types of possession

Here, we will look at the types of possessions that exist in Ethiopia. It is quite challenging and impossible to mention the many types of possessions but two types of possessions seem to predominate in Ethiopia. First, possession of someone by an evil or bad spirit. This type of spirit can be referred to as *setana*, *shaytan*,⁶⁴ *zitana*, *shetani*, *jinn*, or by one of the variant of these names. These spirits are generally regarded as evil and hence they should be exorcized as it is difficult to control and manage them. They result in disorder, melancholy, and various forms of mental and physical illness (Lewis 1984: 420-421). Secondly, an individual may be possessed by a guardian zar spirit known as *wuqabi*. It is widely believed that *wuqabi* protects an individual, one's family, lineage, and a community (Lewis 1984: 421). This is also a belief shared by informants about *wuqabi* at Faraqasa. Some informants even stated that these people even help those possessed by the lesser evil spirits such as *buda* (evil eye) in their respective areas.

5.3.2.6. Symptoms of possession

Possession by a zar spirit is marked by a number of serious mental and physical problems such as loss of sense of time, inability to work, sleepiness during the day time, dizziness, serious and continuous head aches, lack of appetite, and restlessness, and the possessed can not get full

⁶⁴ Also spelled *Sheitan* is in Islamic myth, an unbelieving class of *jinn* ("spirits"); it is also the name of *Iblis*, the devil, when he is performing demonic acts. In the system of evil *jinn*, the shaitans are identified simply as unbelieving *jinn*. Folklore, however, describes them as exceptionally ugly creatures, either male or female, capable of assuming human form(available on <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9067083/shaitan>)

treatment from traditional and modern treatments (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 50). It is easily identifiable because of other prevailing characters of the possession such as spiritual trauma, temporary dissociation, physical pain, convulsive behavior, and sometimes auto-aggression (Lambek 1996: 239). Indicators of possession by a spirit may also include extreme lack of interest in most of the day to day activities, sterility, proneness to accidents, and raging seizures (Messing 1958: 1120, Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 48). Occasionally, the afflicted may start to shout, become insistent and uses some obscene words, hitting the head against a wall, singing, and also laughing and crying at the same time (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 50). Similarly, most of the above signs of possession are evident at Faraqasa.

The possessed individual's misbehavior is usually associated with the zar spirit communicating via the individual. When the possessed talk for himself, it is assumed in most cases that it is the spirit talking through the individual (Klass 2003: 37, Al-Adawi *et al.* 2001: 50). The possessed may sometimes talk with different tones. This is attributed to the belief that many spirits may possess a single individual simultaneously (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 50). At Faraqasa, for instance, when the possessed talk of the things that it needed, it was assumed that it was the spirit asking using the mouth of the possessed as a medium.

5.3.2.7. Methods of healing the possessed

In the previous sections we have seen how spirits possess humans, the prevailing types of possessions, and also characteristics of possessions. How do spiritual leaders heal people possessed by one or the other types of spirits?

People usually start to suspect that an individual is possessed by a zar spirit after all treatments had failed. Ultimately, either a friend or relative of the afflicted suggest that possession by a zar spirit might be the cause of the illness and recommend visiting a professional healer. The possessed will be taken to the healer's place and he/she will be interviewed and a series of ritual ceremonies will be arranged to try to exorcise the spirit. The focus of the healer is usually to encourage or force the unknown spirit to possess the afflicted so as to know which type of zar attacked the individual. The healer then uses his own spirit to exorcise the unknown spirit of the possessed (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 50). The healer makes use of his own zar language to speak with the possessing spirit and ultimately expel it. When people are in the condition of being possessed, the spirit is believed to be in control of the possessed and the spirit usually communicates using the body of the individual as a medium (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 49).

It is assumed that zar cannot be exorcized and it should not be exorcized as well. The popular belief is that zar cannot be exorcized permanently but promises of bribery and appeasement

would be made to give provisional relief to the possessed. Once possessed, the zar spirit may return especially during possession ceremonies, and usually annually to obtain different promises including material rewards from the possessed, which the spirit consider as human horses. Zar is not usually regarded as an evil spirit and as good spirit as well as the spirit sometimes acts badly (Lewis 1984: 421). The above explanation conforms to the information by interviewees. They stated that, despite the impossibility, it is not advisable to try to exorcise zar as it is considered as the protector of an individual, a family, as well as a society. Rather, the possessed has to take part on various annual as well as other ritual ceremonies led by ritual experts, as it will be discussed below, to appease the spirit and harmonize it with the possessed.

The possessed have to take part in various ritual ceremonies to either exorcise or appease the spirits. I will discuss ritual as performance. Jennings defined ritual performance as “a display of the ritual and of the participants in the ritual to an observer who is invited to see, approve, understand, or recognize the ritual action” (1982:113). The ritual ceremonies performed either to exorcise or restrain the spirit are performed by a skilled mediator, who perhaps earlier was possessed and now has learned how to control the disturbances of various possessing spirits and to use this skill acquired to a healing task. Sometimes, the ability to exorcise or tame a zar spirit can be inherited and sometimes an individual ‘may be called to it’. At Faraqasa, however, the ability to exorcise or appease spirits is most of the time inherited. El Guindy and Schmais stated that it is women who inherit the power to heal people possessed with zar and that, men who heal zar patients claimed to have been invited by the spirits to do so (1994: 111). At Faraqasa, the power of healing people possessed with spirits is inherited regardless of gender variation. All the zar healers at Faraqasa after the death of Momina were men. Individuals who exorcise a zar spirit are assumed to have controlled spirits and introduced them into their body by their own choice. Then they use this power over the various spirits to heal people possessed by other smaller spirits (Messing 1959: 1120, El Guindy and Schmais 1994: 110-111, Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 49).

In Ethiopia, both the possessed and the professional healers are referred with a term *bale-zar*.⁶⁵ The healer was also once a patient who learned how to control his zar spirit and use his spirit to exorcise other spirits that possess other individuals. The healer is believed to have a stronger and powerful spirits and he uses these to exorcise the lesser sprits that attack other people. Known healers usually have certain talents such as a staring ability which can calm persons in panic, and also linguistic ability (Messing 1959: 1122). Momina was believed to have the strongest spirit which she used to heal patients possessed with lesser spirits. After the death of Momina her spirit

⁶⁵ In Amharic, the official language of Ethiopia *bale-zar* has an equivalent meaning of ‘some one with a zar’ spirit.

was said to have passed over to her descendants who succeeded her as spiritual leaders. The leaders also have a strong staring and verbal ability. When they interviewed the possessed, they looked directly in to the eyes of the possessed and gave instruction to the spirits with a language full of strong wordings including threats of being burnt.

The first activity in the attempt to heal the possessed is to interview the sick at the healer's own house and find out which particular type of spirit is the cause for his sickness. The type of the zar possessing a certain individual is identified by the nature of the dance performed by the possessed under the direction of the possessing spirit (Messing 1959: 1120). The zar dance is a diagnostic method. The speed and the difficulty in which a person enters into possession trance in reaction to a certain song verify whether that specific individual is possessed or not, and the kind of the zar spirit that caused the illness. It is believed that there are around 162 kinds of zar in Ethiopia. (Gemechu 2003: 50). Some of the most widely known of these spirits include *birr alenga*, *shumbash*, *tekuar abba bullo*, *wosen abba mentir*, *adal moti*, *wossen garre*, *adal sumale saifa tangar*, *giragn abba gugsa*, and *abdul sumale*. The possessed encourages the spirit by dance to possess her/him and show itself. It is said that the identification of the type of the spirit that attacked the individual is the first and the most important step to healing (El Guindy and Schmais 1994: 113).

When a spirit expresses itself and began to talk through the individual, the reason why the spirit afflicted the individual will be known, and the healer made promises or threats to exorcise it (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 49- 51). It is not possible to expel a zar spirit permanently. What healers do is to cure it temporarily. The permanent way of dealing with the spirit is only to show upon ritual ceremonies. The chance of being sick again is likely if the zar is not properly treated (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 52). Informants also agreed that it was not possible to exorcise zar permanently. Worshippers have to take part in group healing rituals. What the healers do at Faraqasa is to appease the spirit and to order the spirit not to harm its human "horse" until the next pilgrimage, usually a year after each pilgrimage. During that period of a year, the possessed had to fulfill what he/she promised to the spirit. Otherwise, the spirit would become angry and make the possessed sick again. Under this circumstance, the possessed has to go to the pilgrimage center for healing again.

Concluding the finding about the ritual ceremonies and healing, the belief of possession by spirits is a common belief and practice at Faraqasa. Informants agree that individuals may either inherit the spirit or the spirit possesses them by its own will. There are two types of possession by spirits. These are possession by evil spirits which are referred to as *buda* (evil eye), *Jinni*, and *Setan* (Satan); and possession by guardian spirit, which is referred to as *wuqabi*. Informants emphasize that an individual may be possessed by a spirit due to various factors. Some of these are going to a

river, a forest, or garbage dumping area at midday or midnight alone, and ridiculing the zar ceremony as a spectator or at any time and any place. Inheritance of spirits from closest or distant relatives is also mentioned as one way of possession by spirits.

The zar is the dominant form of possession, ritual ceremony, and healing method of those possessed by spirits. At Faraqasa, zar is not regarded as a social protest by women against their dominance by men, as opposed to the explanation given by Lewis that zar is a social protest by men of low status and women (1984: 419). It is however true that most of those who took part on the event were women and it is not known why this trend developed. There are many rich and educated men and women possessed by zar. Informants stated that possession by the spirits is not determined by personal status.

Once possessed by spirits, the only way of getting a relief is by taking part in the zar ceremony. Evil spirits should be exorcised from the possessed and guardian spirits should be harmonized with the possessed as they are considered to be harmful causing sicknesses such as throwing the possessed on the ground, which might some times be a solid ground, lack of appetite, refusal to talk and work and so on.

The possessed have to take part in the ritual ceremonies to exorcise or pacify the spirits. At Faraqasa, this is done by the ritual expert, who is usually the spiritual leader of the pilgrimage center. Even if there are many descendants of Momina, it was only one of them who emerge as a leader at a time. Informants stated that it is those who Momina's karama choose that ultimately inherit the strongest spirit that became spiritual leaders. For instance, they stated that before her death Momina had prophesized that her great grandson, Tayye would emerge as a leader. However, immediately after the death of Momina in 1929, her spirit did not possess Tayye. Hence, the role of administering the pilgrimage center fell on the hands of her closest aides and followers. This inheritance of the spirits is preceded by severe sickness.

Those possessed by spirits are believed to be possessed by lesser spirits than the spirit possessing the spiritual leaders who use their spiritual power either to exorcise evil spirits or harmonize guardian spirits. The possessed have to appear before the spiritual leaders and take part on the rituals to get relief.

As practiced at Faraqasa, the method of healing people possessed by evil spirits and guardian spirits is different. The basic difference is that, healing people possessed with zar spirit involves the whole group at the same time and at the same place, where as healing people possessed with evil spirits involve individual contact with the healers. If people possessed with zar spirit failed to treat it properly and they became sick, however, they also have to meet healers individually. The other important aspect of a zar ceremony is costume. Most of the participants wear a colorful dress

or scarf. It is believed that the spirits want their human “horses” wear colorful garments. The zar ceremony at Faraqasa is intended to harmonize and pacify the spirits instead of exorcise them. It is believed that it is not recommended to try to exorcise the guardian spirits permanently, and even if it is found to be useful, it is quite impossible.

In the next chapter, I will summarize the most important points discussed so far in the thesis.

Chapter Six

Summary

In this thesis, I have tried to show how the Faraqasa indigenous pilgrimage center came to regional dominance in Ethiopia and the ritual ceremonies and healing methods practiced at the institution. How did the Faraqasa pilgrimage center come to regional dominance?

The tradition of going to pilgrimage in Ethiopia is a tradition with a long history. Pilgrims go to pilgrimage with variety of motives, such as, spiritual, healing, commercial, demonstration of affiliation to a certain group, and to establish mutual relationship with supernatural bodies by offering gifts. The most dominant motive for pilgrims to go to Faraqasa was, however, its healing appeal and contact with supernatural bodies, such as the spirits of the leaders, through prayers and handing over of gifts. Hundreds of people, with commerce as their primary motive, also visit the center.

There are different types of pilgrimages in Ethiopia. Some of them are inclusive of only one ethnic or religious entity, while others are exclusive of various ethnic and religious groups. The Faraqasa pilgrimage center is unique. At Faraqasa, a new cult appeared merging some aspects of Christian, Islamic, and traditional religious traditions, even if Islamic elements are dominant over the other two.

The Faraqasa pilgrimage center was founded by Ayyo Momina in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Momina was not a native of the area. She was born at another place called Yejju in northern Ethiopia. She left her homeland due to various reasons, some of which were to escape persecution as well as the drive of her spiritual power. She had stayed at various places before she finally settled at Faraqasa, where she died in 1929. The pilgrimage center as an institution, its spiritual leaders, and the believers had faced various oppositions and challenges through time such as confiscation, beating, and imprisonment. Some of the major challenges came from local administrators, fanatic Muslim religious leaders, and Christian priests.

I have tried to show that the fundamental factor for the coming to regional dominance of the Faraqasa pilgrimage center is its spiritual, social, and economic importance. Spiritually, the pilgrimage center is believed to have healing powers for various physical and mental illnesses. Socially, it is a melting point for pilgrims of diverse religious, ethnic, linguistic, and political backgrounds. Hence, it strengthened social bond. Economically, the community living around benefited from the large number of pilgrims gathering during periods of pilgrimages. The community earned money by selling food items, renting rooms and pack animals. The center also supported the community by providing agricultural inputs, donations to schools, and constructing a

road linking Faraqasa with Abbomsa, the capital of Merti *woreda*. So, they could take their produce for market.

The most important function of the Faraqasa pilgrimage center, however, is spiritual and there are a number of pilgrimage dates with their events that attract many thousands of pilgrims to take part in a number of annual and seasonal spiritual ceremonies. Some of these periods are October 29 (anniversary of the death of Momina), *Mawlid* (the birth of Prophet Mohammed), the day of *Id al-fitr*, December 28, and the month of *Pagumen*. One of the events during the major pilgrimages was the handing over of votive gifts in kind and money. Pilgrims offer gifts for their fulfilled wishes, to give strength to their wishes, and to demonstrate devotion and loyalty to the center.

There are various ritual ceremonies that are related with healing that pilgrims attend during the major pilgrimages. These ritual ceremonies have five general characteristics. These are repetition annually, sacred nature, formal actions, traditional history, and purposefulness. The purpose of ritual ceremonies is to demonstrate submission to a spectator, which is usually god. In return, pilgrims expect their prayers to be heard and gain a benefit of one kind or the other, which could be material benefit, or relief from physical or mental problems. In addition to *Mawlid* and the anniversary of the death of Momina, the most important ritual ceremonies are *Wadaja* and *Arhibu*. *Wadaja* involves chewing *chat*, drinking coffee and *hawza*, singing of hymns and narration of the life history and miracles of Momina and Tayye while *Arhibu* is a call to summon pilgrims to drink coffee.

As it is mentioned above briefly, the above ceremonies are related to healing, one of the fundamental reasons why pilgrimages attract large number of worshippers. There is a belief that the ritual ceremonies that took place at the pilgrimage center, the various healing methods, and the power of the spiritual leaders are ways of getting rid of physical and mental illnesses. The spiritual leaders, especially Momina, are particularly believed to have been gifted with supernatural power to heal the sick, the deaf, the blind, the lame, infertile women, and even raise the dead. Even after her death, Momina continued to live in the memories of her followers. There is a belief among Momina's followers that even the mentioning of her name solves various problems. In addition to this power of the leaders, there are two other healing methods. The first method is the use of traditional medicine such as *tabal* (holy water), *emnat* (holy ash), and *hawza* (boiled *chat* leaves). Some of the medicines are drunk by pilgrims while the others are applied to the external body. The second method of healing is the possession cult: zar.

Of all the healing methods, however, zar is the most dominant and popular form of healing people possessed with spirits. Zar is believed to have originated in Ethiopia and spread to other

parts of Africa and the Middle East. It is a general term which refers to the possessing spirit, the state of being possessed by spirits, and also the ceremonies that take place to tame the spirits. Zar tend to possess people in certain natural conditions such as bushes and rivers. Zar can also be inherited regardless of sex and age. It can also possess people of its own accord.

This possession by spirits is characterized by a number of mental and physical illnesses. Some of these symptoms are lack of appetite, lack of interest in the normal daily activities, exposure to dangers, convulsions, sleepiness, acute headaches, talking and laughing alone.

Once possessed by spirits, people have to visit an experienced spiritual leader, who is believed to have possessed and controlled a stronger spirit. He then interviews the possessed and identifies the kind of the possessing spirit so as to undertake the right healing method. People may be possessed by evil spirits such as *jinni*, and *buda* (evil eye), which should be exorcised because of their bad nature. The spiritual leaders usually made threats to exorcise these spirits and they do not compromise with the spirits. People may also be possessed by the zar spirit, which is considered as a good spirit. It is stated that it is not recommended or possible to exorcise zar spirits. Various forms of material concessions are made for the spirits to tame them. If the possessed failed to abide, it is believed that the spirit may make them sick again. In addition, the possessed have to take part in group zar ceremonies to show their devotion to the spirit.

The healing power of the center, together with the ceremonies and the supernatural power which the spiritual leaders are believed to have possessed, and the miracles which are believed to have performed at Faraqasa, contributed significantly to the emergence of Faraqasa as one of the dominant pilgrimage centres in Ethiopia. Added to this was the contribution of the beautifully composed hymns narrating miracles and passing stories from generation to generation in the coming to dominance of the Faraqasa pilgrimage center. Although Ethiopia is a country that accommodates people with diverse cultures, religious beliefs, customs, and beliefs, the Faraqasa pilgrimage center is not an exception in this regard. However, the experience at Faraqasa is unique in a sense that it involves both Muslims and Christians.

In conclusion, the Faraqasa pilgrimage center can be referred to as an indigenous institution mainly as a result of its accommodating characteristics and its indigenous development. It is probably the only spiritual establishment where the adherents of Christianity and Islam and people who belong to different ethnic and political divisions in the form of various regions came together and perform spiritual activities. This trend as a meeting place of people with various religious backgrounds might be the reason for the syncretistic nature of the Faraqasa pilgrimage center which has both Islamic, Christian, and Indigenous beliefs and practices. It is one of those pilgrimage

centres which are not influenced by peoples' loyalty to various ethnic, religious, political, and linguistic groups.

This research on the Faraqasa indigenous pilgrimage center investigated some points that have been overlooked by previous researchers on related topics. Some of the articles produced in relation to the place are either historical, or anthropological. One important point that has to be made about this work is that it involved a critical historical study as well as anthropological investigation and ethnographic observation and description. Yet, it is not wise to conclude that this is an all covering study. The space and time constraint for the thesis proved to be a major influence to cover every aspect regarding the pilgrimage center and produce a complete study.

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Glossary

- Adbar* It is a big tree under which pilgrims worship.
- Aggafaris* It refers to those who supervise work at all the pilgrimage centers established by Momina. They have played a crucial role as intermediaries between pilgrims and local officials on one hand and Momina on the other hand. This tradition persisted even after the death of Momina and her successors. They are also responsible for receiving guests who came with different types of votive gifts. They also facilitate accommodation for the pilgrims.
- Aja'bat* refers to the public annunciation of miracles.
- Ayyo* It is an Oromo honorary term with an equivalent meaning of “mother.”
- Balabbat* It referred to the hereditary possessor of a *rest* land. *Rest* was hereditary method of land possession granting usufruct privileges to the owner, but which in the twentieth century came to refer to complete private ownership. *Balabat* however came to refer to the hereditary ruler of the southern people of Ethiopia since the nineteenth century.
- Bala-karama* Some one with a *Karama* or spiritual power.
- Bale-zar* It refers to some one with a zar spirit.
- Baraka* The blessings of the spiritual leader.
- Buda* It means “evil eye”. In this case, misfortune is blamed on envy, especially, “the fear of envy in the eyes of the beholder.”
- Chat* (*Catha edulis Forssk*, Celastraceae) is a small tree which is found in great amount in the highlands of Ethiopia and Yemen. Unlike the tea shrubs, it is not grossly in appearance. It is grown for its small leaves and buds which are very stimulating and mildly euphoric when chewed and ingested in small amounts, and intoxicating when consumed in large quantities.

<i>Darasa</i>	It is an Arabic word meaning ‘to study’ and it refers to young Muslim religious scholars.
<i>Darmu</i>	It refers to hyena.
<i>Dejjazmach</i>	Politico-military title with an equivalent meaning of ‘commander of the gate’.
<i>Dergue</i>	It stands to mean ‘committee’ and it was a new inclusion in Amharic political lexicon in the 1970’s. It represented the Marxist regime that ruled Ethiopia from 1974-1991.
<i>Ebbash</i>	In Amharic language, it stands to mean ‘the last or the final one’.
<i>Ehite</i>	It is an Amharic word with the meaning of ‘sister’.
<i>Emnat</i>	It is an Amharic term referring to a holy ash obtained after burning incense.
<i>Gabbar</i>	It refers to a peasant who pays tribute.
<i>Gada</i>	It is a socio-political system of the Oromo and it is based up on age grades.
<i>Gifti</i>	It is an Oromic word with a meaning equivalent to “queen.”
<i>Girazmach</i>	It was a political and military title with a meaning of ‘commander of the left.’
<i>Hadra-Mari</i>	It refers to the leader of the Hadra or the religious assembly.
<i>Id al-fitr</i>	The breaking of Muslim fasting at the end of the month of Ramadan.
<i>Jama’a.</i>	Pilgrims who visit the Faraqasa pilgrimage center and its branches.
<i>Jinni</i>	A supernatural spirit below the level of angels and devils.
<i>Kaddamis</i>	The servants at the pilgrimage center. They are mainly responsible for preparing food, boiling and serving coffee.
<i>Karama</i>	Refers to some one’s spiritual power.
<i>Mafaqia</i>	In Amharic it refers to a twig for cleaning teeth.

<i>Masgid</i>	Prayer houses in Islam as well as at the Faraqasa pilgrimage center.
<i>Naftanna</i>	It was derived from the Amharic word, <i>naft</i> , which means rifle and later it was given as a name for Emperor Menelik's soldiers of Northern Ethiopia origin who later settled in the conquered parts of Southern Ethiopia.
<i>Pagumen</i>	It is the thirteenth month of the Ethiopian Calendar. It is made up of only 5 days and it has six days every four year.
<i>Qalicha</i>	He is regarded as a holy man who is in touch with the ancient spirits that reside on the <i>adbars</i> . He may not be touched, not even to shake hands. He is respectfully referred to as "Master of the Spirit".
<i>Qannazmach</i>	It was a political and military title with a meaning of 'commander of the right'.
<i>Qissa</i>	It means 'chronicle'.
<i>Qubba</i>	The tomb of Momina at Faraqasa, which is now the center of the pilgrimage.
<i>Ras</i>	It means 'head' and it is the highest traditional rank only next to the king.
<i>Shaytan</i>	In Islamic myth, it refers to an unbelieving class of <i>jinn</i> .
<i>Sidaja</i>	It is an Oromo corruption of the Arabic word <i>sajjada</i> , a skin used for a prayer.
<i>Tabal</i>	It is a holy water found in most of the pilgrimage centers. It is believed to have a curing function for various types of sicknesses.
<i>Tiqimt</i>	The second month of the year in the Ethiopian calendar.
<i>Woreda</i>	(also spelled <i>wereda</i>) is an administrative sub-division, or local government of Ethiopia, equivalent to a district. Woredas are composed of a number of <i>Kebele</i> , or neighborhood associations, which are the smallest unit of local government in Ethiopia. Woredas are typically collected together into zones, which form a <i>kilil</i> (Regional administration);
<i>Woizero</i>	An Amharic term which refers to married women and it is an equivalent of "Mrs."

Wuqabi It is some kind of protective or guardian spirit.

Ye-Arusiwa Emmebet It is an Amharic term which means “The Lady of Arsi.”

Ye-Gunaw Nigus It means “The King of Guna” in Amharic.