Monastic life is not a bastion for those who are despised by the world, rather it is a refuge for those who contempt the world. Abūnā Ṣadiqū Yāsāy (the founder of Māndaba), the Son of Emperor Āmdā Sāyūn (the Warrior King of Ethiopia), abnegated the world and all His personal comforts and took monastic order despite He was belonging to the Imperial Court.

SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

An emic understanding of monks’ involvement in economic activities and work assignments: Evidences from the Māndaba Mādhanaēlām Monastic Community in Lake Tana, Northwest Ethiopia

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Abstract: Monasticism has had spiritual, socioeconomic and cultural significance since its inception as a religious order in Egypt during the 3rd C. Although it is viewed in the broad spectrum of the social and economic arena, monks’ involvement in the economy and work assignments is a topic that has remained relatively under-researched. This study, thus, attempts to fill the knowledge gap on monks’ engagement in the economy and work assignments based on emic rationalization. The study found that monks’ engagement in the economic activities is unavoidable as it is embedded within their coherent religious life. The self-government, deprivation of previous economic privileges, social duties the monastics have, self-reliance and industrious traditions of the monastic community have been recognized as endowing factors for the inevitability of economic engagement. Monks’ involvement in the economic activities does not infringe their spiritual missions, for they pursue a low consumption pattern, moral values, internal supervision, religious practices and the strict rules of the monastery. Work is as integral and obligatory a part of monastic life as...
prayer and fasting are, although it cannot substitute the worth of prayer. Apart from livelihood significance, work also has social, religious, personal and institutional values. Monastic work constitutes a junction where religious order (life) and socio-cultural values meet and complement each other. Monastic work and economic activity are uniquely embedded within a fixed religious order and one can get meaningful insight about them if they are interpreted based on the insider’s view.

Subjects: Anthropology - Soc Sci; Political & Economic Anthropology; Social & Cultural Anthropology; Religion & Anthropology

Keywords: emic understanding; monks; economy; work assignments; Mändaba Mädhanēlām

1. Impetus for the research

Personal curiosity about new things, the desire to get a research degree along with its consequential benefits; the need to solve the unsolved problems, an intellectual joy of doing creative work, the directives of the government, the desire to fill a knowledge gap, social thinking and awakening have stimulated scholars to do research (Kothari, 2004, p. 2). The same is true in this case the initiation of the study has emanated from the author’s academic exposure, personal interest and professional concern for the field. This article is a part of his master's degree thesis entitled: Socioeconomic Life of Monks: The Case of Mändaba Mädhanēlām Monastic Community in Lake Tana, Northwest Ethiopia” carried out in the 2015/16 academic year.

The research title was first envisioned when the researcher wrote a term paper on religion and education in Ethiopia with specific reference to the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) as part of an assessment for the master's course in Social Anthropology entitled: Anthropology of Religion (SoAn 526). Several papers were reviewed for the term paper with the emphasis on monasteries as centers of learning and a depository of Ethiopian cultural values. At the time, the researcher was occupied with other academic tasks and could not develop this topic further, and only focused on the relationship between religion and education in the EOTC context. After a time, an opportunity arose to look into this topic, which is the basis for the present research.

The research idea was further strengthened by a brief visit of the researcher to Mändaba Mädhanēlām monastery at the invitation of relatives (next of kin), Dr. Memberu Lulu Yayinshet whose uncle, Aleka Mezimure Dingle Yayinshet, was one of the prominent church scholars who served in the cloister before he died. During the visit, the focus of the researcher’s interest was the socioeconomic dimension of monastic life. Since very little research had been carried out on the socioeconomic aspect of monasticism, the researcher felt that it would be preferable to him to conduct a study on this issue. Thus, as part of his academic concern in the field he trained, Social Anthropology, the researcher decided to contribute something as an anthropologist who tries to explain the culture of a particular group of people in its own context.

In order to initiate the research, the researcher embarked on a field trip to the Mändaba Mädhanēlām Monastery. His aim was to understand the general socioeconomic situation and to determine whether the issue is worthy of an anthropological study. The author was astonished when he witnessed various activities of monks starting from simple labor tasks to skilled labor. The monastic community engaged in various activities under fixed religious orders (meaning in accordance with the regulations of the monastery). Some of the economic activities the monastic community engaged in were transportation, shopping, craftwork and a grinding mill business which is run by monks in addition to their customary agricultural (both farming and animals rearing) practices. The community has revised its production and consumption tradition, resulting in one which is socio-culturally sound, religiously compatible and economically
advantageous. After he observed such economic activities, the researcher asked they shift from spiritual service to these socioeconomic deeds. A monk named, Abba Michael Yasay replied as:

You see my son; this is your misunderstanding about ascetic life. Being a monk doesn’t mean restricted only prayer and fasting rather it is delicately serving the community too. For instance, when the government failed to fulfill some basic services, such as transport, farming consultancy and other infrastructure, we fill this gap by providing these services to the community. We have multiple local/indigenous knowledge and life philosophy which is not recognized by the nonmonastic, but the great unwashed who are viewing us from the outside label monks from their level of understanding of monasticism.

The explanation made by Abba Gebrselassie, who was the former Ābä Manēt (Abbot) of Mändaba indicated the values monastic owned. The knowledge the monks have neither documented nor applied in socioeconomic and national building efforts. Ethiopian monastic tradition is not only a league of religious fanatics and stronghold of Ethiopian stray culture. Contrary to the view, according to which the Ethiopian monastic tradition is a space in which knowledge of time management, resource utilization, indigenous knowledge, social values and industriousness still exist. This untapped knowledge and sociocultural assets can do offer better to local development when it scientifically investigated and conveys to the non-monastics. In the end, the author grasped that monasticism has unique socioeconomic components, which has worth and must be studied in different angles and anthropology is a field in which these components can be studied as a sociocultural phenomenon in an in-depth manner.

At the time the research trip took place, the author was requested to select a research topic. Therefore, before submitting the final draft of the research proposal for evaluation, he submitted a number of research titles to the research advisor, Dr. Dawit Yosef Agidew. At the onset, the title was framed “Ethnographic Study of the Life of Monks Living in Mändaba Mädhäněläm Abbey”. But the research advisor commented that ethnography by its nature is a detailed account (of material and non-material aspects) of the monastic community. It needs participant observation supported by other methods. Unless one is a member of the monastic community, it would be difficult to participate in their activities, particularly non-members like the author. This would be especially challenging for the researcher considering the general atmosphere of the research setting (e.g., the living situation of the study participants, issues of social distance and access to certain domains in the monastery).

The second research topic suggested by the researcher was “Contemporary Features of Monastic Life: Socioeconomic Life of Monks Living in Mändaba Mädhäněläm Monastery”. The researcher endeavored to examine the ongoing socioeconomic situation of the monastic community. But through discussion with his research supervisor, the researcher realized that the phrase “contemporary features” seems ambiguous as it lacks clear time demarcation. Then, he decided to find another alternative topic which clearly describes the actual situation. The researcher modified the title to be “Monastic Life at Crossroads: Spiritual and Socio-economic Life of Monks”. This topic was framed to display the shift and the overlap between work and prayer in monastic life. A common misconception is that spirituality and work exist in parallel in monastic life and one cannot adversely affect one another. Moreover, it is difficult to examine the spiritual life of monks, for spirituality is something of an elusive concept and methodologically challenging. Finally, the researcher decided on the topic titled “Socioeconomic Life of Monks Living in Mändaba Mädhäněläm Monastery”. The current article is based on the results of the research conducted for his Master’s Thesis. The researcher realized that all of these topic modifications were an indicative of that the monastic community is not something culturally defunct rather it is well adapted with the prevailing socioeconomic situations and economically is also vibrant.

2. Introduction
Monasticism has long been a fundamental component of many of the world’s major religious traditions, including Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, Daoism, and Jainism (Brown, 2017;
Although its origin goes back to St. Paul of Thebes (Woods, 2005), Christian monasticism was fully developed in the 3rd C in Egypt (Genet, 2014; Jeppson, 2003), and St. Anthony of the great is believed to be the founder of monasticism in the deserts of Upper Egypt (Mikhael, 1998). Many ancient Christian countries embraced monasticism as a religious practice after receiving Christianity (Kefyalew, 2001). As elsewhere in other Christian nations, Christian monasticism was introduced to Ethiopia as religious order following the arrival and teaching of the Nine Saints [1] (Brihanu et al., 2005; Kefyalew, 2001; Mahibere Kidusan, 2009; Wondwosen & Jerusalem, 2010). Since its introduction, monasticism has remained the basis of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity (Getatchew, 2012; Jacob, 2018). It has since maintained its identity, inner strength, and organization (Jacob, 2018). Monastic life is also regarded as a crucial institution and a higher form of Christian virtue (Dege-Mueller & Kribus, 2018; Getatchew, 2012).

Ethiopia is known for possessing numerous churches and monasteries (Brihanu et al., 2005; Mahibere Kidusan, 2009). There are more than 1000 monasteries in Ethiopia (Brihanu et al., 2005; Dege-Mueller & Kribus, 2018; Kefyalew, 2001; Meheret, 2001). Of these, most of the monasteries are for men and a few are for women (Brihanu et al., 2005; Mahibere Kidusan, 2009). These monasteries are not only places of ascetic life, but they are also the place of hard work, social life and where the historical and cultural wealth of Ethiopia is preserved (Brihanu et al., 2005; Kefyalew, 2001; Mahibere Kidusan, 2009). Monasteries have long been hubs for innovation and development of such areas as agriculture, handicrafts, science and teaching, hospitals, orphanages and so forth. As a result, monastic life should be viewed in the broad spectrum of social, cultural and economic aspects (Müller-Stewens, Muff & Eberle, 2014).

Mändaba Mädhaniäläm is one of these monasteries which are relevant to the explore of socio-economic aspects of monastic life (ANRSBCT, 2006; Amhara National Regional State Bureau of Environmental Protection, Land Administration and Use [ANRSoEPLAU], 2014; Bantalem, 2010; Chiari, 2015; Getatchew, 2013; Kefyalew, 2001; Sefrin, 2012). Although Ethiopian monasteries have served as an important and powerful socio-cultural and economic center for centuries (Finneran, 2012; Getatchew, 2012; Jacob, 2018), their roles in socioeconomic and cultural arenas have generally been undermined by the society at large due to the misconception that monasteries serve only as a place of spiritual life (Menberu, 2017). Monastics and churchmen have a great role in the cultural case. They had served the people as managers, teachers, doctors, engineers, counselors, meteorologists, water technologists, justice and their deeds are the base of the current modernization (Tsegeye, 2011). Though monasteries are seen in the social and economic field (Dege-Mueller & Kribus, 2018), monks’ engagement in the economic activity and work assignment has not been documented (Gerima, 2007; Kassay, 2007).

Furthermore, some studies criticized monasticism as a paradigm. Babalola (2009) and Andrews (2017), for example, viewed monasticism as an abnormal phenomenon that has no biblical basis. Babalola (2009, p. 79) saw monasticism as something that detaches or isolate people, not only from family or social life but also from national life. Although the monasteries were supported by the labor of their members, the work of monks is utterly halted, and the monastics are dependent on extorted incomes obtained from families, rich and poor. Productive people who were essential in the state are indolent in the monasteries. Above and beyond, Biruh (2017) argued that monastic life facilitates the loss of Ethiopian former values which were common in the Axumites Empire. Therefore, it encourages most people not to work, but needs to eat, need to be wealthy without hard work. People who prefer celibacy use churches for implementing their hidden political agenda with the system of monasticism.
Babalola’s and Andrews’s studies have accredited the contribution that monastics have made to the development of the church and civilization. But it is too general to criticize monasticism without an emic understanding of it in its specific cultural context based on cross-cultural data. Therefore, the relativistic approach in anthropology is used in this study as it is more apt to explain the value and practice of monastic life from the perspective of those people who experience the phenomenon. The rationale for using the relativistic approach in this study is that anthropological insights are vital for exploring the key concepts of monasticism in its specific cultural context (Persoon, 2003a). Anthropology does not approach religion to falsify it, nor to verify it, nor even to judge it. It is not apologetic, attempting to prove or justify religion; neither is it an exercise in debunking any or all religion (Eller, 2007, p. 2). Rather anthropologists concentrate on describing the various systems of religious belief and practice, how they function, and the degree to which they influence human behavior (Ferraro & Andreattta, 2010). Against to apologetic view, anthropologists looked religion as an inseparable and interrelated phenomenon which allied to and affects, economy, politics and societal organization (Zerihun, 2005, p. 149).

Anthropology displays religion as a system of network, which embedded in the total social and economic structure (Eller, 2007; Ferraro & Andreattta, 2010; Kumilachew, 2015; Zerihun, 2005). Opposite to the view, according to Mauss, “social life should not be seen through functional associations in the realms of economy, law, government and religion” (Kasuga, 2010). Yet, Mauss’s assumption is not always applicable in all areas. For instance, the monastery is not confined to its spiritual mission (Jonveaux, 2014), since it is the heart of social and discipline life (Berhanu, 2017; Gil, 2008; Kassay, 2007). Monasticism is not occupied as an independent entity, led by an autonomous set of laws. Monastic life is not an island; it is intertwined into socioeconomic systems in which work value, handicraft, indigenous knowledge, social values, and civic virtue are cohabiting with the religious life of monastics. In this regard, Booth, Leach, and Tierney (1999) claimed that “an anthropological study can draw devotion to the embeddedness of people’s understandings of religious, economic and social issues within broader, cultural understandings of how the universe works and their spot within it”. Therefore, anthropology has an approach and methods that show how different monastic realms are worked and functioned together to establish an integrated spiritual life.

Anthropology of religion has credited monasticism as a phenomenon of great religious significance (Persoon, 2003). The anthropological approach is best suited to appreciate monks as a distinct group of religious specialists who have a unique spiritual, cultural and socioeconomic life, apart from them from other religious specialists and laities in the EOTC tradition. Anthropological insight is also vital to explain how the monks understand their own religious and social hierarchy, religious concerns and dedication, social relationships, economic roles, and exclusive consumption and production patterns based on the views the monks hold. This suggested the calls for an emic understanding to describe monks’ socioeconomic deeds from the viewpoint of those monks who better understand the situations.

Understanding monks’ social and economic deeds from the external view cannot be realistic in the monastic context due to three reasons. First, the etic approach cannot be functioned when access to certain domains in the monastic life is closed to the outsider. This would be challenging for researchers and observers who are viewing from the outside to provide the thick description. Secondly, the etic approach is essential to make comparisons among groups and clearly understand how groups are similar or different (Punnett, Ford, Galperin, & Lituchy, 2017). But making comparisons among monastics is not possible in communal monastic life where the whole monastic order works together, eats together, prays together and renders services together (Brihanu et al., 2005; Keyfayew, 2007; Mahibere Kidusan, 2009); they are egalitarian. Thirdly, emic is culture-specific and etic is universal (Buckley, Chapman, Clegg, & Mattos, 2014). Even though religion and religious rituals are a universal value (Zerihun, 2005), monasticism is religion and culture-specific depending on the theological and dogmatic stance of a particular religion. A culture-specific issue like monastics economic action and work assignment is better to
understand using the emic approach. As Buckley et al. (2014) “in many cases emic matters more that etic, and that the emic can often add value beyond the etic”. The case in which emic needs more that etic could be monasticism where socioeconomic phenomenon can be well explained.

Babalola’s, Andrews’s and Biruh’s studies cited above have questioned the monastic paradigm, but there are some scholars who refuted these notions and come up with the views that the monks in the monastery have a long history of socioeconomic deeds, which is continuing (Gil, 2008; Jonveaux, 2014; Roudometof & Michael, 2010). Besides, Kefyalew who repudiated to views noted that the monasteries of the EOTC are important institutions with a strong work culture (Kefyalew, 2009). Monks and nuns made great contributions to the growth of religious life and the development of Ethiopian culture (Kefyalew, 2001). In particular, Persoon and Jacob counterfeit Biruh’s view that holds monasticism encumbers national development and cause for the collapse of Ethiopian civilization. Persoon recognized that the Ethiopian monasteries have multipurpose in function and have been enduring in Ethiopian civilization (2006), and the whole philosophy of Ethiopian civilization owed much of the monastic movement (Jacob, 2018). Churchmen and monastic fathers have recorded several deeds of civilization to Ethiopia (Berhanu, 2017; Danial, 2015; Gerimo, 2007; Kassay, 2007; Kefyalew, 1999) that enable Ethiopia the only country in Africa to have its alphabet, writing and calendar system (Kefyalew, 1999, 2001). On top of that, Berhanu et al. concluded that monasteries have long been functioning as a source of literature education, church music and the study of the holy book. Monasteries are also the center of relics, arts, and libraries. It is hard to underestimate the value of monasteries for Ethiopian people (2005, p. 36).

The socioeconomic and political change in Ethiopia throughout the last century has created a knowledge gap on monasticism in general and little is known about the socio-economic life of monks. Hence, few studies have so far been conducted on the socio-economic life of monks (Tirsit, 2015). Among such works, the notable ones are Getnet (1998), Kefyalew (2001, 2003, 2007), Getatchew (2004), Brihanu et al. (2005), Gerima (2007), Kassay (2007), Tsegeye (2011), Tesfamichael (2013), Danial (2015), Gebressilasse (2016), Berhanu (2017) and Petros (2018). The main focus of most of these studies on monasteries and monastic life in Ethiopia were spiritual and doctrinal dimensions of monastic tradition from philological, theological and historical perspectives. Yet these studies contributed to the mentioned aspect, they provide very little records about monks’ engagement in work assignments. This study takes valuable evidence from the mentioned studies; however, it makes it unique in its perspective and methods of inquiry by contributing the scarce literature of anthropology of monasticism. As stated by Vandewiele (2016, pp. 63–65, 2016a) specific anthropological and sociological scientific pieces of literature on monastic community life is virtually non-existent, in stark contrast to the many works written from a spiritual, theological and esoteric point of views. The empirical and ethnographic exploration of the field is more than imperative, as there is little valid social-scientific information available on monastic life. Therefore, to fill these gaps, this study emphasis on the monks’ engagement in work assignment and economic activities as understood by the monastic living in Mändaba Mäðhaněläm Monastery.

3. The research site
Lake Tana is the largest body of water of Ethiopia with an area of 3,000 squire-kilometers, roughly 75 km long and 65 km broad (ANRSBCT, 2006; Dube, 2012). The Lake is endowed with rich historical, cultural, religious heritages and mesmeric natural beauty (Sefrin, 2012, p. 45). The Lake is spotted with thirty-seven scattered islands, some twenty out of which shelters churches and monasteries (ANRSBCT, 2006; Dube, 2012) that serve as socio-cultural museums of early Ethiopian civilization and museums for Ethiopian church (Alubel, 2011). Lake Tana is home to unique churches and monasteries of the EOTC dating back to the thirteenth century (NABU, 2015). Based on their relative locations, the churches and monasteries of Lake Tana can be categorized into four groups: The southern, the east, the northern and central, Mändaba Mäðhaněläm Monastery is located in the northern group (Bantalem, 2010). Most of the monasteries including Mändaba were established in the medieval period (fourteenth century AD) by the monks locally referred as “The Seven Stars” (ANRSBCT, 2006; Binayew & Yiheyis, 2016;
The saints whose names were subsequently used to refer to the monasteries they established are the following. Hirutä Ämlakä Zä Daga Štijanos; Yohannā Zä Kēbrān Gābrēl; Bätā Mariam Zä Dābrā Ţiąfanos; Yosayē Zä Dābrā Mändaba Mādhanēłām; Afnrēni Ėgzi Zä Gugubē and Tadiwos Zä Dābrä Mariam (Kefyalew, 2001, p. 114). The Mändaba monastery was established by Ābunā Šadiqu Yasaq (ANRStEPLAU, 2014; Chiari, 2015; Getachew, 2013), who was the son of emperor Āmdā Šayon, during the reign of this emperor (around 1317AD) (Gebressilasse, 2016; Getachew, 2013). The monastery is 5 km away from Gorgora town of Dembia district which is located South of Gondar City on the North shore of Lake Tana, in the North Gondar Zone of the Amhara Region (Behailu & Satyanaryana, 2015). It is one of the biggest in the Lake Tana and home to several holy monks who are believed to have reached the high level of righteousness in the Orthodox Christian religion (Kefyalew, 2001). The monastery’s tradition holds that the name Mändaba was given to the monastery because Abuna Yasaq came to the island transported by a stone tanqwa (canoe) and the local people were so impressed that they called him Endā Ābbā (nobody can do like Abba) (Chiari, 2015). As is depicted in the cover image, Ābunā Šadiqu Yasaq used the stone canoe when he moved around Lake Tana. The ancient stone of Abuna Yasaq’s ferry, well paintings and different sacred objects are some of the artifacts situated within the compound of the monastery (Getachew, 2013, p. 40). In addition, tourists and pilgrims can experience and visit the lifestyle of the monastic community (Behailu & Satyanaryana, 2015; Getachew, 2013). Today, the monastery hosts 200 monks and priests (Chiari, 2015), although the number vary over time. All of them have shouldered social and economic duties assigned by the council of the monastic community. Due to religious reasons, women are not allowed to enter the monastery (Gebressilasse, 2016). This restriction is made to avoid temptation and to make the lives of monks’ appropriate (Gizachew, 2014) (Figure 1).

4. Research methods

Research paradigms are used by researchers so as to confirm a strong research design (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006). For this research, the constructivist research paradigm is used. This paradigm is often characterized by its emphasis on the social construction of knowledge (Ranjbar, 2015). Therefore, the research participants construct their own meanings and views on a certain phenomenon (Creswell, 2009; Lauckner, Paterson, & Krupa, 2012). In the study of monk rendezvous in the economy and work assignments, the constructivist paradigm is crucial to understand the way members of the monastic order construct their world based on their views, experiences and knowledge, as it enables researcher to acquire detailed data about the phenomenon from the perspective of those individuals who understand the situations. As of Creswell and Clark (2007) the paradigm attempts to understand the meaning of phenomenon based on the participants’ subjective views using the qualitative approach. Bisman and Highfield (2012, p. 6) add that the qualitative approach helps to “offered the means to generate rich, deep and contextualized understandings of the research issue, and an appreciation of the socially constructed and experienced realities of the participants”. In view of this, the qualitative approach has been used in
this study to obtain a detailed understanding of the issue, as it occurs in its natural setting. Among the different parts of qualitative research, ethnographic research design has been applied to collect detailed descriptive data. The ethnographic method helps to study the every-day life of the enclosed monastic community (Vandewiele, 2016). It also utilizes emic issues in understanding particular community cultural elements in their context and producing rich qualitative data (Ogbulogo, 2012).

A total of thirty-three individuals took part in this study as firsthand informants. They were selected using the purposive sampling method which enables to select the informants according to the aim. Of these, fourteen informants participated in the interview, and the remaining eighteen took part in the group discussions which were done in two groups. Thus, the necessary data were collected using informal conversation, key informant interview (KII), focused group discussion (FGD) and observation methods. Informal conversation is “crucial in building rapport between the researcher and a potential informant and it helps the researcher to ‘get the feel of’ the person he/she is conversing with and thus enriches his/her knowledge and understanding of the issues” (Girum, 2013, p. 11). Informal conversation was made with five informants as it creates a relaxed and expediential atmosphere, while the informants share their views and experiences. Besides this, KII were carried out with nine informants who were selected based on their special social positions, experience and knowledge in relation to socioeconomic aspects of monastic tradition. Payne and Payne (2004) state that this interview method can help the researcher to gather data from those individuals whose social positions in a research setting gives them special knowledge about the other person’s account.

In addition, two FGDs were also held to gather shared understanding and views of several individuals from a specific categories of people on the way labor division is organized and the value of work from the monastic community perspective. Food production and consumption patterns and the monks’ rational in engaging with economics activities were discussed extensively. For the purpose of comparing the informant’s response with their actual behavior, the observation method was used. The researcher took some time to observe the daily life and activities of the monks. He was able to observe the types of work and economic activities that monks are engaged in. To collect the required data, ethical standards/considerations were kept throughout the course of the research. The church is believed to be the house of God, and everything in and around the compound is sacred and respected (Abiyou, Hailu, & Teshome, 2015, p. 133). A monastery is a sanctuary where people who are believed to be holy live. They also possess different consecrated objects. Thus, care was taken by the researcher to refrain from any sacrilegious acts by compliance with legal, social and professional ethics in the research setting. An attempt was also made to refrain from actions that threaten future research endeavors of the anthropological community and other fellow researchers in the study area.

5. Results and discussion
All of the interviews and discussions were effectively carried out as per the procedure established. Thus, the informants replied to most of the questions raised by the researcher. In order to supplement and triangulate the data collected through interview, group discussions and observation methods, as well as secondary data taken from various sources related to the research theme have been used. Triangulation of different data sources has been done to draw reliable implications from the results of the study. The findings of the study are structured and presented in light of its aims. The collected data are also prepared in textual form followed by brief discussions and arranged in themes in accordance with the responses of the informants. To meet the aims of the study and draw an integrated picture of the research problem, the results of the study have been labeled in topics and subtopics. An attempt was also made to present the results of the study by quoting the direct voice of the informants. Direct Amharic quotes were used to incorporate their original views. The international phonetic writing system is used to scribe Amharic terms.

6. Monks engagement in the economic activities
The value of religion and/or religious life is usually understood in spiritual terms, but there are many social and economic acts performed by religious specialists (Hirschman, 2004). Monasticism
is not for a religious fanatic, or a life of excessive austerities, or a museum exhibit piece, nor a life for those looking to escape from the world. Rather, it is a way of life through which one attempts to achieve an integration of the human spirit moving towards becoming fully human as a person through involving various social and economic activities (Park, 2013, p. 80). Besides their usual religious devotion, the monastic community has a long tradition of engaging in economic activity and work assignments as part of religious and social requirements. But as to what extent and for what purpose the monks are engaged in the economic activities is the main discussion point of the coming pages. Thus, the main concern of the next section is to explore how monk’s involvement in the economic deed is seen or justified and valued by the monastic community.

A monastic community is a self-contained religious group in which monks work for the existence and continuity of the institution. Even though monks engage in the economic activity to the welfare of the monastic community, their involvement in such bustle is not clearly recognized by the society. As the informants attested, there is a misunderstanding about monks’ involvement in economic activities due to lack of depth of understanding about the economic aspects of monastic life. Monk’s engagement in economic activities has been unknown by the public and this knowledge gap has created misconception about monks which were viewed as economically indolent and idle. However, monks are involved in different economic activities for different purposes with spiritual and socioeconomic reasoning. In this era of economic competition and secularism where both state and region are separate institutions at this day in Ethiopia, monk’s engagement in various economic activities is indisputable.

The monastic community is economically self-reliant and an independent religious group, which has little or no bequest from the EOTC. In previous times, the monasteries had extensive farmland in the form of Gult and they acquired monthly or yearly donation from the emperors or the royal families to run and develop the monastery. In addition to economic support, the monasteries and monks had special privileges and power since the church and state had a close relationship. Menberu (2017, p. 30) noted “historically and traditionally, till 1974, the EOTC (patriarch) and the Ethiopian Empire (Emperor) have had a close relation, making the religious and political context nearly inseparable”. The emperor and the patriarch of EOTC were in a mutual relationship, where the emperor was dependent on the patriarch and the patriarch was dependent on the emperor, both politically and ideologically (Smrdal, 2012).

Although donations were given to monastics was not remained idle. They had worked more than expected in order to strengthen the spiritual and social mission of the monasteries. Monastic work was not interrupted even if there were subsides taken from the government and the society. The feudal system vested churches and monasteries large acres of land, which was the main source of income for several monasteries. Finneran (2012) has attested the privileges of the monastic community during the feudal period before 1974:

Ethiopian monasteries rapidly attracted extensive royal patronage and became important centers of wealth within a multiethnic and diverse landscape where secular power was vested in an Emperor and his peripatetic court and an extensive feudal system. As late as the Revolution of 1974, Ethiopian monasteries still held economically important and agriculturally fertile tracts of highland landscape in an age-old system of land tenure known as gult (Finneran, 2012, p. 250).

However, the glorious days of the monasteries ended when the lands were confiscated, and the donations were ceased during the Därg regime. The relation between state and church collapsed, and secularism prevailed in the country for the first time. Due to the nationalization policy of Därg, the land and property belonging to the church were expropriated. The socioeconomic status of the monastic community and people in general changed. Thus, to this day the monasteries and their communities survived by their own efforts. According to Finneran (2012), following the removal of Emperor Haile Selassie I, which marked the end of the imperial period in 1974 the extensive land
possessions of the monasteries were nationalized. Furthermore, Getatchew (1991) reflects that the nationalization of land by the military Marxist-Leninist government left the monasteries without material possessions. They may have had to find other means of subsistence, such as the establishment of cottage industries. But at present, the future of Ethiopian monasticism is very dim. Mezmur (2011, p. 17) describes the present situation of the Ethiopian monasteries in the following way “the income of the various monasteries and churches has drastically deteriorated and the scholars [such as priests, deacons and monks or nuns] there are not given assistance and care by the EOTC or the government”. Some writers and scholars have echoed the idea that monastic communities must be supported for they are part of the historical, spiritual and cultural heritages of Ethiopia (Abiyou et al., 2015, p. 132). Equally, Aulet et al. indicate that monasteries are examples of both tangible and intangible heritage and are highly symbolic built spaces that have often become the guardians of tradition (2017, p. 174), which could be protected and safeguarded (Kefyalew, 2005).

At present, the monastic community has two interrelated religious and moral obligations that need to be charged. Firstly, the monasteries have no annual budget from the EOTC, although a few monasteries and churches that are located in drought struck areas are given relief by the Mahibere Kidusan to secure their survival and continuity (Meheret, 2001). Monasteries have a considerable number of members and outsiders and guests who seek the support of the community. Therefore, in order to overcome such difficulties and sustain their living, the monastic communities have felt the need to be engaged in the economic activities. On that point, Meheret (2001) highlights that monasteries that are self-sustaining can also assist and support the surrounding people. This was echoed by the participants of this study. For example, Debekulu, the key informant, explained the economic involvement of the monasteries as:

As it is known, monasteries are independent and self-governed institutions having their own means of income generating activities since they have no budget from the church or other branches of the church. Hence, their engagements in the economic activities are inexorable. Apart from better dedication in spiritual life, a good monastery is the one which is economically self-sufficient and vibrant. They are also expected to involve in different social service activities, such as orphanage, manmade or natural disaster relief, providing shelter and food for homeless and destitute. These social activities would have not been possible without the monastic community active participation in different economic activities in the rural community.

A number of literary works echo similar opinions to that voiced by the informant, Debekulu. Kefyalew (2005, p. 36) states that “monasteries and churches have not only been ascetic and religious life but also are prominent centers of development in various fields”. Likewise, Menberu (2017, p. 103) attested that “monastic communities, through their religious-based socio-economic activities, have an influence in strengthening community development. Nowadays, religion has a multi-faceted influence on the overall development of a certain community”. Therefore, monks are engaged in various livelihood activities to ensure the continuity of monasticism as a religious institution, for themselves and for others who seek their assistance.

Some of the focused group discussants, Luqas, Markos, Motiwos and Yohannes, believe that there is a direct linkage between monk’s engagement in the economic activity and durability of the monastic tradition as a religious institute. Although monasteries have a chiefly spiritual duty, their endurance and stamina are bent by the economic efficacy the monasteries achieve. The structure of abbey and monastic life as an idea and ways of life have not lone endured on spiritual inductee, it is also armored when religious enthusiasm is aided by a firm socioeconomic act. Orthodox Christian monasteries remained durable for centuries not only by the religious vows of monks but also by the hard works of the monks. The monks engaged in livelihood activities to upkeep the durability of the institution as it was and is to transfer the monastic tradition to the next generation. Yisak has exemplified this as:
... let me take Mändaba as a case to elucidate our discussion. In addition to their strong religious devotion, our fathers have long been working day and night to preserve and transfer the monastery for the next generation. They developed different livelihood strategies ranging from farming to animal rearing unless they had been involved in such economic activities, it would have been difficult for them to sustain the institution as it is and provide relief for the indigents. We also deed what our precursors committed by engaging in different social and economic actions to guarantee the strength of the monastery ...

Profit maximization is not the concern of a monastery, but the monastery must be financially secured to be survived. Each monastic crowd is responsible for handing over its monastery to the next generation with good financial wellbeing (Müller-Stewens et al., 2014). Even if monasteries are not economic action-oriented groups (Jonveaux, 2014, p. 72), monasteries have an extensive involvement in the local economic life and provided a primary means for the concentration of capital and economic activities (Roudometof & Michael, 2010, p. 71). From its very beginnings, the most of consecrated life in the Church had to deal with various economic challenges. To survive these challenges, the monks (for instance, in ancient Egypt) had to participate in an economic life with their surrounding society. The monks who contributed to the spiritual heritage of Christianity were simultaneously engaged in various economic practices (Gioia, Jonveaux, Sawicki, Trianni, & Quartier, 2016).

Fifteen of the study participants stated that the monastic community’s involvement in economic deeds is unavoidable, but its engagement in such activities differs in terms of size, capacity, function and context. The participants related that the monastic community has its own means of contextualizing the economic involvement of monks with monastic life. Religious, cultural and social justification is provided for rendezvous in the economic activity. Monks partaking in the economic activities need to be discussed from their own perspective. Five of the group discussants believe that one cannot explain how the economic activity is viewed in the monastery, unless the explanation is carried out based on a particular cultural milieu the monastic community occupied.

The monks are engaged in the economic deeds to avoid immoral and/or wrong means of subsistence or livelihood. The informants stress that monks should engage themselves in proper economic activities. Livelihood activities and/or good economic deeds are measured in terms of their relevance, function and socioeconomic suitability of the religious life of monks. An economic activity that has no contribution to the monastic life is not performed in the monastery. In other words, monks engaged in livelihood activities that are relevant for society and for their spiritual development. The economic activities should also be environmentally sound and spiritually appreciated. The livelihood practices are not incompatible with the ecology since protecting the environment is believed to be a moral and religious obligation of monks. Abiyou, Hailu & Teshome’s study has detected the monks rational for the protection of the environment.

Hermits and monks use the forests as praying sanctuary and also feed on the leaves, fruits and other parts of the wild plants. Conservation of forest around monasteries helps to give grace for the monasteries, serve as traditional learning and teaching under the shade of trees, resting places/sanctuaries for saints, provide sweet aroma to the church and trees around churches symbolise the fact that God created Adam and and Eve and placed him in Eden (Abiyou et al., 2015, p. 127).

The monastic community refrains from economic activities that hinder their religious mission. Interviewed informants, Ezira, Natnael and Yaqob attest that the livelihoods practice of monks do not undermine their religious life. Monks make a livelihood that are spiritually relevant, mean that monks work for people in need for charity, the development of the monastery and as work is a means to deabolic resistance. They work for others not for their personal enrichments. They also work with due respects of commemoration days of some saints and sabbath. This shows that involving in the economic activities and maintaining a religious mission is a responsibility of all monastics. Economic behavior and work assignment cannot be run in the expanse of spiritual
purpose the monks pursue. Religious life and labor activities need to be balanced and should not adversely affect one over the other.

The above informant’s accounts show the function of the monks’ economic involvement. Monks are engaged in economic activities not for material accumulation, as they strongly believe that material accumulation is the foe of the soul. A good monk is believed to be the one who is selfless and altruistic and does philanthropic service. Material ownership and comfort are not believed to vest monks to lead consecrated life. Instead, eternal salvation is obtained when the monks do sublime work. Menberu (2017) adds that “religious based social and economic activities are meaningful and effective when hard work is supplemented by benevolent practice for those people in need”. The purpose of monastic economic deed is not aimed to enrich the monastics themselves, but it should aim to secure the monastery and strength religious or social responsibilities the monks have been accomplishing. Jeppson (2003) indicated that the monasteries or convents are seen as secured places. For example, in case of financial troubles, or problems with housing, the convents are secure places for fulfilling these needs.

According to the key informants, there is a misconception towards monks’ engagement in economic activities. Some people consider monks’ involvement in economic activities as an antithesis of monasticism. Menberu has also acknowledged that “creation of ideological and socio-economic polarizations among EOTC followers themselves, the existence of a higher level of EOTC leaders who want to wreck the monastery down, consideration of the monastic community as a trade center than a religious one” (Menberu, 2017, p. XI). But some literatures have rebutted this view. The economic aspect of monastic life does not mean denying the main goal of a monastic institution which is indeed a religious one (Jonveaux, 2014, p. 77). Economic actions are important to provide economic assistance both to themselves and others who seek help from them (Lemeni, 2016, p. 2). Bugiuilesccu (2018) settles the above-cited literatures’ disagreement by recalling the verse from the Bible. He stated that material things are not bad in themselves but become bad by misuse, because they get to enslave the human nature, and this is why the Savior said: “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God” (Matthew 19:24). Economic resource is not evil by its very nature, but the wickedness of material thing is determined by its purpose. The monks believe that economic misuse led them to be under the yoke of bodily desire except for strategies that reunite both monastic virtue and material things are operated.

The more a monastery’s economic self-sufficiency is at risk, the greater the danger that a community will focus too much on its economic activities. Many monks and nuns suffer from being torn between the two evidently and increasingly opposed worlds and are unable to find a balanced approach to these areas of conflict. If a work ethic and efficiency-oriented thinking rather than prayer and divine worship are to increasingly determine the everyday monastic activities, this could lead a monk to an alienation from monastic life (Müller-Stewens et al., 2014). A monk need to make a balance between two seemingly distant goals, self-sufficient economy and worship. The monks known that monastic life and business activity cannot travel in the same path of life except balance is made. To this effect, the monastic community of Mändaba applied monastic rules and regulations to avoid contradictions and overlap (if any) between economic and spiritual life. Yisak explains this fact as:

... for others, who have no awareness and knowledge it seems to contradict, but monks participation in the economic activities is not paradoxical. This is because it is better to see the function of the economy than the monks engagement in the economic activities. There is a difference between enagement and use of the fruit of the economic deeds. Besides prayer, the monks dedicated in the livlihoods activities. But monks do not consume the fruits of the economic production for themselves, they only take the responsibility of producing it. In terms of utility of the fruit of economy, monks are consumed in a spone of shuble producation what we call it in ideomatical speaking ‘a drop in the ocean’ [a very small part of something]. The rules of the monastery do not allow monks to use and consume everything without the consent of the monastic community ...
During focused group discussions, Simon, Dawit and Yitbarek reiterate the above statement forwarded by Yisak. They stated that in the āndānāt (communal) monastery everything is restricted based on the Qānona of the monastery. Qānona is a set of religious regulations outlining what to do, what not to do, what is allowed to do and not to do in addition, it contains other religious and moral guidelines. Although there are basic regulations that are shared by all, the scope and practice of the regulations vary from monastery to monastery. Jacob demonstrates the reason for the variation of monastic Qānona across cloisters. Monastic rules (Qānona) in each community vary significantly, this is due to the topography of Ethiopia with its rugged landscape which formerly prevented easy communication and encouraged regional tendencies even local theological and dogmatic traditions. Ethiopian monks and nuns traditionally lived close to nature and had to adapt to widely varying habitats (2018). Qānona is strictly respected and anyone against it will be punished as a record of wrongdoing. Due to this fact, monks are not allowed to own personal property, even a single needle without the permission of the monastic community. Basic economic questions, such as what to produce, for whom to produce, when to produce and how to produce are determined by the council of the monastic community. Monks cannot independently decide regarding the production and consumption system in the monastery. In communal monastic life, production and consumption are centrally planned and governed by the council and rules of the cloister.

The monastic community is known for a high production quantity and low personal consumption. The informants noted that although the monks produce a very high quantity of goods, they eat a very small portion, which is allocated by the Yāndānāt Mahabār or the monastic community. Monks do not consume what they want for eating, as desired foods are believed to fulfill the bodily desire. They eat only the food provided by the Māgabi, the one who supervises the property and runs the different social and economic activities of the monastery. The type and the amount of foods are also determined by the Māgabi. Not only the type and amount of foods are determined by the monastic community, but also the time for eating is dictated by the Qānona of the monastery. Daniele narrated that the consumption tradition of the monks as follows:

We have no free choice of foods to be consumed. We eat what the Bētā Ėgaziabhēr [4] produced or/and offered and the Māgabi made or cooked. The amount of the foods is allotted and distributed by the Māgabi. Commonly we received one half Mekoreta or Dabē with tin sauce or stew per a day, but some member of the monastic community consumed less than the given amount, such as kurman (one quarter of Dabē), Senti (one eight of Dabē) and Malachi (one sixteenth of Dabē). Five hundred Ethiopian birr [18.5 USD approximately] is also allocated for cloth per a year or three meters of Ābujādi (gray fabric) offered. They can take either of the two, but not both, the money and Ābujādi. Aside from these daily and yearly allocations of food and cloth, monks cannot own property including food. In the whole, what to consume, when to consume and what goods are allowed to be used or possessed are not decided by a single monk, but rather by the community.

When asked why some monks eat less than the given amount (one-half Dabē) even not on fasting days, the informants replied that the amount of food a monk eats has spiritual implications, and that eating less than the expected amount of foods is an expression of monk virtues of rightness and asset of spirituality. Some monks consume a little food in two or three-day intervals. It is believed that those who consume little are better in resisting bodily desire than those who eat more. The interviewed monks stated that they believe their actions could help them to increase spiritual self-control by overcoming the feelings of the physical world and concentrating on prayer. They seem to prefer prayer and work to eat food. However, these monks cannot refrain from eating a little bit because as Thomas sated:

Human being is both a body and a soul. This indicates that body and soul cannot live one without the other. If his body is not fed, it cannot live, and if his soul is not fed with prayer and religious knowledge, it cannot live either ... it will die. We should cognize that both body and soul need to be fed in order to live. Man can live when his body and soul cooperate with each other.
The key informants, Kidus, Elsa and Tomas mentioned factors that contribute to the low consumption tradition in the monastery. According to them, in the EOTC tradition, there are seven fasting seasons, these are the Great Lent (55 days), fasting of the Apostle (10–40 days), the Virgin’s fast (15 days), the fast of Nineveh (3 days), the fasting of the Prophets (40 days), the fast of Salivation (38–43 days) and the fast of revelation (1 day). In addition to these compulsory fasting seasons, there is also a fast known as the “fast of willingness”, what we call it in Amharic Tsegie (the flight), which is observed for 40 days. As Bantalem (2010) elucidated, Tsegie is observed to commemorate the flight of the holy family from the persecution of Herod, the king of Judea. Herod worried by the prophecy of wise men, who told him of the birth of Christ from St. Mary with the human nature. The flight began on June 2 and took about three years and six months (until their return after they had learned the death of Herod). However, in Ethiopia, it is observed for only 40 days from October 6 to November 14. Although it is not compulsory and part of official fasting days of the EOTC, many Christian observes the fasting during these 40 days to remember the hardship faced by St. Mary during the flight. To conclude, the fasting days observe in the EOTC are approximately more than 240 out of 365 days in fasting a year. These fasting seasons are strictly practiced by the monks. The monks also fast even if there are no fasting days. Consumption is restricted in fasting seasons. Thus, the quantity of non-fasting days is that of the days of feasting. The monks engage in the economic deeds, but the religious practices, such as fasting, contribute to the low consumption rate.

The focused group discussants firmly believe that monks’ engagement in works and economic activities are not an antithesis to religious life because the monks are engaged in an economic action that are socially significant and spiritually concomitant. For example, work and division of labors are viewed as an integral part of spiritual life. Without participating in economic activities, the monks do not see how they are able to continue or led the spiritual activities they are basically devoted to. Monasticism is not separated like island, rather it is strongly embedded and intertwined with sociocultural phenomena. In this respect, Ferraro & Andreatta (2010, p. 346) explain that religious practice is exhaustively entrenched in the total socioeconomic structure, and that it is difficult to distinguish religious behavior from economic, political, and social behavior.

The informants connected the religious life of monks with their engagement in economic assignments. The monastery as an institute is expected to be economically powerful and active, but not the monks. Members of the community have a duty of maintaining the status of the monastery not merely by prayer and fasting but through hard work. The quality of spiritual life is not entirely reset upon prayer, fasting and obedience. It is also dependent on the monastic economy. It is generally believed by the monastic community that spiritual life cannot be detached from socioeconomic life. In order to effectively and efficiently lead a religious life, the monks believe they consume little and render social service for the poor, elders, children and the disabled, as well as contribute to the monastery’s development as an institution.

The economic participation of monks in labor does not suggest that they are an economic-oriented group. In fact, spirituality and economic activities are found in the two extreme points of a continuum line, but there are monastic rules and/or regulations as well as consumptions tradition which overcome the discrepancies. In order to balance religious life and economic activities, monks engage in economic assignments, which are relevant and combined into a comprehensible spiritual sphere of life. Yonas and Ephram, who both shared this view stated that monasticism is a place where religious life and socioeconomic activities coexist in accordance with the principle of symbiotic relationships. In this respect, Jonveaux (2014) argues that “the most relevant questions for monks and nuns today is indeed to find an economic activity that can be productive for the community, but which also can be integrated into a coherent religious system”. Monastery is an entirely religious institution that theoretically admits in its framework only activities that can help it to reach the religious purpose of the institution. That is why economic activities have to be justified by monastics in order not to challenge the religious utopia (2014, p. 74).
The informants of the study argue that the monks’ economic involvement by itself is not enough to consider them as an economic-oriented group. Monks engage in the livelihoods activities since the religious life is embedded within the socioeconomic sphere of life. Work is an integral part of monastic life along with prayer and fasting. Donation/charity, rehabilitation, care and social support are also part of monastic life, as is obedience, civility and living in poverty. Monastic economy can be realized in the context of the monastic community who virtually experienced it. The economic deeds of monks can be well understood if they are viewed in the light of the context of the monastic community.

7. Monastic work traditions
The major livelihood means of the monastic community of the Mändaba are agriculture: farming and cattle rearing. In addition to these, the monastery is engaged in trade, transportation, handcraft, shop and grinding mill businesses. Mändaba, in addition to its rich spiritual, cultural and historical heritage, is also renowned for its agricultural production. The informants say that the productivity of the monastery is the result of the hard work of the monastic community. Each member of the monastery shoulders economic responsibilities assigned by the council of the community. Among several tasks, labor is the one which the whole monastic community should fulfill.

The data obtained from the field indicate that in addition to prayer and fasting, the monks dedicated their time and energy on work. The monks who are a member of Yāndanä Gedam (communal monastery) are expected to work hard. Any member of the monastic community has an obligation to perform any tasks assigned to them as part of religious order. To this effect, monks have engaged in various livelihood activities, such as farming, handicrafts, domestic work, animal husbandry, beekeeping, bookbinding and teaching. Some of the monks offer social services, which include reception, socializing with candidate novices, advising, disseminating knowledge, and regulating the overall situation in the monastery. A monk performs any of the above-mentioned jobs assigned by the monastic community regardless of how it could be challenging for him.

Work has been part of the monastic tradition since the time of Saint Anthony of Egypt. Saint Anthony was one of the first Christian ascetics, and certainly the best-known, to completely abandon civilization and settle in the desert, a move that endeared him to many as the father of monasticism (Geffert & Stavrou, 2016). In addition to his regular prayer and fasting, Anthony engaged himself in some kind of work assignment to combat the temptation of the Satan. Except those who are incapable to partake in monastic work assignment due to health and aged-related problems, no member of the monastic community remains idle. DeWeyer (2009) confirmed this fact as “at harvest time all able-bodied monks and students are working in the fields, and only the old and lame remain behind”. This affirms that a monastery is not a retirement center and provision for monks who take monastic order. Rather, it is a place of hard work along with prayer and fasting. It is said that a single monk’s work is harder than that of lay people irrespective of the working environment. Everyone who is a member of the community should work hard and share the burden. Therefore, work is compulsory for any member of monastic community. Ranging from the first day of their arrival in the monastery members of the community continued work until they are discharged from work by the monastic community. Yonas who is one of the interviewed informants stated that:

If you ask a monk about what kind of work he is doing, he will replay that ‘no work is left for him’. The monks work regardless of the type of the work the monastic community assigned for them. Monks perform challenging works, which require both physical stamina and mental cognition, and produce quality outcomes despite deadline pressure.

The researcher was able to witness monks’ work activities and the ability to handle different tasks within the given time. In the monastic tradition, work is centrally assigned like production and consumption. The monastic community has the right to recruit and allocate an individual for a specific job. The recruited individuals have the duty to accept the decision of the monastic
community. Accepting responsibility is a norm and it has sociocultural values in the monastic tradition. The informant said that even if the monk is unfit for the assigned work, he must accept the decision. The informant, Debekulu stated that “አንድነት ማህበሩ ለዚህ ስራ እ ግሌ ይሻላል ብሎ ከመረጠዉ ጡዜ ማህበሩን ዉሳኔ ተቀብሎ በተአዝዞ የማያገለ የማህበሩ አባል የለም።” loosely translate as “If the association or union selects the monk to do some work, no member of the monastery will refuse to serve. Even if he is not able to discharge his work responsibilities, he receives the task in the morning and relinquishes in the evening instead of refusing the task.” The monk has done everything the monastic community has asked of him. This implies that accepting task or obligation given by the council of the monastic community is a virtue of monastics.

Work for personal enrichment and satisfaction is not allowed and could lead to excommunication. If a monk’s work would be to grow a single potato or other type of vegetable around his cell, it would be considered as a reverse of the communal life for he is working for himself. He should work for others. The informant, Yonas used an Amharic proverb to describe monks’ work for others member of the community but not himself. He said that “ገዳም ህይወት ነብሴን ለስላሴ ስጋየን ለመነኵሴ ተብሎ ማክነርበትቦታነዉእን ይለእራስተብሎሚሰራበትአይደለም።” It is roughly interpreted as “monastic life is a life in which one entrusts his soul to the Holy Trinity and his body to the monk; not a life he makes for himself”. This means a monk cannot work for himself because his body belongs to the whole monastic community and his soul also is dedicated to the Lord. Since he cannot work for himself, his soul and body are the property of the Lord and the monastic community, respectively. There are no things he needs, as his body is under the control of the monastic community. When the community orders him to do something, he should accept the command and do the assignment.

But there is a case in which few monks counter the monastic work norms. Although it is mandatory for any monk living in the communal monastery to carry out activities given to him, there may be times that some monks refuse to do the work they are ordered to do. When this happens, the Śrārātā Abāw will be applied. Śrārātā Abāw is a set of norms and regulations which come down to the monastic community in tradition from Saints and former monastic fathers stating the monastic life and systems. The monk who refuses to comply with orders and fails to do a work will be investigated based on these norms. Any monk or member of the monastery takes a direct order from the Māgabi and it is compulsory for a monk to respectfully accept the orders and carry out. Other monastic fathers may sometimes order the monk to do a work as necessary and they would report to the Māgabi if the monk refused to do the job. The Māgabi then investigates the matter and presents it to the whole assembly for the decision.

If the monk is found guilty of failing to comply with the Māgabi’s and other monastic father’s orders, the assembly will pass corrective measures on him according to the monastic norms (Śrārātā Abāw). The corrective measure may vary depending on the weight of the fault by the monk. The punishment that is considered as the easiest is cutting the daily food (intake) of the faulted monk. The logic behind this punishment is the belief that it is against God’s will for a monk to have his daily food without labor.

If the monk is found to be incorrigible after the first punishment, a more severe physical punishment may be applied. For instance, the unrepentant monk may be tied to a log in iron chains for seven up to forty days. If the monk’s violations of the norms of the monastery are repeated regularly, the assembly of monks may take a prayer session for the wronged monk as it is believed this could be Devil’s test. Usually, after the prayers a monk who finds hard times complying with norms of the monastery is delivered from his problems. If, however, the aforementioned measures don’t work, the monk is forced to leave the monastery and go into ascetic life.

Instead of refusing to accept orders or failing to do the activities given to him, a monk has a choice of doing the activity up to his capacity and requesting for another work if he cannot do the job. A monk may have some reasons for refusing to do a work given to him. For instance, if he
(monk) believes the work he is ordered to do exposes him to worldly desires that are antithesis to his spiritual life, he may decline to carry out orders. A monk, for example, may hesitate to go to town even if it is important for the monastery. This is because he believes going to town may lead to sinful desires and it goes against the very decision he made to abandon worldly life. This appears to be the very reason many monasteries in Ethiopia are located far away from towns and cities. i.e. to get far away from the world and worldly desires. The monasteries are located in mountainous areas making them inaccessible for transportation by vehicles or even back of animals. Thus, even if he has a reservation, it is the monk’s duty to do any work he is ordered to do and at the same time to prevent things that might affect his spiritual life.

A type and amount of work assignment is rotated across time. Monks, hence, may change a type of work when the monastic community assigns him to other work activities. This enables the monk to do multiple types of work rather than remaining on a single type. A monk can work on every task assigned to him as he is passed and examined in various tasks since his membership to the monastic community. There is no gender division of work assignment. The traditional gender divisions of work are entirely abandoned and replaced by age (seniority), education, experience and personal proficiency.

There is a division of labor that is aimed at effectively executing tasks. The overall managerial and administrative tasks of the monastery lie upon the Āḇä Mänęt or Mämḥär, chief administrator of the monastery. He is the supreme leader and authority of the monastery. Āḇä Mänęt is responsible for the wellbeing of the whole community. Āfā Mämḥär is also assigned to run the overall activities of the monastery next to the Āḇä Mänęt. He assists the Āḇä Mänęt and sometimes he is delegated to administer the monastery when the Āḇä Mänęt is absent due to business outside the monastery. Āfā Mämḥär acts as deputy and public relation, and second in command of the monastery. Both Āḇä Mänęt and Āfā Mämḥär are clergy, commonly Qōmos, an ordained religious title given to clergymen, such as priests and deacons when they take monastic vows.

The participants explained that the Mägabi is in charge of administering the property of the monastery. He assigns the monks’ work assignments and makes sure that monks are undertaking the work allotted to them. He is an authorized person for planning the division of labor. He identifies the type of work need to be done each day. Mägabi is very busy compared to other positions. All monks are directed on what they do by Mägabi. The Mägabi is responsible for equally distributing the food cooked by the Gal Mägabi (foods and beverages provider) in the Bëtä Ēgaziabhër to all monks. He also checks the availability of foods and goods. The Mägabi is as inventory manager of the monastery. He checks the availability of the necessary inventory in the monastery including food. He also welcomes guests and provides accommodation and food to them.

Another work division mentioned by the informants is that of Gäbäz. The Gäbäz looks after the property of the monastic church and oversees liturgical rites. He supervises the liturgy ceremonies, such as anaphora, chant and hymen in the church. He preserves and controls sacred liturgical vestments, such as robes or clothes, ancient chalices, crowns, incense burner, drums, cestrum and prayer staffs. The Gäbäz is responsible to maintain liturgical books, hagiographies, chronicles and ancient manuscripts. Sometime the Gäbäz is assigned as administrator and guider of the church museum.

The Liqä Räd looks after the agricultural activities. He is an expert in farming and animal rearing. His responsibilities range from cultivating, scattering of the crop to collecting the product and putting it in the granary. There is also a monk who is called the Liqä Āḇäw. He is assigned to look after the sick, the old-aged monks and the disabled. The Liqä Āḇäw provides care and support for monks who are unable to move due to sickness, injury and aged-related problems. When a person is sick, the Liqä Āḇäw is called to examine the status and condition of the patient. He can recommend whether the patient needs further medical care or home care. He also has some knowledge in therapy, first aid and setting bones. He prescribes and selects the food prepared for


the sick and injured. He also provides food and another necessary things door to door for the old aged, sick and disable. The Liqä Ābäw plays ambidextrous roles as a social worker and medical practitioner in the monastery.

The Ėqa Bët is a store-keeper who controls and manages the property. He puts the monastery’s property, such as clothes, home utensils, field equipment, cereal storage and other goods in a safe place and preserves it from damage. It is the duty of Ėqa Bët to keep the property clean and ready for use. The last but not the least position is Gal Mägabi who is responsible for preparing daily foo baking Mekoreta or Dabë, Ėnjära, Ethiopians staple diet, usually made from tëff, which can also be prepared from grains such as barley, wheat, maize and sorghum as well as sauces, to the whole monastic community. He also brews tāla, Ethiopian local beer with an alcohol content comparable to an average factory beer or even more when there is special religious ceremony and guests. He also arranges the prepared foods on dishes.

As the informants reported, there are a number of Rääd under the above eight position holders. Rääd means servant who is assigned for various core work position and/or division by the combined consensus of the eight core work coordinators. Including the Ābä Manët and Āfä Mämahar, all work coordinators are selected by the council of the whole community. The Ābä Manët, Āfä Mämahar and Gäbäz should be selected from clergy, a priest monk (Qōmos), but the rest are selected from fellow monks. The selection is based on religious status, knowledge, commitment and personal competence of the candidate. When there is promotion and demotion a general meeting which comprises, the entire monastic community is called. The demotion of a person assigned an official position also can be carried out in two ways. First, when the monk requests to resign from his duty or leave the monastery to experience the Qänona of another monastery. Secondly, if he makes a mistake, he is removed from the given responsibility by the request of the community. But there is no time interval or restriction for the duration of the authority.

The prayer and work life of the monastic community, the informants argued, do not contradict each other. Both activities are conducted in their own allotted time and do not overlap. Prayer cannot be missed even if the monk is tired due to hard work. Sleep is considered a debt in monastic life, and when a monk wakes up from sleep, he feels like he has a debt to pay through prayer. He never leaves his cell (Bäät) without prayer. Work and prayer do not substitute each other in the monastic community but can supplement each other for better spiritual dedication. The value of monastic work is not only economic, as it has also religious, social, cultural, personal and institutional importance. Therefore, it would be true to conclude that there is always work in the monastery, although the monks have no economic motivations.

### 7.1. Religious value

Works have several purposes in the monastic community. Most importantly, it is a weapon to combat evil thoughts. A monk who is slothful, it believed by the monastic community, would be easily tempted by bodily desires which affect spiritual life. When a monk remains workless, he succumbs to bodily desire and this would noticeably affect his spiritual life. Yitbarek, one of the informants, elaborates this as:

A monk who is jobless is easily challenged by the temptation of the Satan. Because a monk who remained idle would think undesirable things which antithesis of spirituality are. To escape from diabolic temptation, the monk needs to work hard. The unsolicited feeling monk thinks are removed by work. When the monk exerts his mental cognition and physical stamina on certain work activities, his thinking will be diverted on the activities and his physical muscle also become weakened. Then a monk would not think sinful things.

When asked what “thinking diverted and physical muscle weakened” mean, the informant (Yitbarek) answered that work requires both mental and physical efforts of a person. The monk’s mind focuses on the process of the work and his body also does what his mind orders him to do.
Hence, the monk can control his mind and body by focusing on work. Being able to control the mind and body will help the monk to remove the source of sin from himself. Membru (2017, p. 102) stated that work, as it is believed in the monastic community, is a way through which sanctification from God followed by goodness can be assured; because, it is assumed by members of the monastic community that when a person is working, he/she is free from any sinful acts.

The group discussants and the interviewed informants argued that a monk who works hard combats one devil, but the monk who doesn't work fights with numerous devils. The study participants, Zekarias and Yohannes emphasized that although work is used to fight Satan, it is not the only means. Because when a monk's life is occupied with work alone, he fails in his spirituality. The monk's resistance will weaken, and he will become defenseless to the temptation of Satan. Work alone is not adequate at all in the struggle against the conspiracy of the devil. This entails that monks use work as a strategy to fight the temptation of the devil. They also argued that work is not the only way to resist the devil's assault, rather it is one of the means.

7.2. Social value
The monasteries are centers of social life. It is supported through the joint effort of the whole monastic community (Gil, 2008, p. 4). Although monks' engagement and dynamic participation in social life is debatable due to their religious function to look for spiritual release, it seems involvement in social life is unavoidable because of their importance in a community and numerous duties they are in charge of (2008, p. 10). Values and norms have tremendous relevance in the social dimensions of monastic life. In monasteries, a common value system is the basis of conflict resolution and standards for correct behavior (Inauen, Frey, Rost, & Osterloh, 2012, p. 4). The study informants linked the value of work with prestige and respect. Monks who work hard regardless of selective of the type of work assigned to them have more social prestige and are venerated. Monks who work hard can be considered as a role model for fellow monks. Abel describes the social value of work as:

Apart from a means to diabolic resistance, work has great social value in the monastery. A monk who works hard is believed to have diversified work skills since he would do any kind of work allocated to him. He would also serve as trainer for new arrivals and an example of hard worker within the monastic community.

However, the monks do not aim to get a social position by working hard. Working with social motivation is regarded as seeking earthly respect. A monk who works hard with social motivation can be regarded as the one who seeks earthly respect. They believe they should not work with the intention of earning social capital and honor. If a monk works with the view of social recognition, his spiritual mission is diverted into earthly desire. Hence, monks perform hard work irrespective of seeking respect, but fellow monks give admiration and learn from them.

To avoid social motivation, the monk concentrates on what he is working on rather than on what others say about him. He works not to earn respect, but rather with the pursuit of blessing from fathers. He also works hard not to elevate his social position, he rather enrich his spiritual aspiration by working for others. In the nutshell, work has social value, such as respect and reverence in the monastery. But the monk does not work to gain such things; rather the fellow monks respect and admire monks who work hard. So that, work has social implications. Monks can take the example of the hard worker as a lesson to be learned, which may enhance the sprite of work culture.

Work is also used as a means of improving social skills. The participants say that through work a monk can improve his social values. Work enables monks to learn and develop social values such as obedience, civility and open-minded thinking. It also helps the monks to develop a strong social relationship among themselves. As is mentioned by the informants; unlike in the private (Qurit) monastic life, monks working together in the communal (Yäändañät) monastic life, leads to better
sharing and helping each other. Group cohesion and communication between monks develop. Work doesn’t only build social status but also helps monks to develop social skills based on religious knowledge.

7.3. Economic value

Although monks are not allowed to own property, they are not expected to beg and depend on others for assistance. Rather monks work and lead their life on the fruit of their labor. Dependency is conceived as a sign of withdrawal from religious and socioeconomic duties. Therefore, monks are expected to be self-reliant and depend on their own means for survival, based on their industriousness tradition. Work is a base for the livelihood of the whole monastic community. A monk must develop a means of livelihood for himself and also for others who need his care and support. Even the little the monks consume must emanate from the work they are engaged in. Yosef says the following about the economic value of work in the monastery.

The livelihoods of the monastery are secured with the work of monks. Without monk’s engagement in work, the durability of the monastery could be endangered. The monastery has no labor power unless the monks work hard. Each monk has a responsibility of working hard as member of the institution. Institutional development, such as helping other, involving in social activities and consolidating traditional church education would remain in dream without the work of monks.

Although the monastery may have economic aspirations, the monks do not work with economic motivation for it is considered an earthly desire and against the core monastic value of living in poverty. Living in poverty does not mean appreciating poverty, but it means avoiding material accumulation and ownership of worldly things or goods and only serving others. Livelihood is sound when the monks work without economic motivation. The monks work only to survive since the soil cannot survive without the body. The body needs to be fed, and work enables monks to produce their daily foods. Three of the interview participants explain that the Lord ordered the man to live through his labors and efforts, so the monks’ subsistence should emanate from their own hard work.

7.4. To get rid of idleness

The other purpose of work in the monastic community is as a tool to get rid of idleness. Idealness is conceived by the monastic community as an enemy of the soul. The need to evade it makes the monks work hard without economic aspiration. This implies that monks can work without economic motivation as idealness is considered a cause of sin. The interviewed informant, Simon narrated that:

But monks should remove idleness for it degrades a spiritual mission pursued by the monks. Indolence is sign of laziness and personal weakness. In addition to being source of sin, idleness would make the monastery center of provision for the idlers. Idleness is against the directive of the Lord, Who ordered the man to live his life through hard work rather than relying on others. Thus, monks should lead their life through their own efforts.

By disabling his enthusiasm of monastic life, idleness can make a monk paralyze and would upsurge his dependency syndrome. The monks seem idler as plodder or recalcitrant one who do not succumb himself to the Lord and disobey for the monastic community. The participants argued that idleness would not only create reliance, but likewise, it is against the rules of the monastery. Furthermore, dependence adversely affects the spiritual assignments of the monk. On the whole, the idler is epitomized and perceived as trivial one who withdraws from religious concern and moral’s obligations.

In order to avoid idleness, monks even perform activities that are less important both for the monastic community and themselves. There is Amharic saying which is used to signify the non-market and social motivation of monks: “ስራ ያጣመነኾሴ ቆቡን ቀዶ ይሰል” which may loosely be translated as “an idle monk tore his skull cap and sew it”. Even if monks have no work assignment, they should not remain indolent; rather they should keep themselves busy as the saying affirms it.
“an idle mind is devil's workshop.” An indolent mind is easily captured by the devil. Because if a monk is remained idle “the devil finds work for idle hands” which means an idle monk would do unwanted things which is against of monastic order.

7.5. To evaluate novices
Work is used to examine and evaluate the eligibility of novices or beginners to monastic life. The informants stated that before novices take the monastic order, they are required to pass a number of tests. One of these tests is work. To examine his readiness and eligibility to the monastic life, a novice is ordered to work much throughout the day and even the night. By deploying the novice into work, the monastic community is able to observe a number of personal traits that he bears.

One of the traits observed in the novice's work performance is the ability to do different work assignments with no selection of the tasks. The novice may be ordered to do challenging and laborious works. The tasks the novice is ordered to do may range from household to farming and fieldwork. This is used to assess the novice's acknowledgment and acceptance of the work assigned to him without precondition even if the work and the working conditions are unfavorable. Thus, work is used as a means of evaluating the novice's disposition to accept commands. Another trait of the novice to be observed is his patience, willingness and readiness to do the work that is assigned to him. Therefore, the monastic community is able to observe the novice's persistence, enthusiasm and prompt responses to work assignments. Kirubel describes how work is used to evaluate the personal trait of the novice.

Work has multifarious value in the monastery of which using work to evaluate personal traits of novice is the one all member of the monastic community share in common. In fact, there are other methods of evaluation, there is no such significant method of evaluation as the work do. It is an ideal tool which is used to detect the novice's appreciation of works under certain moral values. Work has behavioral and moral assets that are significant to examine the novice.

The novice also examines himself through work. The novice can test his eligibility for the monastic life by employing himself in different working environments. As was stated by the informants, the novice can use work as an opportunity to evaluate himself. Work can teach him whether he has the endurance cope with the challenges he will encounter. Work, whether ordered and assigned and/or self-motivated can help the novice to shape his identity, give value to his presence, allow him to structure his time, give him a useful way to concentrate and contribute to his spiritual and social development. Work has a great significance to the novice since it helps him to upgrade his status. A good novice is the one who pursues his work seriously. He should be serious in his assignments in order to properly follow the monastic ways of life. In general, work enables the monastic community to help the novice adapts to monastic life. It is used by the novice as a prospect to socialize to the monastic life. He also uses work as an opportunity to upgrade his status into other advanced life, such as taking monastic vow.

8. Conclusion
A monastic community is a religious group, but studying monastic life, as a socioeconomic phenomenon has considerable significance in appreciating its social, economic and cultural ways of life, it enables an understanding of the rationale behind the socioeconomic activities of the monks in a particular cultural context. The involvement of monks in economic deeds is an anticipated phenomenon. Compared to the previous time, the modern-day social duties, economic independence and competition, political secularism and religious missions forced monks to engage in the economic activities in addition to their spiritual duty. As a result, religious and socioeconomic motives contribute to the inevitability of economic activities in the Mândaba Mâdhanëläm monastery. Economic engagement cannot contradict with the religious mission monks principally pursue if one can measure the values of economic activity in accordance with the religious relevance. Therefore, the monastic economic activity is either constructive or destructive. But the manner in which the economic activity is contextualized within the monastic tradition determines whether it is compatible or irreconcilable with spirituality. The economic activity is potentially
beneficial if appropriate management strategies are used in order to reconcile the overlap (if any) between religious life and economic deeds. Well managed economic activity consequently leads to better spiritual coherence, improves social cohesion and stimulates innovation. It also increases the social welfare mission of the monastic community.

Likewise, monastic work exists at the junction point where religious order and sociocultural values meet and exist in a manner in which they supplement each other. Monastic work is combined not only with religious life but also with the socioeconomic life of monks and moral values. Non-economic stimulus of work plays a crucial role within the cloister, causing monks to continue to work regardless of economic drives, since work is religious and sociocultural requirement. Monastic work and economy are dynamic sociocultural and economic phenomena found within a fixed religious order that builds up on the real sociocultural practices of the community and can only be effective if these phenomena are understood as per the understanding of the monastic community.

9. Limitations
There are some limitations to the study. One is that the study did not represent the views and experiences of hermits, despite them being ascetics and hence representing an additional form of monastic life. Persoon (2003, p. 23) stated that it is challenging to study hermits as part of monastic life, because the hermits intentionally choose to inhabit a starkly liminal world, geographically, socially and spiritually on the edge of human existence. The study is also unable to incorporate the opinions and insights of nuns since the monastery is closed for women. Although monasticism is a common phenomenon within and outside Christian denominations, this study only focuses on the EOTC monastic traditions. The available related literature on socioeconomic aspects of monastic life is scarce and limited as far as the knowledge of the author is concerned. Therefore, it was difficult to compare and contrast the findings with previously done research on this theme.

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Correction
This article has been republished with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article

Glossary
[1] The Nine Saints came to Ethiopia fleeing from the dangerous disturbance caused by the Arian heresy. They chose Ethiopia because they have heard it was a free Christian country that strongly opposed the Arian heresy. The Nine Saints according to the records of the church are Ābbä Alif, Ābbä Garima, Ābbä Āragawi, Ābbä Guba, Ābbä Liganos, Ābbä Yamata, Ābbä Aṣi, Ābbä Pāntolivon and Ābbä Sāhama (Mahibere Kidusan, 2009; McGuckin, 2011). For detail information, you can see The Nine Saints on the cover page of this manuscript.
[2] Monasteries used to be self-sufficient communities that relied on the resources available in their local environment. For instance, the monks produced their own wine, which was essential for the celebration of the Eucharist; or they preserved food from their own produce (Aulet, Mundet & Vidal, 2017:175).
[3] Gult is the right to collect tribute over the fiefs given, which was common before 1974 in Ethiopia.
[4] Bëtä Egziabèrë is a place where food is cooked or made. This place is respected and only allowed to enter for member of the monastic community. But in permission base layman can visit it but not touch things around there, although the permission is varied across monasteries.
[5] Mekoreta or Dabë is a kind of circle shape flat bread which made up of tèff (Indigenous grain, Eragrostis tef, widely cultivated within

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Ethiopia for its seed), barley, sorghum, maze, and so on. Half dabë is given as Mäqunän. Mäqunän is allotment or share of something (for instance, foods, goods etc.) distributed equally among the monastic community.”

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