

**PILGRIMAGES AND SYNCRETISM: RELIGIOUS
TRANSFORMATION AMONG THE ARSI OROMO OF
ETHIOPIA**



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SUMMARY

Currently, the majority of the Arsi Oromo are either Muslims or Christians. However, most of them still practice their traditional beliefs passed down through generations by their forefathers, such as *Waaqeffannaa*, and attend various rituals related to it. *Waaqeffannaa* is a religion based on belief in one God known to the Oromo as *Waaqa*, which according to the Oromo is the creator of the entire universe. The Oromo belief of the existence of *Waaqa* is based on observing what they call his works, such as the presence of various seasons, rain, sun, darkness, growing of crops, existence of water bodies, mountains, trees and other living things. Contrary to Christianity, Islam, and other religions, *Waaqeffannaa* does not require the construction of religious houses for the veneration of *Waaqa* or for thanking him for his good deeds. Instead, the Oromo who are followers of *Waaqeffannaa* thank *Waaqa* by travelling to natural physical bodies such as rivers, lakes, forests, and mountains, which they believe are created by *Waaqa* himself. *Waaqeffannaa* is believed to be a free will religion, where a believer does not need to calculate in order to obtain certain advantages, such as going to heaven in the afterlife for adhering to *Waaqa*. To the same effect, a believer would not face some kind of punishment for abandoning *Waaqa*.

According to the belief held by Oromo followers of *Waaqeffannaa*, *Waaqa* has various attributes. *Waaqa* is considered the creator of the universe, with all its living and non-living entities. Adherents perceive him as the sole champion and protector of truth and justice. They also believe he will withdraw his protection from individuals who lie and commit various forms of crimes. This exposes the individual to various misfortunes, such as accidents and sicknesses. The only way to regain *Waaqa*'s protection is to ask for his forgiveness. Followers also widely believe that *Waaqa* is black. This is mainly because the Oromo associate black with fertility because they believe that fertile soil and rain clouds are black in colour. Additionally, they associate black with the unknown and thereby something deserving respect. They also equate their dark skin colour with that of *Waaqa*. In a metaphorical reference to his wisdom, patience, tolerance, and mercifulness, *Waaqa* is described as having a sea-belly. This belly also provides rain, which brings enough grass for animals and cereal for his people.

Waaqa is closely associated with another entity- *lafa* (earth), which is sometimes referred to as a mother, while *Waaqa* is considered a father. The Oromo indicate the inseparable nature of *Waaqa* and the earth through their prayers. In most cases they invoke both names during prayers and blessings, indicating the equal significance of both entities. The Oromo believe that *Waaqa* assigns spirit-like beings, *ayyaana*, to all living and non-

living creatures for protection, which he removes from people who commit a sin (*cubbuu*). The removal of the protective *ayyaana* exposes a creature to attack by an evil *ayyaana*. A person commits *cubbuu* if he breaks a certain *safuu* (traditional and moral values of the society) such as killing another person, lying, cheating, robbing, disrespecting one's parents and elders, abandoning belief in *Waaqa*, abandoning one's culture and tradition, neglecting responsibility, and being ungrateful. The concept of death, burial, and the afterlife are also important aspects of *Waaqeffannaa*. Death is considered to be a call by *Waaqa* to a person on a specific time assigned to him. The deceased is buried on a ledge off the burial hole, on the right side for a man and on the left side for a woman, in a pattern similar to their sitting position while alive. The deceased's face is placed in the direction of sunrise. Then a stone stele (*sodduu*) is erected on the grave. Followers of *Waaqeffannaa* do not believe in the afterlife. For them, only *Waaqa* knows what happens once a person is dead.

One of the practices in *Waaqeffannaa* is the act of making pilgrimages to the *Abbaamuuda* (father of anointment). Because of the decline of *Waaqeffannaa* and the *Abbaamuuda*, the Arsi Oromo have diverted their pilgrimages to shrines established by various local saints in different parts of the region. The shrine of Sheikh Hussein in Bale, the Sof Umar Guutoo pilgrimage center in western Arsi, and the Faraqqasaa pilgrimage center in eastern Arsi are among the most frequently visited pilgrimage centers by the Arsi Oromo. In addition to the above shrines, large numbers of Arsi Oromo also take part in the *Irreecha* (thanksgiving) ritual by Lake Arsadi in Bishoftu town.

The Shrine of Sheikh Hussein and his cult is one of the most popular shrines among the Arsi Oromo and he is widely believed to be the person responsible for the spread of Islam in most parts of south-eastern Ethiopia. He was born in Anajina, in Bale, about nine centuries ago to his father, Sheikh Ibrahim from Arabia, who had previously come to the region with his father who intended to preach Islam. His mother was Shemsiya, a local Arsi Oromo woman. Another saint in the area, Abelqassim, is said to have had a vision about the birth of Sheikh Hussein long before he was born, on a Tuesday night when the sky is said to have been filled with a bright light. By the time Sheikh Hussein was 20-30 years old, he performed many miracles, like healing the sick and endowing children to infertile women through his prayers. Many young Muslims came to Anajina from all over the country to study the Qur'an with him. About 900 years ago, he is popularly believed to have had 6666 disciples, with whom he built his first mosque. He spent most of his life at Anajina in Bale and Sakina in Arsi. He is also said to have travelled a lot, preaching Islam among the Arsi Oromo *Waaqeffannaa* followers, and known by the name *awaama*. After his death, his son Nurallah

took the responsibility of overseeing religious activities at the center. When Nurallah died, his son Zekeriya took over. After Zekeriya in turn passed away, the responsibility of administering the center and teaching Islam passed on to a number of *Ulama* (Muslim scholars).

Information concerning the center was almost non-existent until the last quarter of the eighteenth century. About 300 years ago, a certain Sheikh Aliyi, affectionately known among the Arsi Oromo by the name Sheikh Muhammad Tilma Tilmo, saw a vision of Sheikh Hussein while studying the Qur'an in Harar, in eastern Ethiopia. In the vision, Sheikh Hussein ordered him to travel to Anajina and look over his center. After some negotiations with the local Arsi Oromo chiefs, he was accepted and started the construction of the shrine in its present form. The *Darga*, hereditary guardians of the shrine, are descendants of servants and assistants of Sheikh Mohammad Tilma Tilmo. It is after the construction of the shrine that large numbers of pilgrims start to flock to the center. Currently, there are two main periods of pilgrimages to the shrine. The first one is during *Arafa* (the day of the revelation of the Qur'an to Prophet Mohammed), when a large number of Muslims with very little money or resources travel there for communal prayer. The second pilgrimage period is known as *Zaaraa Galgala Goobanaa*, and this is celebrated in commemoration of the birth of Sheikh Hussein. Most pilgrims carry *dhanqee lulee* Sheikh Hussein, a Y-shaped stick in accordance with Sheikh Hussein's action.

During the pilgrimages, pilgrims take part in various rituals, including: *salaamoo* (greetings); prostration in front of the main gate of the shrine and the burial place of Sheikh Hussein; smearing of butter on the gate, on the fence, and on the various buildings; burning of joss sticks; and the *waaree* (noon/evening) ritual, which is composed of the handing over of votive gifts (*wareega*), asking for various favours (*niyyaa*), *hadraa* (religious assembly for communal prayers), and singing of *bahro* (hymns in praise of Sheikh Hussein). *Bahro* songs narrate the story of Sheikh Hussein, the miracles he performed, the role he played in the spread of Islam, and they also allude to various social and economic problems in the country. While *Bahro* is sung, pilgrims give money. This gift is called *arjooma* (generosity). The money collected is shared between the inhabitants of the village as well as poor pilgrims. In the *duaayii* (prayer/blessing) ritual, pilgrims are blessed and prayers are conducted for peace, prosperity, health, sufficient rain, productivity and the likes. Pilgrims also take part in the *hadra* ritual, which involves the beating of a drum and is believed to heal individuals possessed with a spirit.

Pilgrims have various motives for their travel to the shrine of Sheikh Hussein during the major periods of pilgrimages, as well as any other time of the year. Pilgrims travel to seek Sheikh Hussein's *barakaa* (holy virtue) and to pray for health and wealth for their family members and themselves. In addition to Sheikh Hussein's *karaamaa* (spiritual power), healing is sought through holy water from the pond of *Haroo Lukkuu* (pond of chicken), *jawaaraa* (holy soil), and by taking part in the *hadraa* ritual. Pilgrims also travel to pray for the conception of a child, to ask for forgiveness for their mistakes, to ask for help in disputes, to help them find lost relatives and property, and to seek success in education and/or business ventures.

The Sof Umar Guutoo pilgrimage center in West Arsi is the other pilgrimage center most frequented by the Arsi Oromo. Sof Umar is believed to be one of the favourite disciples of Sheikh Hussein. There are no religious houses at Sof Umar Guutoo. The center of the shrine is a cave where a woman is said to have survived because she took refuge in it while the rest of the population perished about two centuries ago. This event is said to have attached a power to the cave, and since then it has become a pilgrimage center. Because of the increase in the number of pilgrims, the center of pilgrimage has moved to a nearby plateau in the forest. Pilgrims build temporary huts known as *dagalee* during the pilgrimages. There are two major periods of pilgrimages in a year. The first is known as *Ashuura* and it takes place in December while the second is called *Rajaba* and it takes place in June.

During these periods of pilgrimages, pilgrims perform various rituals. These include: *hamdaa galfachuu* (showing gratitude), *salaamoo* (greeting), *wareega* (votive offerings), *waziiza* (burning of a ritual fire), *ciincaa* (burning the head of sacrificial animals), *waarida* (hymns sung praising Sof Umar), *dhibaayyuu* (libation), and *xiliitee* (roasting of coffee beans in melting butter). Through the *hamdaa galfachuu* ritual, pilgrims show their gratitude by thanking Allah and Sof Umar for bringing them back to the center again. The *salaamoo* ritual involves greeting Sof Umar. During this ritual, *bahro* is sung praising Sof Umar and Sheikh Hussein, his alleged mentor. Pilgrims also give money for prayers so that their wishes will be fulfilled. This money is known as *Kaayoo*. In addition, they donate money in an alleged gesture of generosity, and money given in this form is known as *arjooma*. The *wareega* ritual involves the handing over of votive gifts, which include animals, money, coffee, clothes, and flags. *Waziiza* is a ritual fire around which pilgrims perform the *hadra* ritual, during which they sing hymns praising Sof Umar, accompanied by the beating of a drum. *Ciincaa* and *xiliitee* rituals are performed as an offering to *Waaqa* for his kindness and for spirits to stop them from attacking pilgrims. The *Waarida* ritual takes place throughout the nights. It

involves the singing of hymns praising Sof Umar. During the *dhibaayyuu* (libation) ritual, milk is dropped on *shifaa* leaves to symbolize feeding cattle and on the soil for growing grass and cereals, among others.

Pilgrims embark on pilgrimages to Sof Umar for various reasons. Most pilgrims travel there for earthly reasons. The most important among these are either to pray or thank Sof Umar for issues related to health (for humans and cattle), wealth and to be blessed with children. *Jawaara* (holy soil) from the cave, water from the nearby river, and blessings by elders presiding over the rituals are used to heal the sick.

The other pilgrimage center frequently visited by the Arsi Oromo is the Faraqqasaa pilgrimage center located at a village called Faraqqasaa in eastern Arsi. It was established towards the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century by a woman named Momina, which the Arsi Oromo affectionately call *Aayyoo* (mother) Momina. She originated from the northern part of Ethiopia, served a famous Sheikh in Hararge in eastern Ethiopia, travelled and established shrines in different parts of the country before finally settling in Faraqqasaa where she established the most famous of all the shrines she had previously established. She died on October 29, 1929 and a mausoleum is erected on her burial site. This became one of the most important factors that attract tens of thousands of pilgrims each year. Many miracles are associated with Momina, such as bringing sight to the blind, allowing the lame to walk, endowing children to the barren, wealth to the poor, and even raising the dead. After she died, leadership passed to her descendants, who all claim to have inherited her great spiritual power.

Thousands of pilgrims travel to Faraqqasaa six times a year. The first and most important of these periods is the 29th of October each year, the anniversary of the death of Momina. The other five periods which also attract large numbers of pilgrims to Faraqqasaa are: *Mawlid* (the anniversary of the birth of Prophet Mohammad), *Id al-Fitr* (the breaking of the Muslim month of fasting), St. Gabriel's day on 28 December and 27 May of each year, and *Pagumen* (the last month of the Ethiopian calendar). During these periods pilgrims partake in numerous rituals, one of which is *silat* (votive offering) in return for some kind of material or other benefits such as children, wealth, and health obtained through prayers in the name of the shrine and/or any of the spiritual leaders. The handing over of votive offerings is accompanied by the public statement of the alleged miracles. Pilgrims burn joss sticks and incense under big trees, *adbars*, under which Momina is said to have sat and prayed. Pilgrims also take part in a *wadaajaa* ritual, which is a religious assembly, during which they sing hymns praising Momina and subsequent spiritual leaders of the center, chew khat, and drink

coffee. Pilgrims take part in this ritual invoking Momina's name in order to alleviate themselves from their earthly problems.

Pilgrims travel to Faraqqasaa to pray for prosperity, children, and healing; the latter attracts the largest number of pilgrims. Various methods of healing the sick are employed at Faraqqasaa. The first and probably the most important method of healing, particularly with sicknesses related to possession by a spirit, is the *karaamaa* (spiritual power) of the leader. The leader, who is claimed to have a very strong spiritual power, uses it to threaten other lesser possessing spirits to leave the possessed. Other traditional medicines, such as *tabal* (holy water) from a spring located in a valley close to the center, *emet* (holy ash obtained after burning joss sticks), and *hawza* (tea made up of boiled *khat* leaves) are employed. They are applied externally for outward sicknesses, such as skin problems, and they are drunk in case of internal problems such as belly pain.

The Arsi Oromo are also active participants of the *Irreecha* (thanksgiving) ritual. This ritual involves the process of thanking *Waaqa* at various physical bodies he created, such as on mountains and by water bodies. Even if different Oromo groups celebrate *Irreecha* at a nearby water body close to their communities, millions of Oromo attend the celebration at Lake Arsadi in Bishoftu, about 45 km from Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia. There are two types of *Irreecha*: *Irreecha Malkaa* (*Irreecha* by a river (water body) also called *Irreecha Birraa* (*Irreecha* in the spring season); and *Irreecha Tuulluu* (*Irreecha* on a mountain) also called *Irreecha Bonaa* (*Irreecha* in autumn, which is a dry season in Ethiopia). *Irreecha* is not celebrated in *ganna* (summer), which is a rainy season in Ethiopia. During this ritual, almost all the worshippers carry green grass and flowers. Green grass, always an integral part of an *Irreecha* ceremony, is a sign of fertility and productivity in Oromo tradition. The Oromo thank *Waaqa* for helping them survive the winter (rainy) season peacefully, for helping them grow crops for people and grass for cattle, for creating the *birraa* (spring) season, which is a harvesting season, for creating the autumn and winter seasons, and for creating everything in the universe.

Upon reaching the lake, worshippers perform various rituals, such as immersing the green grass and the flowers they are carrying in the lake and sprinkling themselves as well as others around them. It is considered a baptism by the moderates (those who do not follow Orthodox Islam or Christianity) with past or current exposure to Christianity. They also consider the water holy water. For followers of *Waaqeffannaa* religious practice, it is a way of confirming that the water is pure and clear, hence, the right time to celebrate *Irreecha*. For them it is also a symbolic prayer to *Waaqa* to calm them and make them peaceful like the

lake. The other ritual that takes place is the *daddarbbaa* ritual. This involves throwing food items and drinks, including alcoholic drinks, brought by worshippers as votive offerings, to a spot under the *odaa* tree and on a big black stone referred to as *siidaa* (big black stone under the tree) found close to the lake. Worshippers throw a little bit of what they bring onto the edge of the lake. This is just to thank *Waaqa* by giving a little bit of what they have brought to the celebration. In addition to this, worshippers paint the *odaa* and the *siidaa* with butter, sprinkle perfume, and burn joss sticks and light candles on and around them.

As the belief systems and rituals at the shrine of Sheikh Hussein, Sof Umar Guutoo, Faraqqasaa, and the *Irreecha* ritual indicate, religion among the Arsi Oromo can be arguably perceived as highly syncretistic and in constant transformation as a result of various religious, social and political developments throughout time. As for the dominant religion among the Arsi Oromo at the moment, the religious interplay is largely between Islam and indigenous Oromo religious beliefs and practices, and to some extent Christianity. Despite their apparent association with Islam, elements of indigenous religious beliefs and practices, as well as Christianity are observable in the various belief systems and rituals practiced at Sheikh Hussein, Faraqqasaa, and Sof Umar Guutoo. The shrine of Sheikh Hussein, for instance, is attended by a large number of Christian pilgrims who consider Sheikh Hussein as a father to all human beings. Practices of *Waaqeffannaa*, the religion practiced by the Oromo long before the introduction of Islam include rituals such as: walking backwards while leaving the tomb of Sheikh Hussein, smearing of butter on the fence and the various buildings and prostration. Similar trends can be observed at the Sof Umar Guutoo pilgrimage center. Despite its association with Sof Umar, who is considered one of the greatest Muslim saints in Ethiopia, it is attended by large numbers of followers of *Waaqeffannaa*, and include non-Islamic rituals, such as: *dhibaayyuu* (libation), *killa* ('slaughtering' coffee), painting faces of oneself and relatives with the blood of sacrificial animals, and conducting rituals under certain types of trees. At Faraqqasaa, the celebration of *Mawlid* and *Id al-Fitr* indicates pure Islamic tradition, while celebrating the days of St. Gabriel on 28 December and 27 May each year are among the most important Christian practices.

Waaqeffannaa followers' encounters with Islam and Christianity have led to the introduction of new and hitherto unknown concepts into their worldview. This is mostly true in the case of the concepts of the devil, which the Oromo refer to as *Shaytaana* and the afterlife. For the Oromo, the devil used to be applied to individuals who committed various types of horrendous acts like stealing, cheating, killing, and disrespecting parents and elders. Now the term refers to super natural beings that are evil. It is used by followers of

Waaqeffannaa who have been exposed to Christianity or Islam at some point in their lives. The concept of the afterlife does not exist in *Waaqeffannaa*. This can be witnessed in the various prayers and blessings conducted during their gatherings that do not mention anything related to heaven and hell. They pray to *Waaqa* for issues related to their earthly life, such as: enough rain, sufficient grass and ample cereals for their cattle; health for their family members and animals; wealth; and peace. Since the 1970s and particularly since the fall of the *Dergue* regime it is possible to hear followers of *Waaqeffannaa* who have been exposed to Islam talking about burials in which the face of the dead is placed in the direction of Mecca and Jibril in order to take the soul to *Waaqa* for judgment. Similarly, followers of *Waaqeffannaa* with exposure to Christianity are stating that the dead is buried facing Israel and St. Gabriel and the soul is taken to *Waaqa* for judgment.

The factors that have contributed for religious change among the Arsi Oromo thereby transforming their religious landscape include: the introduction of Islam to Ethiopia and eventually to Arsi; the conquest of the Arsi Oromo by the Christian Shewan Empire towards the close of the nineteenth century; the activity of Protestant missionaries since the last decade; and the emergence and spread of the Salafi movement (Wahhabism) in the 1970s. Islam became the religion of the majority of the Arsi Oromo in the 1970s, thereby decreasing the importance of the *Waaqeffannaa* religion. However, the Arsi Oromo did not abandon their traditional beliefs, which most of them continue to practice even to this day. Their conquest by the Christian empire, and the eventual proselytizing activities of the Orthodox Church as of the 1940s led to the conversion of followers of *Waaqeffannaa* and to some extent those following Islam. The activities of Protestant missionaries, active in western Arsi, and Wahhabism, especially in Bale where the shrine of Sheikh Hussein is situated, have put further pressure on the remnants of *Waaqeffannaa* religious practices and the shrine of Sheikh Hussein, which is considered un-Islamic because of the veneration of a local saint and rituals which syncretized elements of *Waaqeffannaa*. Trying to predict their future under unpredictable and unknown religious, political, and social changes that might further transform the religious situation of the Arsi Oromo would only lead us to similar mistakes as those committed by Ullendorff (1960: 112), who predicted that Islam would disappear from Ethiopia in the near future. Even if it is difficult to pinpoint the exact nature of the outcomes, it is possible to predict that various internal and external religious, political, and social developments will continue to transform the religious field of the Arsi Oromo.

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FORWARD

Mr. Gemechu Jemal Geda has written a remarkable analysis on religious transformation of his own group, the Arsi-Oromo in south-eastern Ethiopia. Studies of this kind based on extensive fieldwork by local scholars are highly welcome in all disciplines of the Sciences of Man. The researchers possess the invaluable advantage that they were brought up in the patterns of their indigenous society, are acquainted with its culture and master the language perfectly.

In six chapters Gemechu Jemal offers a detailed survey on different aspects of Arsi history, traditional culture and religious beliefs and practices in particular. The Arsi are a subgroup of the Oromo, the most numerous ethnic cluster in Ethiopia. The traditional belief system of the Oromo has been influenced by a strong impact of Islam and Orthodox Ethiopian Christianity. Among the Arsi, Muslims have become predominant. A theoretical emphasis is laid on aspects of religious syncretism and on practices of pilgrimage as a vividly continued and occasionally even reinforced tradition in many parts of Ethiopia.

A main chapter deals with *Waaqeffannaa*, the traditional Oromo religion and *Waaqeffataa* the adherents of the traditional Oromo religion, who are called after *Waaqa*, the High God. Similar names and concepts were known among neighbouring ethnic groups in southern Ethiopia, and in most cases this type of Supreme Being could be characterised as a so-called *Deus otiosus* who created the world and all beings but basically left its ruling to minor spiritual beings. Although the vast majority of the Oromo either converted to Orthodox Christianity or to Islam – the bulk of the Arsi are Muslims – a growing interest in traditional practices and beliefs can be observed at present. It is a particular focus of this study to highlight the syncretic elements which become more and more evident as a kind of survivals in the belief systems and practices of the followers of the present world religions. The author provides a remarkable pool of data regarding concepts and attributes of *Waaqa* in the traditional and contemporary belief system of the Arsi-Oromo. These refer to theological speculations as well as to laws, prayers and practices of the life cycle such as *rites de passage* and burial customs. Although people of different religious and ethnic background take part in many of the religious acts conjointly, specific differences can be observed in details of clothing, jewellery and peculiarities of acting and behaviour. Many of these ethnographic details have not yet been documented to such a degree of accuracy as it has been achieved in this study. It can be assumed that numerous elements that are typical for the Arsi *Folk Islam* will disappear the more radical Islamic movements such as *Salafism* will expand in south-

eastern Ethiopia. With regard to the unique Muslim *Sufi* tradition of south-eastern Ethiopia this study can obviously to some extent be regarded as a kind of a “religious archaeology”.

The chapter on pilgrimage (*muuda*), the data of which were provided by intensive empirical research, is a centrepiece of Gemechu Jemal’s work. It deals with three case studies of the most important sites of pilgrimage in Arsiland: Dirre Sheikh Hussein, Soof Umar Guutoo and Faraqasaa. They are well-known as holy places for the Muslims all over Ethiopia, but in the case of Faraqasaa also Orthodox Christians believe to find means of solving mental, physical and social problems there. This is typical for the deep-rooted syncretic elements of traditional religiosity, on the one hand, and for a high degree of tolerance between the followers of different religions, on the other hand.

Ceremonial events of the *Waaqefannaa* cult which are particularly manifested in special rituals of thanksgiving (*Irreecha*) are mainly performed in the region of Bishoftuu by members of the predominantly Christian Tuulama-Oromo. Muslims, however, may also participate, and only followers of the Euro-American mission churches more or less rigorously abstain from taking part in the cultic practices of a “pagan” background. This also refers to one of the most spectacular expressions of religiosity in those areas, the cults of spirit possession, where human media employ spiritual beings in order to solve various types of problems, such as sicknesses, loss of property, etc.

As special achievements comprehensive documentations of songs and prayers in the original language *Afaan Oromoo* and in English translation have to be emphasized in Gemechu Geda’s study. Moreover, as important contributions of research topographic data on grave sites and lithic steles as well as architectural details on the mausoleum of Sheikh Hussein in Anaajiina/Bale have to be mentioned. Obviously, the difficult problem of coordinating the data of the Ethiopian, Muslim and European calendar systems was successfully mastered by the author.

This work on religious transformation among the Arsi-Oromo in south-eastern Ethiopia is a valuable documentation of cultural heritage and it is very much desirable to have it accessible as a printed book.

(Prof. Dr. Ulrich Braukämper)

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Acronyms

BCE- Before the Common Era.

CSA- Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia.

OBPED- Oromia Bureau of Planning and Economic Development.

PHCR- Population and Housing Census Report.

PART I: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

Pilgrimages and pilgrimage centres established by various notable individuals occupy an important place in the lives of the majority of the Arsi Oromo. However, the Oromo as a people and their belief systems have not been given sufficient attention, and information is scarce about them. Some of the existing sources have either been negatively represented, or there is a gap between what has been written and the situation on the ground (Asafa Jalata: 1993; Mohammed Hassen: 1990). The main aim of this work, however, is not to engage in an extensive analysis of the history of the Oromo. With a concise summary of the controversies, various interpretations and approaches to the history of the Oromo, the bulk of this work deals with the transformations that are happening in the religious field of the Arsi Oromo.¹ This is an ethnographic study of the three dominant pilgrimage centres of the Arsi Oromo. By focusing on these three centres and their leaders and clients, and by describing their rituals and practices, an attempt will be made to show the changes that happened through time. For this purpose, I have selected the pilgrimages to the shrine of Sheikh Hussein in Bale, Sof Umar Guutoo in western Arsi, and Faraqqaasaa in eastern Arsi have been selected. In addition to the above mentioned pilgrimage centres, the thanksgiving ritual, *Irreecha* because a large numbers of Arsi Oromo take part in the ritual.²

Another important part of this work is its focus on the process of syncretism that exists between various indigenous belief systems and rituals of the Arsi Oromo as observed in the above mentioned pilgrimage centres and the thanksgiving ritual on the one hand; and Islam, the dominant religion among the Arsi Oromo at the moment, and Christianity on the other hand. Gore (2002: 204) states that the term “indigenous religious beliefs” is used because localized forms of religious beliefs are often referred to as “traditional” or “indigenous” to indicate their distinct features which are different from the popular religions of Christianity and Islam.³ In effect, there has been no ground-breaking work focusing on indigenous religious beliefs, practices of the Arsi Oromo and syncretism. Oromo indigenous religious beliefs and practices have only been mentioned in passing in some extant studies on the Oromo. The majority of the existing material on the belief systems in Ethiopia focuses on Christianity and Islam. These two religions have been extensively researched, whereas the

¹ ‘Arsi Oromo religion’ is used as a general term for Islam, Christianity, and indigenous Oromo religious beliefs in Arsi unless it is stated otherwise.

² Although large numbers of Arsi Oromo take part on the *Irreecha* ritual at Lake Bishoftu, it is mainly a religious ritual of the Tuulamaa Oromo of Shewa.

³ For more information on indigenous religions see James Cox (2007) and David Westerlund (2006).

folk beliefs of southern Ethiopia have virtually been completely ignored (Braukämper 1992: 194).

There are some notable works on various indigenous beliefs of the Oromo. Bartels (1983), one of the scholars whose writing focuses exclusively on the indigenous religious beliefs and practices of the Oromo, studied the dominant indigenous beliefs among the Macha Oromo, an Oromo subgroup in western Ethiopia. His work provides substantial information on major indigenous beliefs as well as Macha Oromo rituals practised in relation to these beliefs. Knutsson (1967) has also written on the *kaallu* institution of the Macha Oromo, *Waaqa* [God] and *ayyaana* [spirits]. Similar to Bartels, Knutsson's study focuses on the same Oromo group of western Ethiopia. Lewis (1984), another scholar who researched indigenous beliefs of the Oromo, provided a description of the *kaallu* institution. Alemayehu Haile *et al.* (2004) also discussed *ayyaana* and *Waaqa* beliefs in their study of the history of the Oromo to the sixteenth century.

The above studies focus on different aspects of Oromo spirituality in relation to life and culture. Their analytical frameworks are different from attempts to understand cultural mixing, otherwise known as "syncretism" which the present study intends to highlight. Braukämper (1992: 194-195) aptly states that "syncretism is to be understood as a dynamic process occurring between two or more religions".⁴ At the same time, it is also evident that this part of Africa is a melting point of diverse belief systems including the universalistic religions of Christianity and Islam. Braukämper (1992: 194) asserts that North-eastern Africa played a significant role in the spread of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, which have significantly affected the indigenous beliefs of this part of Africa.

However, the impacts of the above popular religions, especially Islam and to a lesser extent Christianity, on the indigenous religious beliefs of the Oromo in general and the Arsi in particular, have not been properly studied. Furthermore, according to the definition above, syncretism is a two way process. If Christianity and Islam have an impact on indigenous beliefs, it is also plausible to assume that the two religions, and mainly Islam, might have also been affected by the indigenous beliefs and rituals that existed in the area long before the spread of Islam, which is a recent development in Arsiland. Even though the entire population of Arsi did not embrace Islam as their religion, it became the dominant religion in the region in the 1970s (Braukämper 1984:769-770). Until this study, the syncretisation of Islam and

⁴ For a detailed discussion on the definition, characteristics, and criticisms of the concept of syncretism see chapter two of this work.

indigenous beliefs has been overlooked; there has been little research that mentions the syncretisation of indigenous beliefs into Islam and none that focus on this topic.

Indigenous religious beliefs and practices in Ethiopia are still topics that have been more or less neglected, so knowledge about them is still in its infancy (Braukämper 1992: 194-207). In Ethiopian studies, much attention has been given to the study of Christianity and Islam. Because of various political factors, the study of the Oromo as a people and their way of life has been neglected. These two religions get more attention because of their attachment to the state as well as to various regional rulers throughout Ethiopian history (Braukämper 1992). As for the neglect of indigenous beliefs, this is probably due in large part to the domination of the political, social, and economic aspects in Ethiopia by the followers of Christianity and Islam. A bias against indigenous belief meant a corresponding neglect, and thus a lack of research on indigenous religious beliefs (Braukämper 1992). Even the existing scarce studies on indigenous beliefs in Ethiopia have focused on indigenous beliefs of the dominant ethnic groups, such as the Amhara. In contrast, the Oromo are either less or mostly negatively represented in Ethiopian historiography.

By using the previously mentioned pilgrimage centres and the thanks-giving ritual, this project attempts to investigate religious continuity and change, as well as religious syncretism among the Arsi Oromo. Specifically, the project aims to:

- ✓ Describe the historical establishments of the shrines of Sheikh Hussein, Sof Umar, and Faraqasaa and the rituals performed during major periods of pilgrimages.
- ✓ Describe and analyse the *Irreecha* (thanks-giving) ritual.
- ✓ Investigate factors that transformed the religious landscape of the Arsi Oromo.
- ✓ Investigate the process of syncretism between indigenous religious practices and rituals on one hand and Islam on the other.

1.1 Fieldwork

Three rounds of research trips have been undertaken to collect the data necessary for the completion of the project. The first trip took place between 27 January and 2 April 2010. This was a period of pilot research during which the specific research sites were selected, the research methods were tested, and preliminary contacts with potential informants were established. The second fieldwork trip lasted from September 2010 to April 2011. It is during this period that the bulk of data was collected and the trips ranged from short daily trips to longer stays in Kokossaa, Nansabo, Dodola, Kofele, Shashamane, Faraqasaa, Abbomsa, and Gado. During this period, journeys to the shrine of Sof Umar Guutoo in Western Arsi, to the

thanks-giving ritual of *Irreecha* at Bishoftu, and Momina's shrine in eastern Arsi were undertaken; rituals were attended and recorded; and detailed information about the historical establishment of the places and the nature and characteristics of rituals that took place was gathered from versed informants as well as pilgrims to the above mentioned centres. The third and the final trip took place between October and November 2011. This journey was planned so that it coincided with one of the two main pilgrimage periods to the shrine of Sheikh Hussein in southeastern Ethiopia. During this period, rituals were attended and observed, detailed pictures of rituals and the shrine were taken, and information about the centre and the rituals was gathered from informants as well as followers of the cult.

1.2 Research methodologies

Two methods of data collection were employed to realize the project. Each method helped to obtain reliable and valid understanding and knowledge on the topic under discussion. Berg (2004: 5) writes that diverse research methodologies enable researchers to obtain a better, multifaceted, and a more complete result. Nachmias and Nachmias (1987: 207) are the other proponents of the need to employ more than just one research methodology. They aptly state that it is advantageous to diversify methodologies to test a hypothesis. Hence, for the purpose of looking at the topic from different angles, empirical and historical methods of data collection have been employed.

1.2.1 Empirical research

Participant observation

Nachmias and Nachmias (1987: 289) state that participant observation is the most widely employed method of data collection. It facilitates the gathering of first-hand data by researchers who observe events as they are unfolding (Nachmias and Nachmias 1987: 209). In the case of participant observation, the researcher stays at the research site and observes the behavior of participants, listens to what has been said, and conducts interviews to obtain data necessary for the work (Bryman 2004: 291-292). There are four possible roles that the researcher can assume. First, the researcher can be an active participant of the phenomenon he is investigating. Second, the researcher can be a participant-as-observer whereby he/she assumes both roles but more as a participant and less as an observer. Third, the researcher can act as observer-as-participant, whereby he engages in relatively more observation with limited participation. Fourth, the researcher can be an active observer without any participation (Bryman 2004: 301). During the research trips to collect the necessary data, the author has

played the last three types of roles with varying magnitude. The familiarity and level of difficulty of tasks in relation to the various ceremonies observed has influenced the degree to which the author has indulged himself.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted to gather detailed and personalized views and perspectives of attendees of the pilgrimage sites and shrines, their leaders and other categories of ritual specialists. This proved to be very important as it gave a diversified perspective about a certain belief and/or ritual. 25 informants were interviewed. In terms of age groups, priority was given to elders and individuals closely associated with the shrines under discussion because it is this group of people who have a good knowledge and understanding of the historical establishments of the centers as well as the rituals performed. Ordinary pilgrims visiting the shrines were also randomly interviewed to find out the various personal factors that motivate pilgrims to undertake a journey to a specific pilgrimage center at a specific period of pilgrimage.

Three different types of interviews were employed by the author to get a deeper insight into the various social phenomena as well as personal motives and aspirations. They were all held either on individual and/or on group basis. The first and most frequently type was the structured interview, through which I designed a list of questions and followed it as much as possible. The second type employed was the semi-structured interview through which I not only asked questions from a list but also asked further questions that arose from the answers provided by informants. The third and the final type was the unstructured interview, whereby I put different general questions to different informants.

Informal discussions

During the time in the field, it was frequently easy to engage pilgrims in free conversations on their reasons or purpose of performing pilgrimages and the details involved in carrying out a “successful” pilgrimage. When they saw a voice recorder and/or camera some pilgrims were reluctant to answer some sensitive questions such as: why would they visit a quasi-Islamic shrine while at the same time stating that they are Christians; or what were their motives for attending a certain ritual. In these circumstances, informal discussion was found to be an indispensable methodology to gather data on sensitive issues.

1.2.2 Historical research on literary sources

Literature review

Research was also conducted in various libraries where important published sources such as books, journals, proceedings, periodicals, and unpublished sources, such as senior essays, theses, and dissertations, were discovered. These documents help to cross check and corroborate the information obtained from informants. Although they are relatively scarce, the written sources on topics related to the project are found in the library of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, situated at Addis Ababa University.

1.3 Organization of the dissertation

The dissertation has a total of six chapters. The first chapter discusses topics related to fieldwork, research methodologies used to gather data, as well as how the dissertation is organized. The second chapter is a literature review, and it deals with three relatively broader topics. The first topic under this chapter deals with the general background of the Oromo people of Ethiopia and the Arsi Oromo in particular. Here an attempt is made to explain the position of the Oromo in Ethiopian historiography, the controversies involved concerning their naming and their original homeland, as well as the history of the Arsi Oromo. The second topic discussed under chapter two is the issue of religious syncretism. There is a thorough discussion of the following: themes related to the origin of syncretism, the various attempts to define or characterize it, criticism directed at its application and alternative terms for cultural/religious mixture that were given in an attempt to replace the term. The third topic deals with the core of the project: pilgrimages in the Ethiopian context. A brief discussion of the definition, characteristics and types of pilgrimages, as well as motives for pilgrimages in Ethiopia, is undertaken.

The main body of the work begins with the third chapter, which focuses on *Waaqeffannaa*, an indigenous and pre-Christian and pre-Islamic folk religion of the Oromo. It discusses related issues such as *Waaqa*, the indigenous God of the Oromo, his story as well as its attributes. This chapter also examines the laws of *Waaqeffannaa*, the relationship that exists between *Waaqa* and earth, concepts such as spirit, devil, tradition and moral values, sin, time and place of prayers, death, burial and the afterlife. The fourth chapter offers analyses of the pilgrimages to the shrines of Sheikh Hussein and Sof Umar Guutoo. The fifth chapter deals with the Faraqqasaa pilgrimage center independently because it is the only shrine established by a woman within the scope of this project. The above two chapters investigate the historical establishments of each of the above shrines, periods of pilgrimages, and rituals performed by pilgrims during the major periods of pilgrimages. Part of the study on

Faraqqasaa was presented in 2007 as my Master's Thesis at the University of Tromsø in Norway. I returned to the shrine in 2011. The historical narratives on the history of the shrine, the founder and subsequent leaders, as well as the rituals remained unchanged. In this work, however, new analytical frameworks have been employed to analyze the narratives on the history of the center and personnel as well as rituals performed. The six chapter investigates various aspects of the *Irreecha* (thanksgiving) ritual of the Oromo, such as the area where the ritual takes place, the type of participants, and aspects of syncretism as inferred from clothing and ornaments worn by participants, the rituals performed, religious objects used, and analysis of hymns and blessings at the ceremony.⁵ The seventh chapter discusses and interprets the findings in relation to the theories employed.

⁵ A small part of this chapter is recently published. For more information see Gemechu J. Geda (2013: 143-158).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE HISTORY AND CULTURE OF THE OROMO

2.1 Background to the Oromo people and the area of study

The Oromo, also referred to as ‘Galla’⁶ by others, constitute the majority of the people inhabiting the Horn of Africa and they are one of the largest ethnic groups in the African continent (Gadaa Melbaa 1999: 8, Mohammed Hassen 1990: xi, Van de Loo 1991: 9, Mengesha Rikitu 2001: 1 and 1998: 9, Alemayehu Haile *et al.* 2009: 5). According to the Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia (CSA) Population and Housing Census Report (PHCR) of 2007, the Oromo constitute about 34 million out of the total 73.9 million inhabitants. Mengesha Rikitu (2002:6) also stated that the Oromo constitute roughly 49% of the total population of Ethiopia. Even if the topic deals with the Oromo in Ethiopia, it is important to note that there are many Oromo groups living in Kenya and Somalia (Tesema Ta’a 2006: 17, Mengesha Rikitu 1998:9, Lewis, H.S 2001: 19). The Oromo belong to the Cushitic peoples, who have been living in the northern and north eastern parts of Africa. The physical characteristics, culture, language and other evidence are justifications of the indigeneity of the Oromo to this part of Africa (Gadaa Melbaa 1999: 11). Other writers also support the view that the Oromo are one of the original inhabitants of north-eastern Africa (Bates 1979, Prouty and Rosenfeld 1981, Mohammed Hassen 1990). The Oromo were already organized into the confederacies of Borana and Barentu sometime between the twelfth and fifteen centuries (Asafa Jalata 1993: 16).

According to the report of the Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia (2007: 16) the various Oromo groups include Guji, Borena, Tulema, Kereyu, Gelan, Lika, Becho, Abichu, Selale, Arsi, Raya, Mecha, Gerri, Ittu, and Jille. The different branches of the Oromo, though not fully complete, are also constructed by Asafa Jalata (1993: 17) as follows:

⁶ Much of the literature produced by the Amhara of Abyssinia, the Muslims of Harar as well as European travellers from the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries used the term “Galla” frequently (Pankhurst 1997: 279; Mohammed Hassen 1990: xi;). This name was given to the Oromo by outsiders (Mohammed Hassen 1990 xi; Braukämper 1980: 130; Gadaa Melbaa 1999: 8). Until recently it had been used to refer to the people who have always referred to themselves as Oromo. However, the term “Galla” is used to refer to them despite their resistance to be called this. The term “Galla” is degrading and full of negative connotations (Mohammed Hassen 1990: xi, Zitelmann 1996: 105, Lewis 1984: 591-592). These negative connotations implied by the term refer to the Oromo as: heathen, pagan, uncivilized, without culture, slaves, the enemy, and inherently inferior and cruel (Hasselblatt 1980: 79; Gadaa Melbaa 1999: 14, Asafa Jalata 1998: 8).

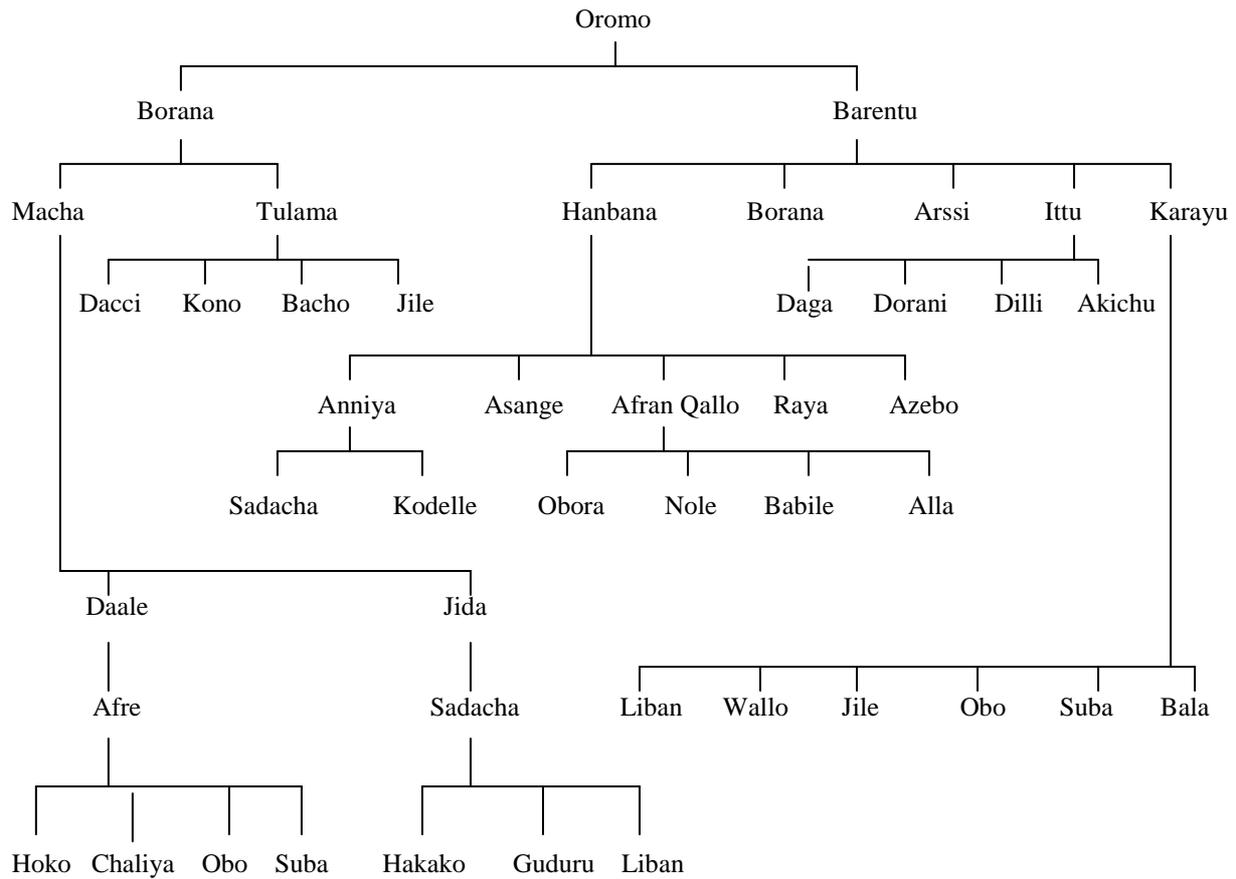


Figure 1: Depiction of selected Oromo genealogy.

The Oromo language, also called *Afaan Oromo* (language of the Oromo) in the local vernacular is one of the largest language groups in the Horn of Africa. It is predominantly spoken in Ethiopia and to a lesser extent in Northern and Eastern Kenya and Southern Somalia. It is believed to have between 17-30 million speakers and around 2 million more who use it as a second language. It is the major member of the Oromoid subgroup of the Lowland East Cushitic branch of Cushitic languages. It has three major language clusters. The first cluster is the Central-Western group and it has around 9 million speakers. This group includes the Macha, Tuulamaa, Wollo and Raya. The second group is the Eastern cluster, which is also known as Harar Oromo/Qottu and it is mainly spoken in eastern Ethiopia. The third cluster is the Southern group. It includes the Booranaa, Guji, Arsi, and Gabra. It is predominantly spoken in Southern Ethiopia and the neighbouring regions of Kenya. The Orma group spoken along the Tana River in Kenya and along the Juba River in Southern Somalia and the Waata group spoken along the Kenyan coast to the south of Orma are distinct from the third cluster (Appleyard 2009: 809).

The dominant confession among the Arsi Oromo in Arsiland is Islam. Out of the total 2,637,657 inhabitants, more than half the population are Muslims (1,532,383) followed by Orthodox Christians (1,056,310), Protestants (37,803), Catholics (3,790), traditionalists

(3,586). The majority of the Arsi Oromo of Bale are also followers of Islam. Out of the 1,402,492 total population of the region, 1,147,673 are Muslims whereas 237,610 (Orthodox), 14,521 (Protestants), 1,419 (Catholics), and 722 (traditionalists) (CSA 2007: 292-296).⁷

The vast majority of the Oromo of Ethiopia today live in the region of Oromia. The Oromia regional state is situated in the central part of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, extending even to the south and west. It is the largest of the nine regional states and two administrative councils in Ethiopia. It has both international borderlines (with Sudan and Kenya) as well as regional borderlines with all regions except the Tigray region. According to the Oromia Bureau of Planning and Economic Development (OBPED) (2000: 2) the regional state of Oromia is composed of twelve administrative zones, 180 districts and 375 towns.

⁷ Since it is beyond the scope of this project, see *The 2007 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia: Statistical Report for Oromiya Region, Part I: Population Size and Characteristics*, 283-299 for the dominant confession of the other Oromo groups.

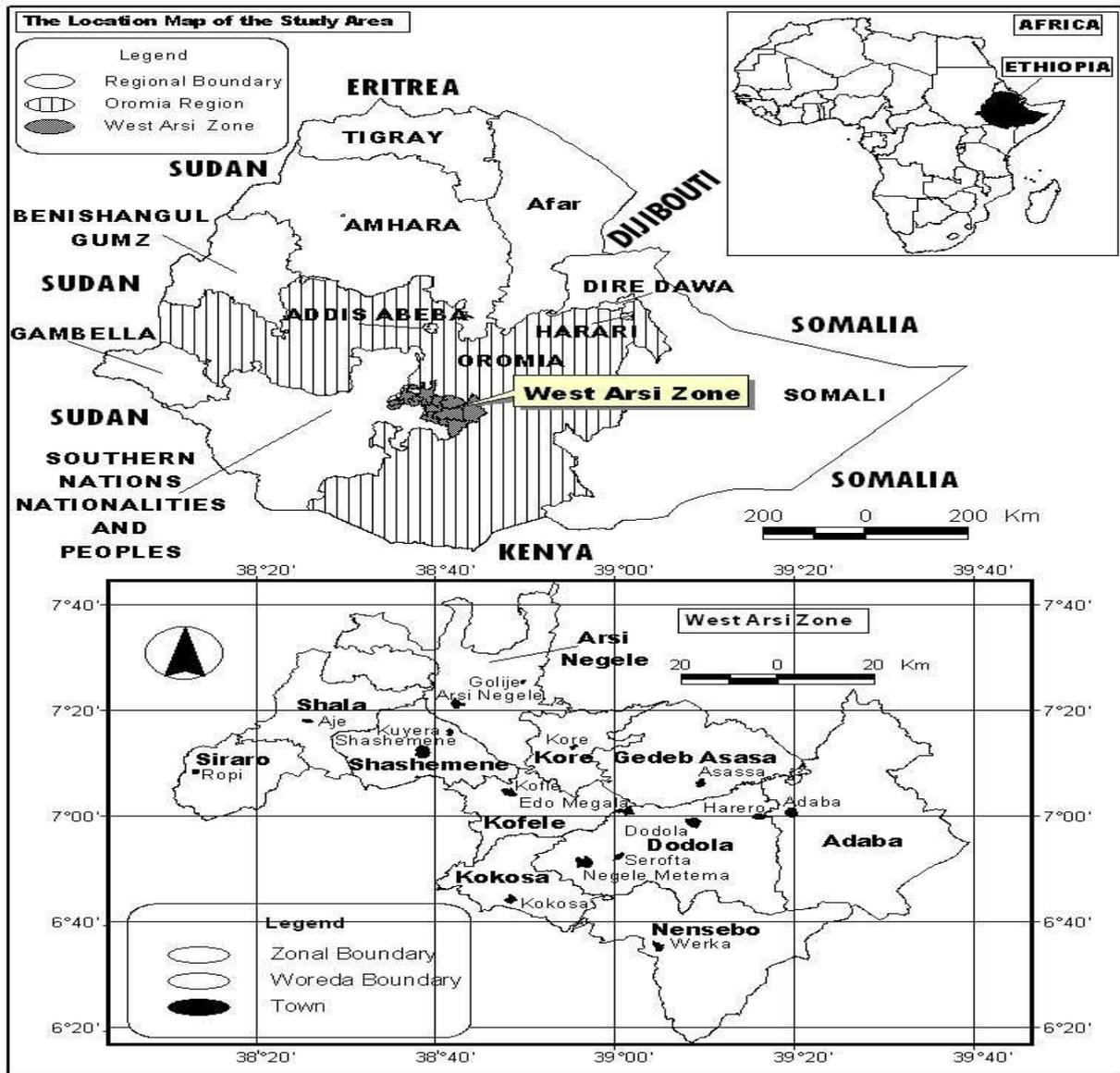


Figure 2: the research areas in reference to the region of Oromia.

The topography of Oromia is characterized by extensive ranges of mountains, hills, dissected plateaus, undulating and rolling plains, deep gorges and valleys. It has an altitude ranging from 500-4377 meters above sea level. There are several rivers, streams, springs and lakes within the five major drainage basins of Abay, Genale, Gojeb, Wabi Shebele, and Inland. These water bodies have the potential for a large amount of hydroelectric power and irrigation of extensive areas of land. The presence of different climates is favourable for the growth of various kinds of agricultural crops and vegetation (OBPED 2000: 2). The region of Oromia has a large amount of forest, woodland, riverine, shrub and bush. There has been, however, a continuous decline in the size of forests over the last few centuries, especially in the last hundred years. One of the main reasons for the acceleration of deforestation in the region is the villagization campaign of the military regime in the early 1980s and a short

power vacuum created in Ethiopia after its fall in 1991. As a result, there has been a high rate of soil erosion in the region (OBPED 2000: 2). In 2007, Oromia had a total population of 27, 158, 471, of which more than 23 million were rural. This makes it the most populous region in Ethiopia (CSA 2008).

2.1.1 The Oromo in Ethiopian historiography

Tesema Ta'a (2006:17) states that even if the Oromo are one of the largest ethnic groups in Africa in general and northeast Africa in particular, their history has not been documented properly and it is still full of ambiguity. Similarly, Abir (1980:134-135) another scholar of Ethiopian studies contemplates that the literary history of the horn of Africa in the middle of the sixteenth century focuses more on developments in the Ethiopian Kingdom and gives little space for the history of the Oromo and other coastal communities.

One important point should be raised here. Although the Oromo were non-literate in the Anglo-American format and did not have a written language at that time, they have oral traditions, which would have been used by various writers to construct the historical and cultural developments as well as internal dynamics of the Oromo. Tesema Ta'a (1994: 981) states that oral sources are very crucial for historical construction of any society, especially when written sources are either scarce or non-existent. Vansina (1965: 1) is the other author who emphasises the importance of oral traditions for the reconstruction of the past of non-literate communities. One scholar of Ethiopian history who has relied heavily on oral history is Yilma Deressa (1967), who wrote about the history of sixteenth century Ethiopia in Amharic (the official language in Ethiopia). Part of the book deals with the origin of the Oromo and their movement during the sixteenth century, for which he has made use of Oromo oral traditions.

But some Ethiopianist writers are not willing to consider the proper study and analysis of oral traditions of the Oromo. Not only are they unwilling to use them, they are critical of those who make use of Oromo oral traditions to reconstruct the Oromo past. Sergew Hable Sellasie (1972) is one of the scholars who totally ignore the Oromo in their works. However, he belittles Yilma Deressa's work for not using chronicles and sources written in Ge'ez and for its attempt to describe the Oromo origin and their expansion into the highlands of Ethiopia. In his critique, he neglects to mention that the Chronicles prepared by the chronicles of kings were exclusively destined to glorify the works and victories of Christian Ethiopian kings rather than deal with the social history of different peoples.

Mohammed Hassen (1990: 1) also aptly states that the Oromo problem is ignored⁸ or stated wrongly in Ethiopian historiography. There are three reasons for this. The first is the fact that the Oromo did not have a written language to document different aspects of their life including their own history. Secondly, the serious study of the Oromo was not properly encouraged. Thirdly, even the few written documents on Oromo history and culture as of the late sixteenth century are clouded with biases, distortions, and misunderstandings (Tesema Ta'a 2006: 17). One good example of these distortions and biases can be found in the works of Bahrey *et al.* (1993: 44), an Ethiopian monk who wrote the following:

I have begun to write the history of the Galla in order to make known the number of their tribes, their readiness to kill people, and the brutality of their manners. If anyone should say of my subject, 'why has he written a history of bad people,' I would answer by saying, 'search books, and you will find that the history of Mohammed and the Moslem kings has been written, and they are our enemies in religion. Likewise Giyorgis Walda Amid⁹ has written the history of Persian kings with their childish legends, like those of Afridon and the other kings of Persia, who are now called 'Sofi'.

Bahrey's work is one of the earliest works in an Ethiopian language. He had all the religious, ethnic, and cultural biases which prevail among sixteenth century Christian society. In addition, he wrote about the Oromo society based upon what he observed from outside and could not have understood various internal developments among the Oromo society. Not much is known about Bahrey himself, the methodologies he employed to collect the data, and whether he had the understanding of the Oromo language (Tesema Ta'a 2006: 18-19). Almeida (1954) is the other writer who wrote about the Oromo in a biased way. He considered the Galla [Oromo] as a punishment sent by God to punish the Abyssinians for their refusal of the faith of the Roman Catholic Church. He even states that the Oromo were inhumane even to their own children.

⁸ A good example of this is the work of Sergew Hable-Sellassie, entitled *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270*, published in 1972. He mentioned the name "Galla" only on four occasions.

⁹ Jirjis (George) ibn al 'Amid, generally known as Al Makin (1205-1273/74). His universal history was translated from Arabic into Ethiopic about 1500. Afridon is Feridun, a legendary king of Persia. Sofi is the 'Sophy' of old English writers, i.e. Safavi, the name of the dynasty that ruled Persia in the sixteenth and seventeenth century (Beckingham and Huntingford 1954: 111).

Telles (1710: 134) also refers to the Oromo as “the scourge that God had made use against the Abyssinians”, while Bruce (1873: 86) describes them as “the most cruel that [have] ever appeared in any country [and who have contributed more to the weakening and reducing the Abyssinian Empire than all their civil wars and all the foreign enemies put together” (cited in Tesema Ta’ a 2006: 19). The Oromo are also referred to as barbaric tribes in the works of Doresse (1959: 147).

The history of the Oromo has been one of the most controversial and polarized topics in Ethiopian studies. Some of the issues involving significant controversies are: 1) the naming of the people, 2) their country of origin, and 3) the sixteenth century movement of the Oromo people. These controversies, as well as other important aspects of the Oromo will be presented in the following sections.

2.1.2 The naming of the people: Oromo vs. Galla

Much of the literature produced by the Amhara¹⁰ of Abyssinia¹¹, the Muslims of Harar as well as European travellers from the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries used the term “Galla” frequently (Pankhurst 1997: 279; Mohammed Hassen 1990: xi;). This name was given to the Oromo by outsiders (Mohammed Hassen 1990 xi; Braukämper 1980: 130; Gadaa Melbaa 1999: 8). Until recently it had been used to refer to the people who have always referred to themselves as Oromo. However, the term “Galla” is used to refer to them despite their resistance to be called this. The term “Galla” is degrading and full of negative connotations (Mohammed Hassen 1990: xi, Zitelmann 1996: 105, Lewis 1984: 591-592). These negative connotations implied by the term refer to the Oromo as: heathen, pagan, uncivilized, without culture, slaves, the enemy, and inherently inferior and cruel (Hasselblatt 1980: 79; Gadaa Melbaa 1999: 14, Asafa Jalata 1998: 8).

Even the origins of the terms “Oromo” and “Galla” are obscured, full of legends and unresolved. The Austrian ethnographer, Paulitschke (1888: 421) observed that the origin and meaning of the term “Galla” is a topic often discussed but hitherto unresolved (cited in Zitelmann 1996: 106). Travellers in the nineteenth century, however, reported that it refers to an Arabic phrase “ghal la”, allegedly uttered by the Prophet (Mohammed) on hearing the refusal of the people to adhere to Islam (Bairu Tafla 1987:52). Huntingford (1969: 11) states a similar tradition of the origin of the term “Galla” but with a slight variation. For him, the

¹⁰ Amhara refers to the ruling ethnic group in imperial Ethiopia until 1991. They were also referred to as the Abyssinians. Their homeland is in north-west Ethiopia (Gow 2002: xi).

¹¹ Abyssinia refers to the major kingdom in the north [what is today Northern Ethiopia] which was a different political entity during the middle Ages. The “Abyssinians” are peoples of the north who speak Semitic languages. This mainly refers to the Amhara, the Tigreans, the people of northern Shoa, Gojam, Lasta, and Begemeder (Lewis 2001: 19, Gow 2002: xi).

Arabic word shouted by the Prophet was “Kal la” and he suggests this term should be henceforth used as the name of the ethnic group. There are also assumptions that it might have originated from the Oromo language itself. Cerulli (1922: 26) and Zitelmann (1994: 35 and 1996: 105) assume that “Galla” might derive from the Oromo word “galla”, meaning wanderer and immigrant. Secondly, it is assumed that it was a war cry used by the people themselves when they were at war (Abbadie 1880: 167-192, cited in Huntingford 1969: 11).

The term “Oromo”, by which the people prefer to be called, is also full of speculations and obscure in origin. According to some traditions, the term derived from Oromo, son of Omer Ghellad in Arabia, who finally crossed the sea and settled in Africa. The other meaning associated with the term is “race, nation” (Huntingford 1969: 11). Bairu Tafla (1987: 53) further assumes that the term was first used mainly in relation to *Afaan Oromo* (Oromo language or tongue) before its application as a group name to refer to those who speak the language. Without providing the language from which it originated, Jaenen (1956: 171) assumes that “Galla” or “Oromo” has the meaning of “free men”. Trimingham (2008: 187)¹² states that the term “Oromo” derived from “Ilm Orm” or “sons of Orm” and Orm is believed to be the name of the chieftain that refused to convert to Islam. Even if though it is a widely supported view by scholars that the name Galla was given to the people by outsiders, such as their Amhara and Tigrean neighbours, and adopted by European travellers, Tutschek (1845: 89ff) states that the term was also used as self-reference by the people themselves (Zitelmann 1996: 106).

Some writers state that the people again claimed their ancient name “Oromo” after the revolution¹³ (Bartels 1983: 16). Hultin (1996: 89) mentioned that the name “Oromo” started to replace the term “Galla” in academic discourses only after 1970. These views are incorrect because there are other scholars who used the term “Oromo” in their publications much

¹² Trimingham’s works on Islam in Ethiopia are not primary sources rather secondary literature.

¹³ It refers to the revolution in 1974 which led to the deposition of the imperial dynasty and the coming to power of the Dergue (Amharic for “committee” or “council”), which was a military regime [until its overthrow in 1991] (Marcus 2002: 181-201, Pankhurst 1998: 267-270, Adejumobi 2007: 116-117, Gow2002: xi).

before the 1970s. A few examples of these are the works of Abbadie¹⁴, Paulitschke¹⁵, Jaenen¹⁶, and Knutsson.¹⁷

2.1.3 Original homeland of the Oromo

In the previous section we have seen the controversies involving the terms “Oromo” and “Galla”. Similarly, there are divergent views concerning the original homeland of the Oromo. The Oromo country of origin is widely contested. Different views have been put forward but with no consensus. For some, the Oromo are strangers who came from abroad, while for the others the Oromo are the indigenous inhabitants of the area they occupy today and if not, their original homeland is at least within the boundary of the modern state of Ethiopia.

According to Bairu Tafla (1987: 79), Asma Giyorgis, an early twentieth century Ethiopian scholar states that the Galla [Oromo] came from the sea, conquered the Ethiopian kingdom and ultimately changed its name to their own name, chased out the Christians in the areas between Wabe [in the South] to Takkaze and Tegre [in the north]. Jaenen (1954: 176) also mentions that some Galla [Oromo] believe that their ancestors originated in Asia, later migrated to Madagascar and then further north to their present settlement area.

It is also stipulated that the Oromo were the indigenous inhabitants of the area around Ogaden and northern Somalia but they were pushed out by the growing power of the Somalis. Paulitschke states that their starting point was somewhere south of the Gulf of Aden, in the eastern part of the Somali Peninsula (cited in Jaenen 1956: 176). Huntingford (1969: 19) and Cerulli (1957: 58) also support the view that the Oromo originated in Ogaden and in what is today northern Somalia.

The Scottish traveller and explorer, James Bruce assumes that the Oromo started their expansion from Sennar in what is today Sudan (cited in Braukämper 1984: 29). Mohammed Hassen (1990: xiii), however opposes the view that the original homeland of the Oromo is outside of the present boundaries of Ethiopia. He states that this hypothesis has the sole purpose of making the Oromo “new comers” and “outsiders” to the country [Ethiopia].

¹⁴ In his work (1890: 302), entitled *Géographie de l'Éthiopie*, he stated that the people are designated as “Oromo” or “Barentu” (cited in Zitelmann 1996: 107).

¹⁵ He has used the terms “Oromo” and “Galla” interchangeably on his work entitled *Ethnographie Nordost-Afrikas: die materielle Kultur der Danakil, Galla und Somali* (1893).

¹⁶ In his article entitled “The Galla or Oromo of East Africa” published in *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, Vol.12, No 2 in the Summer of 1956, he uses the term Oromo interchangeably with Galla as the title of the article. He has even mentioned that the people called themselves Oromo. Even if he stated this view clearly, he refers to the people as “Galla” throughout the article.

¹⁷ In his book published in 1967, *Authority and Change: A study of the Kallu Institution among the Macha Galla of Ethiopia*, he stated clearly that “all Galla call themselves and their people by the name Oromo” (p.30). He, however, similar to Jaenen, refers to them “Galla” throughout his book.

Herbert Lewis (1966: 27) stipulates that southern Ethiopia was the original homeland of the Galla [Oromo] as well as the Somali, and that the [Oromo] lived there and in northern Kenya until their sixteenth Century migration. Tadesse Tamrat (1972: 298) also writes that the area around Lake Abbaya is the Oromo country of origin.

The majority of scholars who have undertaken extensive research among the Oromo and on Oromo oral traditions state that the cool highlands in the region of what is today Bale are the original homelands of the Oromo. One of the scholars who advocate this view is Mohammed Hassen (1990:4). In Oromo tradition there is a claim that a distant land by the name Fugug, located in what is today Arsiland, the heartland of historical Bali, is the original homeland of the Oromo (Mohammed Hassen 1990:04). Haberland (1963: 772) and Beckingham and Huntingford (1954: 133-134) also ascertain that the cool highlands in the region of Bali are the ancestral homeland of the Oromo. Mohammed Hassen (1990:5) locates Fugug as follows:

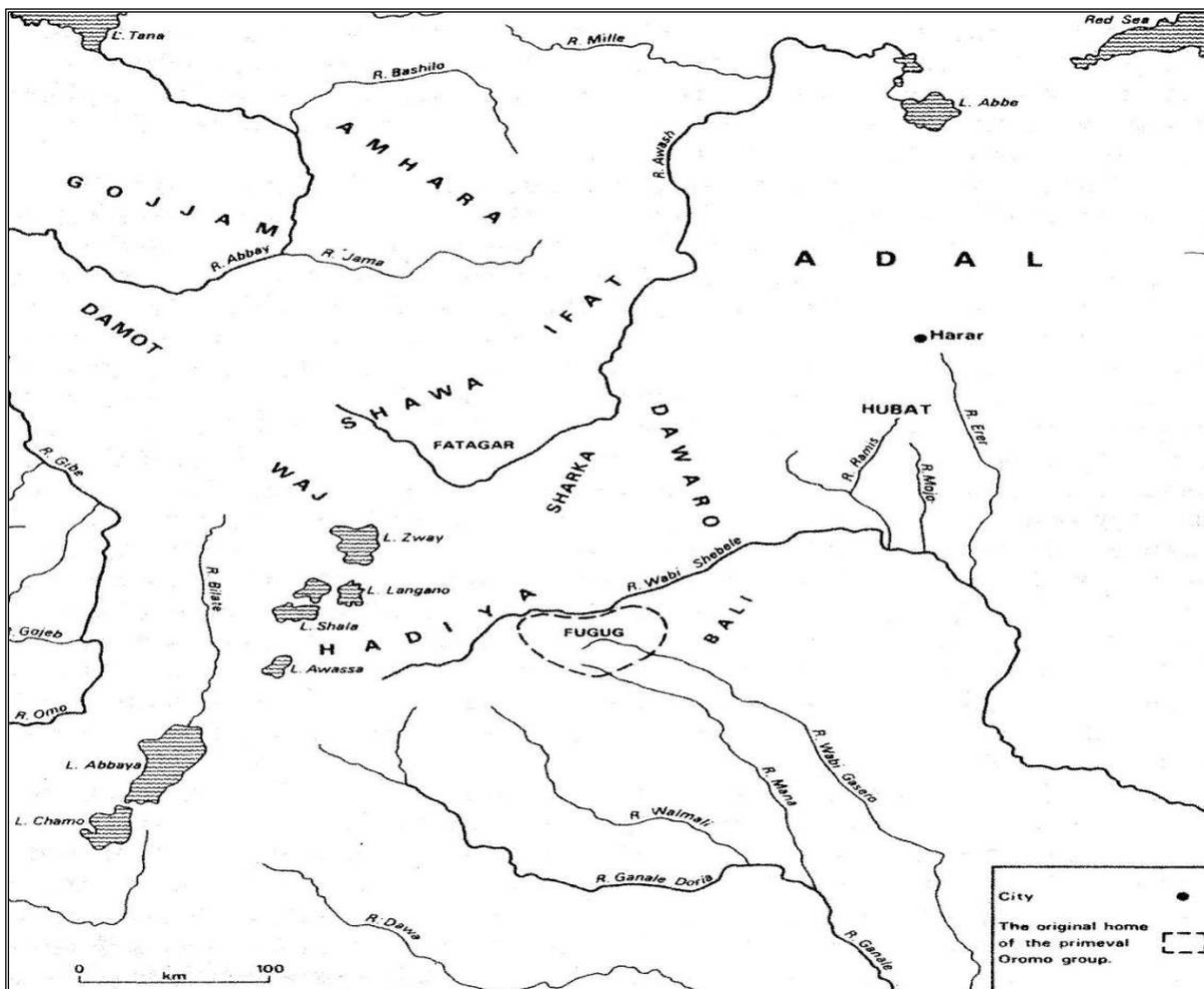


Figure 3: the possible location of Fugug around 1330.

2.1.4 The migrations and expansions of the Oromo from the Sixteenth Century onwards

The Oromo migration and expansion of the sixteenth century is one of the most significant developments in both Ethiopian and Oromo history. Just like other aspects of Oromo history and culture, this important movement is also shrouded in mystery. However, it has been discussed by scholars such as Asafa Jalata 1993; Mohammed Hassen 1990; Pankhurst 1997 and 1998; and Braukämper 1980. The purpose here is not to look at the Oromo movement in detail but to point out possible causes, consequences of the movement on the life of the Oromo as well as the people among whom they settled, and the terminologies used in reference to this important historical occurrence of the sixteenth century. Tesema Ta'a (2006: 20) states that many writers' descriptions of the Oromo and their movement are incomplete, naïve and incorrect and that the fundamental factors and immediate causes of the Oromo movement are very controversial, hypothetical, and still debatable topics among scholars of Oromo studies. Lewis (2001: 23) also states that the exact reasons for the sudden movement and expansion of the Oromo, which he said probably started in 1540, are unknown. Even though the historical documents are inconclusive, an attempt will be made to point out some of the possible factors and consequences of the Oromo movement.

Causes of the Oromo movement

Huntingford (1969: 19) argues that the fundamental cause of the Oromo movement was the increase in strength of the Somali tribes, who settled in the area under Oromo influence, grew in strength and extended to the territories under Oromo occupation. This pressured the Oromo to leave Somalia and migrate towards the west and southwest, reaching Bali around 1522. However, Haberland (1963: 773) doubts the capacity of the Somali to displace the Oromo who almost managed to completely destroy the more organized and powerful Christian Kingdom. Huntingford (1969: 19) suggests that the cause of the Oromo movement was the weakness of the Abyssinian kingdom at the time as a consequence of a long civil war fought against the Muslims of Adal from the eastern.

Bates (1979: 19-20) and Mohammed Hassen (1990: xiii) look at the Oromo movement as the recapturing of lands which previously belonged to them. While the Christian Kingdom and the Muslims were fighting, the Oromo were waiting for opportunities to recapture lands that had been previously taken away from them. By doing so, Bates and Mohammed Hassen are upholding the view that the Oromo did not come from outside of Africa as some authors explain, but have lived for much longer within the boundaries of modern Ethiopia.

Abir (1980: 136) assumes that the cause of the Oromo movement lies within the dynamics of the *gada* system. He states that according to the Galla [Oromo] rituals, members

of the second *gada* class were not allowed to be initiated to join the next class unless they killed an enemy warrior or a dangerous wild animal and fought in wars and raids of expansion to areas hitherto not attacked. In his view, this system gave rise to raids after raids and sustained expansion of Galla [Oromo] influence. According to Abir's hypothesis (1980: 136) the other cause of the Oromo movement lies in population dynamics and environmental factors at their original homeland. He assumes that the Oromo migrated from their original homeland to the Ethiopian plateau because the savannah and the semi-desert area they occupied to the south of Bali could no longer sustain their expanding population and herds.

Consequences of the Oromo Movement

The Oromo movement of the sixteenth century led to significant political, economic, social, and cultural developments that affected various aspects of the lives of the Oromo, as well as the people living in the areas occupied by the Oromo. First of all, the Oromo movement decreased the area under the control of the Christian kingdom. Many areas which had been under the dominion of the Christian kingdom were either directly occupied or isolated from the kingdom by the Oromo and became more or less 'independent'. This development resulted in the decline of the revenue collected by the Christian kingdom (Pankhurst 1997: 306). The Oromo movement also had ethnic consequences. In an attempt to halt Oromo intrusion into areas under the empire, the king gave large tracts of land to other ethnic groups, whom he thought would assist him to withstand pressures mounted by the Oromo. At the same time, the incursion of the Oromo into the dominion of the Christian kingdom resulted in the full or partial assimilation and forced removal of various ethnic groups (Lewis 2001: 26, Pankhurst 1997:307).

The desertion of the nomadic way of life by the vast majority of the Galla [Oromo] is the other consequence of the Oromo movement (Buxton 1970: 29). After their movement, the great majority of the Oromo quickly adopted the practice of agriculture (Crummy 2000: 54). The movement also resulted in the reunion of Oromo sub-clans and clans. Long before the sixteenth century Oromo movement, some groups of the Oromo had detached themselves and settled in other parts of the country, which were later overrun by the Oromo during their movement (Alemayehu Haile *et al* 2006: 75-76).

The Oromo movement resulted in immense diversification among the Oromo themselves, mainly with regard to their political organization and religion. Until the very beginning of their movement, the Oromo were a single, culturally homogenous group, recognizing a common genealogical relation and speaking a single understandable language. This was, however, changed and the Oromo were diversified as a result of their movement,

which brought them in contact with different ecologies, times, and interactions with other groups and cultures (Lewis 2001: 26-35). In terms of religion, the Oromo movement, which brought them in contact with the Christians of highland Ethiopia, resulted in the conversion of some groups of the Oromo to Christianity while others converted to Islam (Jones and Monroe 1978: 9; Pankhurst 1997: 307).

Another important consequence of the movement was the increase in numbers of Oromo tribes and clans, mainly as a result of *moggaasa* (adoption into a clan or tribe) and to a lesser extent *guddifachaa* (adoption by a foster parent), accompanied by Oromization (Mohammed Hassen 1990: 21; Asafa Jalata 1993: 16). The Oromo, however, did not often adopt or assimilate caste groups such as smiths and tanners (Asafa Jalata 1993: 16).

Changes in social norms and other customs were also important consequences of the Oromo movement (Pankhurst 1997: 290-292). One of these took place in the field of [traditional] medicine. In the middle of the sixteenth century, the Oromo adopted the use of the leaves and flowers of the Ethiopian highland tree, the *kosso* (*Hagenia abyssinica*) as taenicide (a medicine that destroys tapeworms). The Oromo adoption of horse and mule riding increased the mobility of the Oromo tremendously and thus enhanced the permanent occupation of the lands they had previously occupied. Once the Oromo came in contact with other peoples who practiced circumcision, the practice, which was previously not common, became widespread in Oromo society (Pankhurst 1997: 290-292).

2.1.5 The Arsi Oromo: an overview

Braukämper (2004: 153) states that the name Arsi appeared in written documents relatively late, not before the nineteenth century. The Arsi are probably one of the largest groups of the Oromo inhabiting mainly the regions of Arsi-Bale, southern Shoa and western Hararghe. They are divided into hundreds of patrilineal clans (*Gossa*) (Abbas Haji Gnamo 1994: 585). When describing the geographical area, the Arsi refer not only to the inhabitants of the present day Arsi region but also the various people who resided on either side of the Wabe Shebelle region in the past (Abbas Haji Gnamo 1982: 1). According to Arsi oral traditions, there was a man called Arsi (e), who had two sons named Siko and Mendo, who in turn gave birth to five and seven sons respectively. Braukämper (2004: 153) states that it is not clear when Arsi, the name of a person listed in the genealogies 16 generations ago, was adopted as the name of one important group of the Oromo cluster. The Oromo residing today in the Arsi and Bale zones are the descendants of the twelve sons of Siko and Mendo (Abbas Haji Gnamo 1982: 1). Abbas Haji Gnamo (1982: 17) has presented the traditional genealogy of the Arsi Oromo as follows

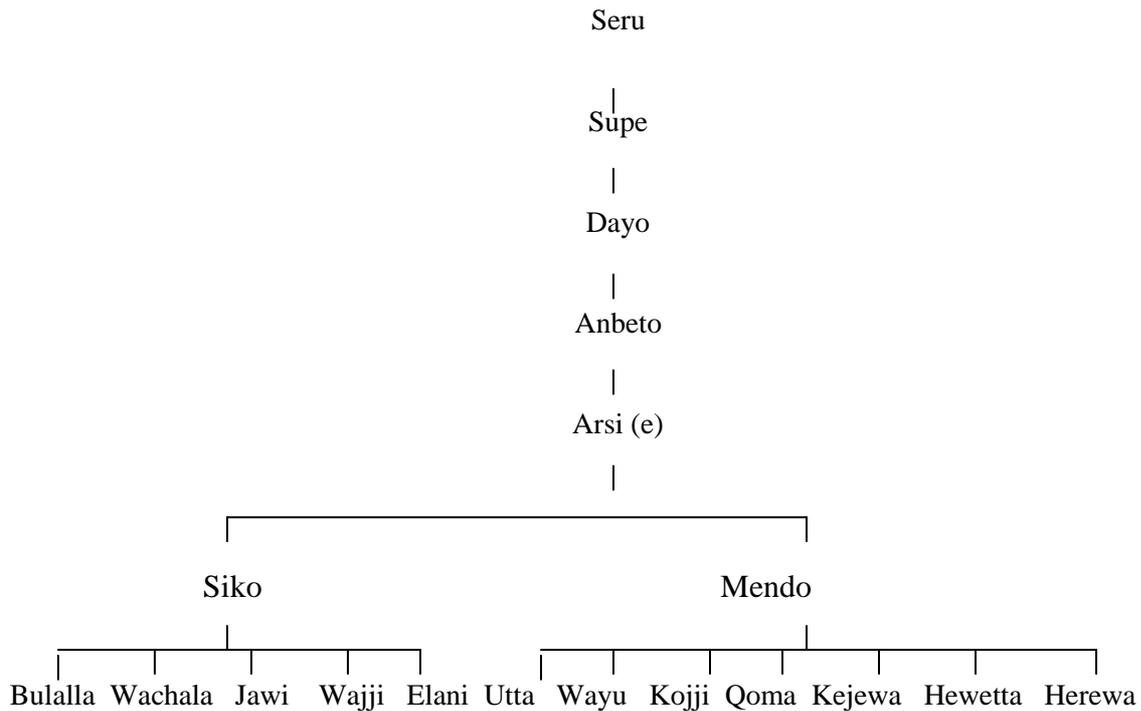


Figure 4: traditional genealogy of the Arsi Oromo.

It is said that Siko's lineage crossed the Wabe Shebelle river from Bale and settled in what is today Arsi during the Oromo migration, most probably in the first half of the sixteenth century while the descendants of Mendo remained in Bale (Abbas Haji Gnamo 1982: 1). The five sons of Siko that crossed to Arsiland are the ancestors of dozens of tribes and hundreds of sub tribes. Even if all the Siko tribes crossed to Arsi and those of the Mendo remained in Bale, which is unlikely given back and forth movements and contacts between the groups, it does not mean that they remained in those places. As a result of the geographical proximity of Arsi and Bale, it is possible to find minority Mendo tribes in Arsi and those of Siko in Bale (Abbas Haji Gnamo 1982: 17). As a result of their common ancestor, the Oromo of Arsi and Bale have closer relationships, and very similar dialects, culture, religions and socio-political organizations when compared with the other Oromo groups.

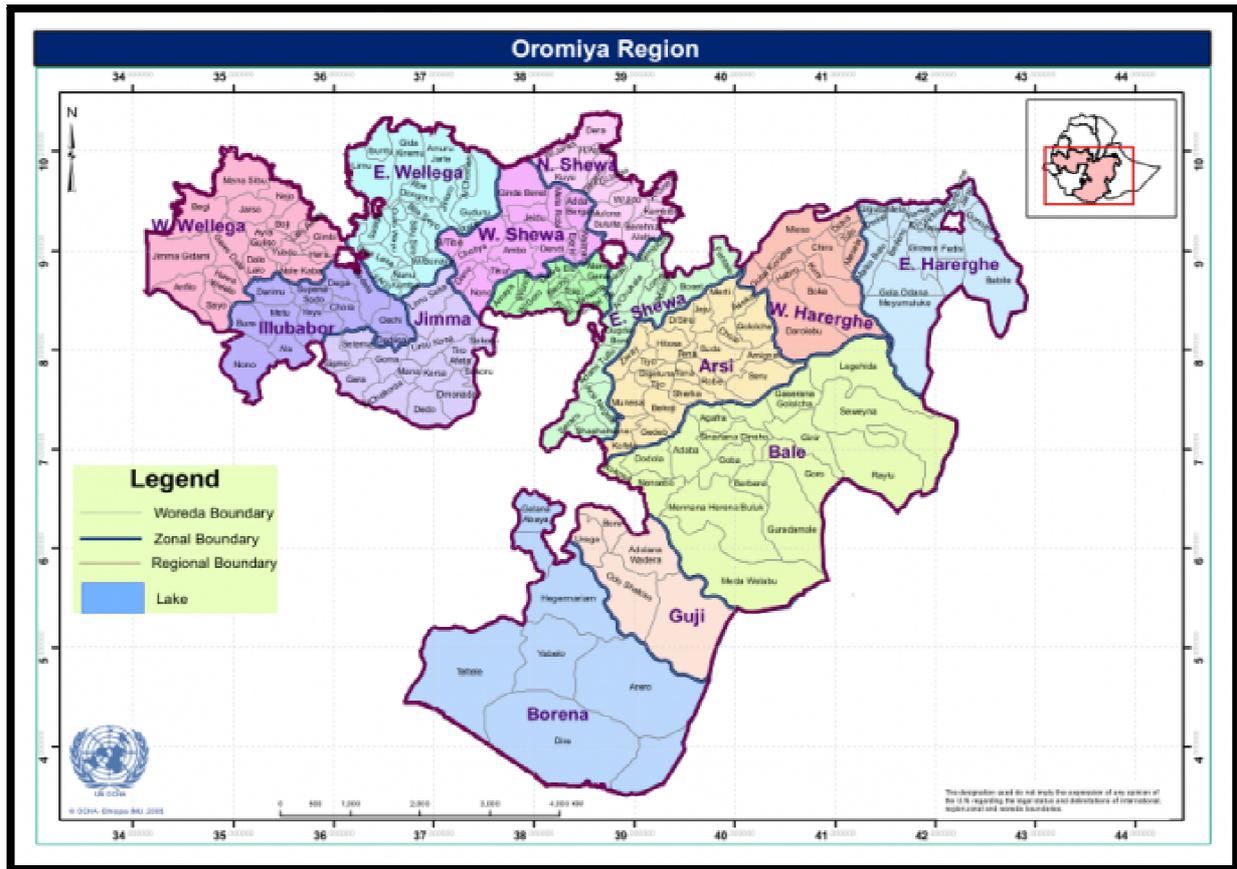


Figure 5: the region of Oromia in relation to Ethiopia.

There are various traditions concerning the origin and the movement of the Oromo. Most of the Arsi Oromo believe that a place called Welabu is the original homeland of the Oromo but they do not really know why and when they came to Bale, which is widely believed as the starting point of the Oromo expansion. The other tradition of the Arsi Oromo concerning their origin is that they are the descendants of the Kuraish group of the Arabs, which are in turn the descendants of the Prophet Mohammed. There is, however, no tangible evidence to support this proposition. The third tradition still states that the original homeland of the Oromo was a place called Bobasa, which they left and later settled in Bale. However, there seems to be an agreement among the majority of the Oromo that their original homeland was a place called Welabu, a region between Sidamo and Bale and this seems the most convincing proposition (Abbas Haji Gnamo 1982: 2).

There are also three different legends of why the Arsi Oromo left their original homeland, Welabu. The first legend states that the Arsi Oromo left their original homeland because of the presence of giant creatures called “Hema Woyee”, which used to eat the people. As a result three groups of the Oromo, namely Macha, Gelan, and Arsi crossed the Wabe Shebelle at the same time and inhabited the present day Arsiland. The Gelan and the

Macha groups, however, left the area after a while and moved to the north. According to the second legend, the migration of the Oromo from their homeland was attributed to ecological changes in Bale at the time. It is said that there was a long period of drought followed by severe rain, which forced the Oromo to flee their homeland. The third legend attributes the migration to an internal pressure at their homeland in the form of a population and cattle increase. As a result of this increase, their original homeland was not able to sustain the cattle and human populations. Hence, the Oromo left their homeland in search of new, unexploited lands (Abbas Haji Gnamo 1982: 3).

Other findings also seem to favour and support the third tradition. Levine (1974: 79-80) states that the Oromo left their original homeland firstly to undertake ritualistic military expeditions against their foes, and secondly to look for a new land to support their ever quickly increasing population. Daniel Deressa (2002: 24) argues that the movement of the Arsi Oromo was not different from the general Oromo movement, which had the goal of conducting ritual and military expeditions against their foes and looking for further land that could accommodate the ever increasing human and cattle populations.

Abbas Haji Gnamo (1982: 4-5) stipulates that prior to their crossing of the Wabe Shebelle River, the Arsi sent a wise man to the other side of the river. The assignment of this man was to spy on the people inhabiting the land across the Wabe Shebelle River. He crossed the river and wandered from one place to the other gathering important information about the Hadiya, the people inhabiting the area before its conquest by the Arsi Oromo. The spy reported that the Hadiya should not be feared by the Arsi Oromo because of the fact that the Hadiya were much inferior to the Arsi economically and organizationally. It was after this report was made that the Arsi crossed the Wabe Shebelle River. When the Hadiya saw the advancing Arsi, they left their land and fled. The Arsi then occupied the houses abandoned by the Hadiya. There were many ensuing clashes between the Hadiya and the Arsi Oromo, but the later took the upper hand and in the final battle, the force of the Hadiya was virtually destroyed. After this event the majority of the Hadiya were chased out, the remaining minority were assimilated, and the area became the home of the Arsi Oromo until its conquest by the Shoans in the 1880s. The conquest of the Arsi Oromo by the Shoans in the last quarter of the nineteenth century has tremendous economic, social, political, cultural and religious repercussions. Although an investigation of the economic, social, and political consequences of the conquest is beyond the scope of this project, this dissertation investigates the circumstances leading to the conquest as well as the cultural and religious consequences of the occupation in more detail in the ensuing chapters.

2.1.6 Religious transformation among the Arsi Oromo

As of the mid-nineteenth century, the religion of the Arsi Oromo was tremendously transformed. The majority of them abandoned the *Waaqeffannaa*¹⁸ religion and embraced Islam and to a lesser extent, Christianity. There are two factors that led to this transformation. The first factor was the introduction and expansion of Islam in Arsi in the mid nineteenth century and the second one was the conquest of Arsi by the Christian Amhara Empire in the early 1880s.

2.1.6.1 Islam

Islam in Ethiopia: an Overview

Around the middle of the seventh century the city of Axum was in decline as a result of several factors: exhaustion of the fertility of its agricultural farms; cutting down trees for construction purposes and firewood; declining climatic conditions; unpredictable rainfall; and control of Yemen by the Persians which in turn affected the Red Sea trade on which Axum relied. The main factor for the decline of the kingdom Axum as a regional power, however, is attributed to the emergence and expansion of the Islamic empire and its ultimate control of the Red Sea commerce. The power vacuum left following the decline of Axum laid a fertile ground for the introduction of Islam to the horn of Africa through the Dahlak Island, Gulf of Aden and Somalia.¹⁹

Ethiopia is the first country where Muslims and Christians met and talked for the first time. The *sahaba*, the first convertees to Islam and the initial followers of Islam were told by Muhammad in 615-616 to seek shelter in Ethiopia (Trimingham 1952: 44; Erlich 2010: 1-2). The main reason for this decision was the oppression they faced in Mecca in the hands of the local Arabs who were practicing traditional Arabian religions at the time. Hence, it can be said that the first *hidjra* was to Ethiopia, a Christian land. The king of Ethiopia (*al-Habäša*) at the time, Najashi Ashama, gave them refuge and permitted them to practice their religion freely. As a result, Prophet Muhammad is said to have instructed his followers not to attack Ethiopia as long as the Ethiopians do not initiate the offensive. This is why the kingdom was spared from military campaigns of the Arabs (Trimingham 2008; Østebø 2012: 46).

His decision to send his followers to Ethiopia to escape persecution were said to have been motivated by his good perception of Ethiopia. This is because Prophet Muhammad is believed to have had an Ethiopian nurse when he was a child. He probably also had an

¹⁸ It is an indigenous folk religion of the Oromo and it is based on a belief in *Waaqa*, a God regarded by the Oromo as the creator of the universe as it exists. For more information, refer to chapter three.

¹⁹ As secondary sources see, for example, Henze 2000: 42; Østebø 2012: 45.

interaction with the Ethiopian Christian community of traders, artisans, and soldiers living in Mecca at the moment. After he started preaching Islam, Muhammad ran into problems with the Quraish tribe, which controlled the Kaaba in Mecca (Henze 2000: 42). Muhammad had tried to convert the people of Mecca for about ten years during which time opposition to his teachings increased tremendously and there was even a plot to kill him (Safari 1994: 15). This was because the then rulers of Mecca obtained many financial benefits and profits during the annual pilgrimage and did not want this to be interrupted by the new teachings of Prophet Muhammad (Safari 1994: 14-15; Smith 1999: 306). As opposition to his teachings intensified, some of his earliest followers were afraid and decided to leave Mecca and travel to Abyssinia. As a result, the first group of refugees, which consisted of twelve men and five women, including Rakiya, the daughter of Muhammad and her husband, crossed the Red Sea and reached Axum in 616. The second group of refugees led by the Prophet's cousin arrived in Axum in 617. The first Ethiopian contact with Islam in the seventh century, however, was insignificant.²⁰ In 628, after emerging victorious, Muhammad sent envoys to ask the refugees to return to Arabia. Only sixteen decided to return while the rest stayed at a place called Negash in the eastern part of Tigray, where a large Muslim population has remained since then. Some of the early Muslim immigrants to Abyssinia adopted Christianity as their religion, hence making them the first converts from Islam to Christianity.²¹

Other than the first Muslim refugees from Mecca who did not propagate Islam, the first Muslims who came and settled on the East African coast were traders and the commercial centers they established to extend their commercial activity to the hinterlands of that part of Africa became centers for the expansion of Islam. It is due to their commercial interaction with these coastal settlements that the nomads of the hinterlands were influenced by Islam. The merchants had set up schools for the teaching of the Quran and the outstanding students were sent to places like Cairo and Damascus for further education. Traders, artisans, and adventurers from Arabia played an important role in the spread of Islam. Most of them came as individuals, lived side by side with the indigenous inhabitants, learned their language, and intermarried with the local people (Trimingham 2008: 138-139).

There were two groups of early Muslim communities in Ethiopia. The first one was made up of Muslim traders within the Christian empire who were enjoying its protection and the second group was made up of Muslim communities that made a living on trade and were located along the trade routes leading from the coast into the mainland. As of the fourteenth

²⁰ See Henze 2000: 42, Trimingham 2008: 12.

²¹ See Henze 2000: 42-43, Trimingham 2008: 45.

century, a struggle developed between the latter communities and the Christian state for power. This struggle resulted in the occupation of large parts of the Christian state by the coalition forces of different Muslim principalities under the leadership of Imam Ahmad b. Ibrahim (1529-43). Even if this conquest was short lived, it had far reaching consequences, including the weakening of the state and inability to halt the Oromo migration of the sixteenth century. Muslim merchants who were responsible for the spread of Islam were under the protection of the kingdom of Axum but were not allowed full freedom of worship or the right to propagate Islam (Kapteijns 2000: 228).

The spread of Islam was intensified in the horn of Africa in general in the tenth century with the emergence of the Fatimid dynasty in Egypt that acted as the protector of all Muslims living in the Christian state, and the revitalization of the Red Sea commerce. The Solomonic dynasty that came to power in 1270 moved the center of the empire southwards, hereby making Zayla the most important channel of exit for commerce from the Ethiopian interior and important point of entry of Islam from the coast into the Ethiopian hinterland. At this time, there were already many Muslim communities in the heart of the Christian highlands, as well as a number of Islamic entities along the following long distance trade routes: from the coast to southern Amhara and Shewa, to the north, and to the lakes region of the Rift Valley in the south. The first known Muslim principality in the interior was the Sultanate of Shewa. Its ruling family, the Makhzumis, are claimed to have ruled the region from 896-1295. They were deposed by the Walashma dynasty of Yifat, also called Ifat who ruled until 1415 (Kapteijns 2000: 228).

The expansion of Islam in Ethiopia remained peaceful until the rise of the kingdom of Ifat and the ensuing conflicts with the Christian kingdom from the fourteenth century to the second half of the sixteenth century. Their expansion used Islam as a pretext to gather followers but it did not have an authentic religious motive. The main reason for their expansion was to get out of their arid area of settlement (Trimingham 2008: 139-140). A major war broke out in 1332 between the Solomonic dynasty of the Ethiopian State and the various Muslim sultanates, and particularly Ifat, in their attempt to dominate the long distance trade routes. The ruler of the Ethiopian state at the time, Amda-Syon (1314-44) defeated them and subsequently Ifat became one of the tributaries to the Christian state. In addition to its conquest by the Ethiopian state, internal conflict emerged in Ifat, which resulted in its further weakening and subsequent control by another Muslim sultanate, the Sultanate of Adal (1420-1560). The Muslim sultanate of Adal, under the leadership of various enigmatic rulers holding title of *imam* and Islamic goals, declared jihad against the Ethiopian state. This reached its

apex under the leadership of Imam Ahmad b. Ibrahim al-Ghazi, commonly known by the Ethiopians as *Gragh* (the left handed), who was able to control and reign over most of Christian Ethiopia between 1529-43. Even if *Imam* Ahmad was defeated in 1543 by the Ethiopian state with the help of the Portuguese, his conquest had tremendous consequences, one of which was the conversion to Islam of the inhabitants of the highlands of Christian Ethiopia (Kapteijns 2000: 229).

Some factors that played a crucial role in the spread or hindrance of Islam are trading contacts, immigration, tribal movements, political conquest and domination, as well as cultural assimilation. Even if the role nomads played in the spread of Islam is crucial, their influence was not direct (Trimingham 1980: 38). Through their movements, the nomadic groups created interaction points in various regional and cultural confines (Østebø 2012: 48). However, they did not influence the expansion of Islam through religious conviction (Trimingham 1980: 38). Traders' effect on the spread of Islam is much more significant than that of nomads and Islam spread in the direction of trade routes. The penetration of Islam into the interior of the southern part of the Horn of Africa had a unique advantage due to the power exercised by the Muslims over the trade routes leading to the hinterlands. As Islam followed the commerce routes from the coast towards the west (mainland), permanent settlements started to appear in the Ogaden, Danakil, along Arsi and Harar highlands, and in Shoa and Southern Wollo, all of which became grounds of interaction between Islam and the local community living in these areas (Østebø 2012: 48).

Aromatics and incense are important products of Africa that have been attracting travelers to visit the shores of Somalia since ancient times. These goods could be used in the production of perfumes and medicines, as well as in various rituals. Other important products from the mainland of the horn of Africa that attracted navigators were ivory, timber, tortoiseshell, leopard skins, ambergris, gold, and slaves. To facilitate a smooth commercial exchange the South Arabians had established a number of settlements along the coast of the horn of Africa (Trimingham 1964: 2-3). Areas that lie within major trade routes embraced Islam quicker than areas where there were no trade routes. Another important factor that played a crucial role in the spread of Islam in the eastern part of Africa is the slave trade, and the Muslims were its chief agents (Trimingham 2008: 142). During its introduction and expansion, the ruling families in the African continent were first exposed to Islam because of their commercial interaction. Islam was also adopted as a prestige of being related to a new order (Trimingham 2008: 39).

Muslim preachers such as Hajj Abadir of Harar, Sharif Yusuf Barkhadle of Somalia and Shaykh Husayn of Bale have also played a big role in the process of Islamization (Østebø 2012: 50). Trimmingham (2008: 208) assumes that Islam expanded in Arsi in the second half of the nineteenth century due to the missionary activity of Shaikh Nur Husain, who also organized the opposition and declared a jihad to the conquest of Arsi by the Christian empire in 1882 (Trimingham 1980: 39). The rapid expansion of Islam in Ethiopia was stopped by the victory of the Christian empire and the unification of the various semi-independent regional entities in the second half of the nineteenth century (Trimingham 1980: 29).

The introduction and expansion of Islam in Arsi

The first contact with Muslims that took place with the coming of Arab refugees in 615 was an isolated event which bears no impact on the introduction of Islam in the southern areas of Ethiopia (Østebø 2012: 45). Islam found its way to southern Ethiopia with the activity of *naggadi* 'merchant'. As a result, this local term for merchants and traders came to be associated and even used as another name for 'Muslims' (Trimingham 2008: 140). Even if the Oromo were in contact with Muslims for many centuries, Islam found its way among them in the thirteenth century (Trimingham 2008: 37). There is almost no written and oral information on southeastern Ethiopia for the period between the seventeenth and the nineteenth century but the presence of Arabic inscription on gravestones in the region show the introduction of Islam into the region, especially around Bale in the thirteenth century (Braukämper 2004 155).

The expansion of Islam among the Oromo found a special momentum in the eighteenth and nineteenth century as a result of the weakness of the Christian empire caused by the Oromo expansion of the sixteenth century as well as internal conflicts (Trimingham 2008: 27). As of mid-nineteenth century there is a resurgence of Islam in southeastern Ethiopia and this is witnessed in the form of the restoration or establishment of many Islamic shrines in the region. Some of these shrines include the shrine of Sheikh Hussein and his son, Muhammad Tammam, as well as that of Sof Umar in Bale (Braukämper 2004: 156).

The influence of Islam on the Arsi Oromo is directly related to the extent of their commercial interaction with the inhabitants of Harar, as well as the Somali, who had long been Muslims (Bartels 1989: 14). The Oromo movement of the sixteenth century had, however, cut off Arsi from the eastern and northern Islamic centers, which in turn led to the decline but not the general collapse of Islam. Few places, such as the shrine of Sheikh Hussein in Bale, where basic principles of Islam were celebrated, survived (Braukämper 2004: 155). The majority of the cults that are observed today among the Arsi are believed to

have emerged at the time of Imam Ahmad b. Ibrahim (1529-43), who led a *jihad* against the Ethiopian empire (Braukämper. 2004: 155).

Although the entire population did not adhere to Islam, it had become the main religion in some areas of eastern Arsi towards the close of the nineteenth century. The factors that contributed to the expansion of Islam in Arsi between the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth century are unknown (Braukämper 2004: 157). The western part of Arsi, however, continued to practice vernacular religion even in the 1930s (Braukämper 2004: 158). The last areas of Arsi to embrace Islam were the lowlands of the Rift Valley where Islamic conversion had to wait until the period of Ethiopian occupation by Italian forces (1936-41). Towards the beginning of the 1940s the construction of a shrine for Nurullah Ahmad, the eldest son of Sheikh Hussein was started by a person named Kabir Dawa in Kolito/Alaba. This was easily accepted by the inhabitants of western Arsi because of the association of the cult with the name of Sheikh Hussein, widely considered the patron saint of the Arsi. But there is no factual evidences that indicate Nurullah travelled or stayed in western Arsi (Braukämper 2004: 159).

During their occupation of Ethiopia the Italians deliberately promoted and favored the expansion of Islam in an attempt to reinforce the position of the peoples of southern Ethiopia against the Christian Amhara, who were spearheading the opposition to Italian occupation. The Italians also supported the construction of mosques and religious schools throughout the country (Braukämper 2004: 159). It is only after the end of the colonial occupation in the 1940s that the Orthodox church of Christian Ethiopia engaged actively in the process of the Christianization of the Muslims of Arsi (Braukämper 2004: 159). However, this did not stop the severe political, social, economic, and cultural discrimination against followers of Islam. Proclamations in favor of Muslims had to wait until the 1974 revolution, at which time the military leaders made important declarations, such as acceptance of Muslim's main holidays (Braukämper 2004: 160).

There are many factors that contributed to the rapid expansion of Islam in Arsi. The first of these factors was the presence of strong Islamic elements among the Hadiyya groups of the Arsi population, who might already have had exposure to Islam in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (Braukämper 2002: 67, 160). The Hadiyya faction of the Arsi Oromo were initially seen as inferiors. But Braukämper (2002: 160) states that "... the more intensive the impact of Islamic values on cultural patterns became, the more the prestige of representatives of the Muslim substratum rose". Islamization thus improved their social status. The existence of many holy places of traditional religion, which were easily converted into

Muslim shrines, is the other factor that facilitated the process of Islamization (Braukämper 2002: 162).

The geographic location of Arsi bordering the Muslim Somali was a second factor facilitating the rapid expansion of Islam into Arsiland. The Somali were trying to leave their inhospitable homeland and expanding into the more fertile regions of the hinterland. Every time the Arsi and the Somali came in contact, the Somali were forcing the Arsi to accept their cultural system by every means possible. Arsi Oromo commercial activity with Harar and Indian Ocean ports, which had played significant roles as centers of Islamic expansion for centuries, also played an important role for the rapid expansion of Islam among the Arsi (Braukämper 2002: 162).

The nature of the Arsi Oromo economy, which was and is still to a large extent dependant on livestock rearing, is the third factor that contributed to the expansion of Islam. Because of their dependence on livestock and livestock products for their sustenance, it would be difficult for the Arsi Oromo to respect Ethiopian Christianity rules of refraining from non-vegetarian diet for almost 150 days per a year. The majority of the Arsi Oromo, who were converted to Christianity in the 1950 abandoned it and became Muslims after experiencing the first Christian fasting. The Arsi Oromo find Islamic fasting, which does not require its followers to abstain from livestock products compelling. In addition, Islam's permission of the consumption of the meat of camels, which are crucial aspects of the economy of the eastern Arsi, made Islam an attractive ideology among them (Braukämper 2004: 162-163).

Emotional factors, which resulted from the occupation of Arsi by the forces of the Christian empire towards the close of the nineteenth century, also played an important role for the spread of Islam among the Arsi, as they developed a strong hatred to the religion of their occupiers (Braukämper 2002: 163, Temam Haji -Adem 2002: 31). In effect, what drove some Arsi to Islam is not just the occupation by the Christian Amhara Kingdom, but its extremely violent nature (Temam Haji -Adem 2002: 32).

Effects and consequences of socio-religious change

Islam had become the Arsi Oromo way of indicating resistance to their conquest by the Amhara and as a method of searching for cultural distinctiveness. The 1950s saw the decline in importance of the *Abbaa-muuda* (father of anointment), which was generally accepted as the spiritual leader of the Arsi. It was then exchanged for the cult of Sheikh Hussein, the patron saint of the Muslims of Arsi (Haberland 1963: 455, Braukämper 2002: 163). The introduction of Islam has also changed the view of the Arsi Oromo regarding honorary titles, which now assume Islamic expressions. Braukämper (2002: 164) states that

“... Arsi men who had accomplished the pilgrimage to Mecca explicitly laid claim to be addressed as *hadjji*”. Furthermore, Islam has affected the dressing style of the Arsi Oromo, albeit in a stereotyped manner. Turbans and caps (*kofiya*) are associated with men, while black head-scarves are associated with women (Braukämper 2004: 164).

Even though Islam has influenced the indigenous Arsi culture tremendously, it has also been affected by them. One area of Islamic practice that is influenced by Arsi Oromo tradition is in the area of building of graves, where anthropomorphic relics and sculptures are introduced despite the rejection of this practice in the dogma of Orthodox Islam. Muslims also continued their ancient practice of laying grass or anointing a tree as well as evoking *Waaqa*, the god of their indigenous religion, as a replacement for Allah (Braukämper 2002: 164). The expansion and consolidation of Islam also resulted in the decline, if not disappearance of Oromo traditional religion and religious practices. Many Arsi Oromo who embraced Islam also dropped their Oromo names and started to pick Islamic and Arabic names. Some factions of Arsi Oromo even started to claim that they are Muslims instead of Oromo because of various negative connotations associated with the Oromo, especially until the collapse of the Ethiopian empire in the 1970s (Temam Haji-Adem 2002: 84).

Islamization resulted in the replacement of the traditional Oromo calendar, based on the position of stars and the moon and which assigns 27 days for each month, by the Islamic lunar calendar. Additionally, Arsi naming of days were also influenced by the Islamic calendar. Some examples of this include *Arbaa* from *Al-Arba* (Wednesday), *Kamisa* from *Khamis* (Thursday), *Jum'aa* from *al-Jumu'ah* (Friday), and *sanbbata* from *al-Sabt* (Saturday) (Tema Haji -Adem 2002: 84).²²

2.1.6.2 The conquest of Arsi by the imperial government and its consequences

The reign of Emperor Menelik II (1844-1913), who was King of Shewa from 1866-1889 and Emperor of Ethiopia from 1889 up to his death in 1913 was characterized by three important developments. These were the arrival of Europeans in Shewa and the establishment of formal relationships with Europeans, active involvement with other kingdoms situated north of Shewa, and the conquest and expansion of the kingdom in the southern, south-western, and south-eastern parts to bring large areas inhabited by the Oromo under its sovereignty (Darkwah 1975: 57). The first two developments are out of the scope of the topic

²² For more information on the traditional Oromo calendar see Marco Bassi (1988). “On the Borana Calendarical System: A Preliminary Report”, in *Current Anthropology*, 29(4), pp. 619-624, Asmerom Legesse (1973). *Gada: Three Approaches to the Study of African Society*. New York: The Free Press; and Asfaw Beyene (1995). “Oromo Calendar: The Significance of Bitä Qara”, in *Journal of Oromo Studies*, 2(1 and 2).

under discussion. Hence, more emphasis is given to the expansion of the Empire to incorporate Oromo areas to its domain.

Menelik turned his attention to areas inhabited by the Oromo in the south, southwest, and southeast late in his campaign and only after securing areas north of Shewa (Darkwah 1975: 90). Although Menelik had sporadically sent military expeditions to the Oromo countries in the south and southwest of Shewa, the main focuses of his military activity until 1878 were areas to the north of Shewa. It is only after conquering the areas to the north of the Shewan frontier and the signing of a peace treaty with Emperor Yohannes IV (emperor of Ethiopia from 1872-1889) in 1878 that Menelik felt safe to concentrate on areas to the south of Shewa (Darkwah 1975: 95).

Menelik's campaigns of conquests were continuations of a phenomenon already started by former Shewan leaders of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Bahru Zewde 1991: 60, 1998: 152). But Menelik's expansion was also a reaction to external developments of that period, which was characterized by a tremendous attempt by European colonial powers towards the closure of the nineteenth century to colonize the entire African continent (Bahru Zewde 1998: 152). Long before his coronation as emperor of Ethiopia in 1889, Menelik had the ambition to be Emperor and extend his domain over areas north and south of Shewa. To achieve this goal, Menelik had worked hard to increase his reputation and to show his military might. One way he demonstrated this was by increasing the number of his troops through annexation of territories which had not previously been under his control, so areas inhabited by the Oromo and the Sidama and their abundant manpower proved too tempting for Menelik to resist conquering.

The most important factor that attracted Menelik to these areas, however, was the economic potential he anticipated in these regions, which were endowed with tremendous resources such as coffee, ivory, gold, gum, etc. He wanted to use the resources of these areas to acquire better quality weapons to arm his soldiers. Menelik bought these better weapons, which made his conquest easier and a success, from European merchants who frequented Shewa in the 1880s. This resulted in the development of a direct relationship between the acquisition of weapons and the intensity of Menelik's campaign of conquest (Darkwah 1975: 96). Jones and Monroe (1978:136) state that "French adventurers did a roaring trade in out-of-date small arms which they bought in Europe for five or six francs and sold in Shoa for forty". In order to buy as many weapons as possible, Menelik intensified his conquest to acquire resources needed to pay for the firearms and the acquisition of better firearms made his campaign successful (Darkwah 1975: 96).

Menelik's expansion into territories inhabited by the Oromo had three motives: imperial, economic, and religious, with the first two being the most dominant motives (Darkwah 1975: 95). After conquering most areas to the southwest of Shewa, Menelik directed his attention to the south, especially to the land of the Gurage ethnic groups, and to the southeast, which was and still is mainly inhabited by the Arsi Oromo. There were two motives for Menelik's desire to conquer the Gurage area. The first motive was related to the commemoration of the Christian culture of the medieval Ethiopian empire (Darkwah 1975: 100). It was to the Gurage area, and mainly to the islands located in Lake Zeway, that various treasures of the Ethiopian church were taken for safe keeping when the country was ravaged by the wars of Ahmad Gran during the sixteenth century. Menelik conducted a campaign in Gurage in 1875 and 1876 through which he conquered most of the Gurage lands and prepared the way for the conquest of Lake Zeway and its islands, with the final goal of retrieving the treasures of the church kept there. In 1879 Menelik personally led the campaign to conquer the lake and its islands, which his soldiers could not reach because of the lack of boats. As a result, the campaign was a failure (Darkwah 1975: 100-102).

The second motive that attracted Menelik's attention to Gurage areas was economic. The most important products from the Gurage area were slaves. As a Christian king, Menelik himself, as well as his Christian subjects in Shewa, were not directly engaged in slave trade. The most important income from this was the tax paid by slave merchants for a transit through Shewa. Slaves from the Gurage area were well known as being hard working and obedient. This increased the demand for Gurage slaves (Darkwah 1975: 102-103). Due to the lucrative nature of this activity, Menelik completed the conquest of the Gurage in the second half of 1889 (Darkwah 1975: 102). Some of the slaves were reserved for domestic use in the empire. However, most of the slaves were sold to the Sudan and the Arabian Peninsula. These slaves were captives of war, caught during slave raids, or sold by their own parents as a result of poverty caused by famine or financial problems (Bahru Zewde 1991: 22).

Arsi's location in the south-easterly trade route to the coast was key to Menelik's campaign of conquest. Shewa was not the only starting point of the route for goods and slaves to the coast. Some of the trade routes leading to the coast crossed through Arsi. This became one of the factors for Menelik's campaigns to conquer Arsi. The campaign in Arsi was one of the most protracted and the bloodiest of all campaigns conducted by Menelik before he was coroneted emperor in 1889. He conducted six campaigns of conquest between January 1882 and January 1887 to finally subdue them. In all six campaigns, Menelik's troops were confronted with a stiff resistance from the Arsi (Darkwah 1975: 103).

At the beginning of his campaign to subdue the Arsi Oromo, Menelik promised the various Arsi Oromo clan leaders' autonomy if they accepted his lordship. This offer attracted two of the clan leaders, Suffa Kuso and Damu Usu, who pressed for submission to Menelik. This proposition, however, was opposed by other clan leaders and Arsi Oromo elders (Bahru Zewde 1991:63). The resistance of the Arsi Oromo was organized and led by six war lords: Lengisso Diga of the Koloba clan in Arba-Gugu area, Koffe Shamo in Lake Zway area, Ogotto Binno in the Munessa area, Intalle Shule in Robe/Didaa area, Gobana Robe in Gadab area, and Gatisso Balango in the area between the Kambata-Mountains and the Sidama area (Braukämper 1980: 270). The clans that opposed Menelik's expansion contributed warriors to resist the conquest. Despite the Arsi Oromo's inferior armaments of spears and arrows against the firearms of Menelik's troops, the campaign to subjugate them lasted from 1882-1886 and Menelik was even personally forced to take part in many of the campaigns (Bahru Zewde 1991: 62). In the campaign of December 1883, Menelik personally led his troops and narrowly escaped with his life (Teshale Tibebu 1995: 43).

However, the resistance of the Arsi Oromo was finally crushed by Menelik's troops at the battle of Azule in September 1886 (Teshale Tibebu 1995: 43, Bahru Zewde 1991: 63). During this final campaign, during which the Arsi attacked the camp of the imperial troops north of the Wabi Shebelle River, the Arsi managed to kill about 700 soldiers and women, but about 6000 Arsi were killed by the superior armaments of Menelik's troops (Braukämper 1980: 269). Abbas Haji Gnamo (1995: 14), on the other hand, estimates that up to 12 000 Arsi were annihilated at that battle. The battle is vividly described as follows:

The Arsi were mobilized massively... to crush their enemy definitively at Azule... *Ras Darghe* (commander of the imperial army) was well-informed about the Arsi plan and made the necessary preparations. He dug trenches around the camp and stationed thousands of gunmen on every corner of the fortress. The soldiers were given strict orders not to fire until all the Arsi had entered the camp and until he had given the order... Almost all the horsemen fell into the trenches and other who managed to enter the fortress were mowed down by Shoan bullets.... *Ras Darghe*, confident of his victory, pursued the foot soldiers and cavalry who escaped. For days, with unbelievable fury, he slayed and mutilated any one he found on his way (Abbas Haji Gnamo 1995: 14).

Because of this loss, the resistance of the Arsi Oromo was tremendously weakened, if not completely broken. Sporadic resistance by the Arsi Oromo, however, continued until 1888 (Braukämper 1980: 269). After the battle of Azule, *Ras Darghe* summoned the Arsi at a place

called Anole under the false pretence of making peace. The Arsi were tricked and they arrived unarmed. Once at the place, the right hand of men and the right breast of women were mutilated. This was aimed to increase the pace of submission and to discourage further resistance by the Arsi (Abbas Haji Gnamo 1995: 15). In addition, Braukämper (1980: 269) points to revenge as a reason for this action.

The Arsi managed to resist the army of Menelik for such a long time partly because of their numerical superiority and the large territory at their disposal (Darkwah 1975: 103). This was an important factor for their ability to mobilize a substantial number of fighters believed to be between 100 000 and 1 000 000 against the conquerors (Abbas Haji Gnamo 1995: 3). The Arsi had the numerical advantage over Menelik's troops because he had to permanently station soldiers in all the areas he had conquered before his campaign in Arsi and this reduced his fighting capabilities. Furthermore the Arsi's strong resistance was supported by their adoption of the Oromo war technique which involved conducting surprise attacks during the nights while the enemy was resting and retreating quickly before the enemy could organize a counter attack (Darkwah 1975: 103-104).

The prevailing internal harmony and unity among the various Arsi Oromo groups at the beginning of the conflict also contributed to the longevity of their resistance. They solved their internal rivalries through mediation instead of military confrontations (Abbas Haji Gnamo 1995: 3). The way they perceived war and the place it had in their social organization was the other factor that played a significant role in their war of resistance against their occupation. The Oromo in general were known for their fighting ability, but the Arsi in particular were known as brave warriors (Abbas Haji Gnamo 1995: 4). In addition to the superior armaments of the imperial troops, other factors that contributed to the downfall of Arsi resistance. One important factor for their defeat was internal strife among the Arsi that developed in the course of the struggle. The other factor was Menelik's canny strategy of enticing the Arsi Oromo into areas that were properly fortified by his forces (Bahru Zewde 1991: 63).

One important consequence of the occupation of areas to the south of Shewa was the establishment of the *gabbar* system, where the conquered people of the south were not considered to be free citizens but rather slaves to the state. The Amharic term, *gabbar* initially meant tax payer, which is a person who paid land tax. After Menelik's campaign of expansion in the southern direction, however, the term had become a synonym for exploitation and oppression of individuals living on lands given to feudal lords. Towards the close of the nineteenth century, the areas in the south were given to the imperial soldiers as well as other

deserving individuals as fiefdoms (Braukämper 1980: 295). These individuals enjoyed extensive user rights over the land as well as the people living on the land under their domain (Braukämper 1980: 296).

In addition to its numerous political consequences,²³ Menelik's expansion has also changed the ethnic picture of the southern regions of Ethiopia (Braukämper 1980: 302). The availability of large tracts of fertile land in the occupied southern regions attracted large numbers of immigrants from the relatively infertile highland Ethiopia (Braukämper 1980: 303). Arsi nomads living in the lowland areas were forced to be personal slaves of occupying Amhara soldiers. In addition to paying their taxes in cattle, money, butter and honey, they were also expected to tend to the cattle of their lords (Braukämper 1980: 208-209). Furthermore, the conquest resulted in profound changes to the economic, technological, religious and psychological situations in southern Ethiopia (Braukämper 1980: 319). The conquest also led to economic changes that were related to the establishment of settlements in occupied areas of the south for administrative purposes. The establishment of settlements promoted commercial relations between the various regions. Muslim traders from Addis Ababa started to frequent the southern trade routes. The volume of commodity exchange between Addis Ababa and the southern regions increased tremendously and coffee as an export item was discovered (Braukämper 1980: 320). The only meaningful technological consequence of the occupation by the imperial government is the introduction of the plough by the invaders (Braukämper 1980: 320-21).

The conquest has also imposed a lasting effect on the material culture of the people of the southern regions. This is apparent through the adoption of stools, benches, coffee pots and devices for the preparation of alcoholic drinks. In addition, the southern people have adopted the consumption of certain food items such as *injera* (flat bread), a staple food of the occupying Amhara. The cultivation in southern regions of crops such as *teff* (*Eragrostis tef*), flax, potato, and onion dates back to this period of conquest (Braukämper 1980: 321).

As a result of the conquest, the religious sphere of the southern people changed (Braukämper 1980: 322). Until the end of the Italian occupation (early 1940s), the Ethiopian Orthodox Church did not engage in any missionary activity to convert the people of the occupied territories of the south. The reason for this behaviour might lie in the fact that the Christian conquerors perceived themselves as the chosen people and their religion as a tool of conquest against the conquered. The conversion of the local people was not in the best interest

²³ For more political and social consequences of the occupation see Braukämper 1980.

of the Amhara conquerors who also wanted to monopolize the spiritual sphere. They did not want the local people to use their conversion to Christianity as a tool to improve their social status. Even if the number of Christians among the southern people increased steadily, it was only religious emblems such as Christian necklaces that were copied by the local people in an attempt to improve their social status. The only deliberate campaign of proselytization in the south took place in Arsi and even this turned out to be a failure. Every time bigger towns were established in the occupied territories, churches were also built at elevated grounds and sites considered holy by the local people (Braukämper 1980: 323-324).

The occupation also increased the pace of the expansion of Islam among the Arsi. The Arsi Oromo developed a strong hatred to their Christian Amhara conquerors and their socio-economic and religious institutions. This hatred encouraged the Arsi to adopt Islam as a form of protest to the religion of their occupiers (Braukämper: 2002: 163, Temam Haji-Adem 2002: 31).

2.2 Religious syncretism

This section gives an overview of the following discussions: how scholars have conceptualised syncretism; its historical origin and the shift and change in meaning over time; some of the major oppositions to the use of the term; other terms suggested as reference to religious mixtures instead of the term ‘syncretism’; and an attempt will be made to indicate how these alternatively recommended terms are, themselves, very controversial.

2.2.1 Origin and definition of syncretism

The origin of the concept of syncretism has its roots in two different backgrounds. One origin of the term has its root in politics, advocating unity among the Cretans when faced with an external danger (Rudolph 2004: 70). The term was in this sense coined for the first time in the first century AD by a certain Roman writer, Plutarch, who used it in a completely positive way to refer to the action of the people of Crete, who used to set aside their internal divisions and conflicts in the face of external danger. It was this coming together of the Cretans which Plutarch termed in Greek “*syn-kretismos*”, meaning “syncretism” (Stewart 2004: 264; Kippenberg 2004: 29). Based upon this, Berner (2001: 504) considers syncretism as a survival strategy at a time of individual or communal crisis and tension. Berner (2001: 503-504) also identifies two levels of syncretism: syncretism on the level of elements and syncretism on the level of systems. The former refers to the act of adopting elements of one religion into another but at the same time highlighting the margins between the two religious traditions, whereas

the later refers to the process of eliminating the boundaries between the different religions with the purpose of reducing friction.

The second origin of the term has its roots in theological controversies around a negative approach to mixing (Rudolph 2004: 70). This took place during the Reformation of the seventeenth century, when a certain Lutheran theologian, Georg Calixtus, proposed that the different Protestant factions should be integrated and finally merge with the Catholic Church. His proposal was, however, met with different reactions. Some Calvinists supported it, but it was opposed fiercely by Orthodox Lutherans and the elites of the Catholic Church. This proposed merger 'threatened a heretical and inconsistent jumble of theologies-a syncretism' (Stewart 1999: 45-46). Through time, the concept found its way into scientific scholarship. The idea of syncretism was brought into the academia by the German historian, Droysen, who used the term in his work in the second quarter of the nineteenth century to refer to the "east-west mixture of people" that took place in the period following Alexander's occupations in the fourth century BCE (Before the Common Era) (Martin 2004: 286).

The traditional definition of syncretism is related to the concept that culture, religion and ethnicity are homogenous elements, which might be mixed when they come in contact with another culture, religion and ethnic groups (Leopold and Jensen 2004: 2). Braukämper (1992: 194) also provides a similar argument, stating that syncretism refers in its broadest meaning to the mixture of cultural elements, but mostly it is used in connection to the sphere of religion. Having said this, it should also be pointed out that the term syncretism is one of those concepts in the academia that still has no clear and consensual definition. For this, Baird (2004: 48) also states that the term syncretism is hardly ever clearly defined even if it is usually considered to be clear enough.

To have a clear understanding of how the meaning of syncretism is viewed differently by various scholars, it is wise to look at some of the attempts to define the concept. Pye (1971: 93) defines syncretism as a temporary ambiguous coexistence of elements from diverse religious and other contexts within a coherent religious pattern, whereas for Rudolph (2004: 82), it is the intertwining of religious and cultural elements of varied backgrounds into contact. Still, Droogers (1989: 20) defines it as a religious interpenetration, either taken for granted or subject to debate. For Vroom (2004: 110), syncretism is an act of incorporating or trying to incorporate elements that are hitherto uncommon and unusual to the basic belief systems of a specific religious tradition. Stewart (2004: 282), however, argues that syncretism is the combination of elements from two or more different religious traditions within a specified time frame. For Light (2004: 325), syncretism is simply a religious melding,

whereas Van der Veer (2004:208) defines syncretism as a “term which...refers to a process of religious amalgamation, of blending heterogeneous beliefs and practices”.

Syncretism involves the negotiation and interfaces of a new element into a different group. The concept of syncretism is related to the diffusion of religion. The elements transmitting into a certain religion can originate from other religious or secular sources. The causes and consequences of syncretism are greatly affected by the existing cultural, historical, social and political conditions (Leopold and Jensen 2004:3-4; Rudolph 2004: 82). In effect, syncretism involves the coexistence of elements of varied background intermingling dubiously and it is a natural and continuous character of all religious systems. Pye (1971: 92) writes that:

It is part of the dynamics of these religious traditions from one cultural context to another whether geographically or in time. But since the traditions are moving all the time, and since the meaning are continually being refashioned, any particular case of syncretism is necessarily temporary.

It is not a must for all elements involved in syncretistic religious circumstances to be of a religious nature. Some of these elements can be political, philosophical or other non-religious substances (Pye 1971: 93). It involves a process in which beliefs and practices from one religious current or world and life view are adopted by certain people in another religious current, and subsequently assimilated or repudiated.” (Vroom 2004: 104).

The other characteristic of syncretism is its controversial nature that is exemplified by five different interpretations or opinions about it. The first interpretation views syncretism in a more negative way and associates the term with false and contaminated religion. This view, mainly posited by Christian theologians, has primarily been applied to indicate the pureness and trueness of Christianity. The second interpretation of the concept is commonly used by phenomenologists and students of comparative religion in a more objective and neutral way to try to avoid a value judgement. The third interpretation views the term in a more positive way. The fourth interpretation propagates the notion that the term is not concrete enough to be useful because of the complexity of the intermingling of various cultural traditions. The fifth interpretation proposes to continue the usage of the term while adding the concept of power to it because “it points to a friction between official and so called illegitimate producers of religion” (Droogers 2004: 223-225).

2.2.2 Criticisms and support

The term syncretism as used for a mixture is criticized heavily and sometimes unfairly. According to Leopold and Jensen (2004: 5), one criticism of the concept is its vagueness and

indefiniteness in classifying its object and the lack of meticulousness of important levels of explanation. However, the root of the main criticism against syncretism is because it is related to many negative connotations that are, in turn, historically related to its use by missionaries. This has caused the term to incorporate various negative theological assumptions of religions that mix elements of other religious or secular groups (Leopold and Jensen 2004: 8; Kraemer 2004: 41). This introduction of “foreign” elements of one group to the other tends to imply the idea of “contamination” or “interpenetration” (Leopold and Jensen 2004: 4). From this perspective, the term syncretism appears to indicate impurity. The main reason for this is the fact that individuals tend to make their belongingness to a certain idea or group more important. (Leopold and Jensen 2004: 3).

According to Baird (2004: 53) the other criticism of syncretism stems from the fact that it simply keeps the incompatible elements of various religions without reconciling them successfully. It is this tendency of the concept to retain conflicting elements of various religious elements that led to the rejection of the concept of syncretism. According to Stewart and Shaw (1994: 2), this uneasiness about syncretism is probably the result of the term evoking for some the existence of a ‘purity’ or ‘authenticity’ in contrast to something defined. According to Martin (2000:279), the theological use of the term, which tends to contrast a pure or authorized religious truth with local contaminations and corruptions, is the main reason for criticism against the term and the concepts it imply. But the most severe criticism directed towards syncretism is from the followers of a particular religion or tradition. These groups of people, Baird (2004: 54) explains, do not employ the term or the concepts it applies to their own religious traditions. The main reason for this, Romberg (1998: 69) argues, is because, for believers, the term syncretism is mostly considered an insult for it de-legitimizes the basics of their practices. According to Peel (1968: 129) the other reason for the rejection of the term by believers of a certain religion or tradition is the belief that syncretism takes away the uncompromising claim of uniqueness of the religion and/or tradition in which they belong.

But there are also some positive arguments in support of the term. For Kraemer (2004: 39- 41) syncretism is a necessary and important feature in religion, and the practice of assimilation in the religious world in the past as well as at the moment is the norm of the time everywhere in the world. He further explains that it is not correct to view syncretism as a startling and illegitimate consequence because this is what should be expected (when various religious traditions came in contact). Van der Veer (2004: 196) is the other scholar who

argues for the positive significance of the term, stating that syncretism is a development that fosters tolerance.

2.2.3 Alternative terms for ‘mixture’

Because of their rejection of the term syncretism, numerous scholars have ventured into other disciplines and historical developments in an attempt to find another more suitable terminology. It seems to me that this, however, has resulted in more confusion and an array of terminologies, none of which appears to escape criticisms and shortcomings of their own. According to Stewart (1999:45), the controversial nature of existing terms and concepts for mixture has led some in the academia to almost totally reject them and apply terms like *bricolage*. This shows the deficiency in creating an independent and controversial-free terminology to refer to cultural mixtures. This is aptly stated by Hannerz (1987: 547) as follows:

... We seem to have made no great progress even in developing a vocabulary for talking about such things (cultural changes and mixtures) in an acceptable, subtle, well informed way. So, when called upon to say something about them, we may lapse...into the simple rhetoric of denouncing cultural imperialism or we come up with one more improvisation on the ‘between two cultures’ theme...

Despite this comment, Hannerz simply borrows another word, creolization, and popularizes it as the appropriate term to refer to cultural mixtures. He states that, “this world of movement and mixture is a world in creolization” (1987: 551). Stewart (1999:42) comments that Hannerz has used the term creolization, which he borrowed from the field of creole linguistics referring to a situation that develops as a result of contact over a long period of time between two or more originally distinct languages, to refer to the phenomena of cultural mixtures, without its previous racist tone being removed (Stewart 1999:44). To this, Stewart (1999: 45) gives the following interesting comment:

If we are effectively to reappropriate a term like creolization and extend it into present usage, then we must confront its previous history. The coordinates of power, race/culture, and environment-strikingly present in the semantic history of *creole*-are virtually absent from contemporary ... applications of the term.

Stewart and Shaw find it paradoxical to employ the term creolization to refer to mixtures. According to them (1999: 44) creolization itself is a much criticised concept in linguistics as syncretism in religious studies. Stewart (1999: 44) also draws our attention to the imperialistic and biased nature of the root term, creole as follows:

Creole draws attention to the inequities of power that allowed European colonizers to discursively legislate the importance of “race”, culture, and environment in determining where one fits along a chain of being that placed the Old World homeland and its subjects at the pinnacle.

The other term in use today to refer to mixtures is hybridity. Hannerz (1997: 13) states that it is more or less the general and more preferable term to refer to mixtures because it can easily be applied in different disciplines. Despite criticizing its biological inclination, Hannerz still prefers this term to syncretism. Similar to creolization, this term does not escape the criticisms that it is a racist terminology. According to Stewart (1999: 45), hybridity was purposefully coined in the nineteenth century as a component of the terminology of scientific racism. It was intended to indicate that a hybrid²⁴ was frail and non-reproductive and evidence that human races were different from one another and that they could not possibly mix. Today, the term has even entered into technological vocabulary.²⁵

According to Hannerz (1997: 13) there is still another term used to refer to mixtures: synergy²⁶. It is, however, mostly employed by scholars in the discipline of intercultural communication to refer to the advantage of contacts and mixtures between different traditions. Even if the term has nothing to do with religion, and even if he indicates that the term is also applicable in the business sphere to refer to mergers and/or takeovers of businesses, Hannerz seems to prefer this term to syncretism, which already had roots in religious controversies.

²⁴ The word hybrid is derived from Latin, where it meant the offspring of a tame sow and a wild boar. This union across animal categories provided a model for talking about procreative relations across human categories whether social (master/slave) or biological (“races”). The word remains little-attested until nineteenth century racial theorizing takes it up. The debate over the viability of hybrids was central to the debate over monogeny and polygeny (Young 1995: 6, cited in Stewart 1999: 45).

²⁵ According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, the term hybrid originated from the Latin word, *hybrida*, and it refers to : 1) an offspring of two animals or plants of different races, breeds, varieties, species, or genera; 2) a person whose background is a blend of two diverse cultures or traditions; 3) something heterogeneous in origin or composition; 4) something (as a power plant, vehicle, or electronic circuit) that has two different types of components performing essentially the same function. (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hybridity>).

²⁶ The term synergy has its roots in the Latin word *synergia* and Greek word *synergos*, which means ‘working together’. In its broadest sense, it refers to any combined action or operation. It also refers to a mutually advantageous conjunction or compatibility of distinct business participants or elements (as resources or efforts) (<http://mw4.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/synergy>).

But Kraemer (2004: 41) believes that ‘amalgamation’ is the more appropriate term, which he thinks is devoid of value-judgement in reference to the mixing of religious elements. Amalgamation, however, is not that much different from synergy because it also deals with mergers and does not escape similar criticism directed against ‘synergy’, i.e., it has nothing to do with religion.

Despite the controversy, if we examine the above attempts to define and characterise the concept of syncretism, it is possible to observe one important common element: they all involve, more or less, a mixture or flow of elements from one religion, tradition and/or culture to the other. It is wise to pay heed to the comment made by Stewart and Shaw (1994: 2) that it is a blunder to try to reject a concept that already exists as an illustration of religious synthesis because of the mere fact that it acquired negative meaning in the works of most nineteenth century scholars. Borrowing words from other fields and historical developments that are totally unrelated to the study of religion will not take us anywhere. I intend to use syncretism to refer to mixtures of elements between two or more religions and/or traditions. I would also like to argue that the majority of criticisms directed against syncretism are unfair and not logical. The scholars who resented the term ‘syncretism’ for mixtures and opted for another term, also suggested and argued for the removal of the negative meanings and tones originally attached to the terms they proposed. The paradox here is that they will seek out new terms and rid them of negative associations, but they are not willing rid ‘syncretism’ of the negative connotations attached to it historically. No matter how controversial it is, ‘syncretism’ is the appropriate term to refer to mixtures, especially religious mixtures. It is time to start thinking of the term in a more positive way and apply it in religious studies rather than using terms borrowed from linguistics, biology and technology that have nothing to do with religion.

2.3 *Muuda*- pilgrimage

Generally, pilgrimage is defined as a journey undertaken to venerated sites, mainly for religious purposes (Kaplan 2010: 151; York 2002: 137; Stoddard 1994: 18). Turner and Turner (1978: 34) state that pilgrimage is a journey from a secular central area to a holy place located at a periphery. Morinis (1984: 259) also states that pilgrimage is “a process of transposition from the profane, mundane sphere to the sanctified, bounded sphere of divinity”. The Oromic term *muuda*, often used to refer to pilgrimage, has three various meanings. Jeylan W. Hussein (2005: 29) states that:

The word *muuda* has several interrelated meanings in different contexts. As a verb, it has three meanings. These are to make pilgrimage, to anoint, and to provide a religious

or sacrificial offering. As a noun also, it has three meanings. These are anointment, pilgrimage and pilgrims. The different meanings of the word *muuda* together tell us something about the Oromo religious ceremony. In the *muuda* ceremony, expedition is made to a sacred place where there is a ritual leader who takes offerings and in turn blesses those who made a long and arduous journey.

Many scholars state that pilgrimage is one of the distinguishing elements of many religions and cults around the world. Stopford (1999: ix) writes that the practice of undertaking journeys of pilgrimage has been an important character of most major religions of the world and many of the minor cults in the world. It has been practiced for many centuries and even today it remains a popular practice. Webb (2002: viii) states that pilgrimage is not only a European religious practice; it is also practiced in other parts of the world and it features in traditional religions as well. Bhardwaj and Rinschede (1988: 11) state that pilgrimages to sacred sites have existed since ancient times and are a persistent feature in the history of mankind.

2.3.1 Features of pilgrimages

Pilgrimages in general have five distinguishing features that made them unique from other movements of people from one place to another. To begin with, pilgrimage refers to a movement from one place to another (Stoddard 1997: 43). Second, the journey should have a particular destination (Gesler 1998: 536). The destinations of every pilgrimage are objects rendered holy, which could be: natural bodies such as rivers, mountains, and trees; cultural objects such as graves, churches, temples, and relics; and individuals (Bhardwaj and Rinschede 1988: 12; Stoddard 1997: 46). Generally, locations where holy men and martyrs lived and/or died become pilgrimage sites (Turner 2005: 7146, Turner and Turner 1978: 34). Third, pilgrimage differs from other frequent travels to shrines, churches, and mosques. This is mainly because pilgrimage journeys and events take place at a particular date, period, or time where large number of pilgrims travel to the site (Bhardwaj and Rinschede 1988: 11-12). Pilgrimage also differs from other journeys because it has three stages: separation (beginning of the journey), the liminal stage (the journey to and stay at the center), and reaggregation (returning home at the end of the pilgrimage) (Turner 2005: 7145). Rituals during pilgrimages might last from a single day to a year, but the duration is always restricted. Fourth, for most pilgrims, the journey to a holy site is not, at least theoretically, to obtain some sort of material benefits, but for spiritual purposes (Gesler 1998: 536). In general, the main motive of pilgrimages is not related to economic benefits. However, the handing over of gifts and establishments of markets are important components of pilgrimages (Kaplan 2010: 155).

Fifth, although pilgrims can travel individually and/or in small/large groups, pilgrimages involve the gathering of large numbers of people at a particular place and at a specific period of time (Gesler 1998: 536).

As a result of the above features, pilgrimage is conceived as a journey by a group of pilgrims to a specific destination, at a particular period of time and primarily, at least in theory, for spiritual reasons. It is also necessary to look into the social environments surrounding pilgrimages. Pilgrimages produce ties among pilgrims. Many pilgrimage centers attract pilgrims from various geographical locations and all walks of life. In this way, pilgrimages create bonding among pilgrims of various backgrounds (Gesler 1998: 536). It is this bonding among pilgrims of various social, geographical, religious, and political backgrounds that Turner and Turner (1978: 38) and Turner (2005:7146) consider a generation of *communitas*. Turner (1974: 53) states that the defining characters of *communitas*, both during journeys to pilgrimage centers and while staying at pilgrimage centers, are common feelings, presumed equality of pilgrims, and the presence of camaraderie. Some of the distinguishing features of *communitas* are sharing of supplies and sleeping places. The feeling of *communitas* removes pilgrims' roles and status they have within their societies and as a result all pilgrims are equal in status and role at pilgrimage centers (Turner 1974: 201-203, Turner 2005: 7146).

2.3.2 Motives for pilgrimage in Ethiopia

Pilgrims travel to pilgrimage centres for various reasons. The first and theoretically the most important motive for traveling to various pilgrimage centres is religious (Pankhurst 1994: 947; Stoddard 1997: 56). It is widely believed that pilgrims returning from their spiritual journey bring good fortune with them. Some Islamic pilgrimages such as the Hajj are regarded as obligatory practices (Stoddard 1997: 56). It is also common in many Christian traditions to view journeys to pilgrimage centres and shrines as an act of religious zeal. Some pilgrims embark on journeys of pilgrimage after experiencing dreams and visions about the center (Pankhurst 1994: 947).

Second, large numbers of pilgrims are attracted to expressions of group identity, such as group rites of passages and the transition of spiritual power (Pankhurst 1994: 947-948). Third, they are motivated by the healing powers of pilgrimage centres, the rituals that take place during pilgrimage periods, the presence of holy springs and the charisma of spiritual leaders. There are springs that serve as a source of *tabal* (holy water and *emnat* (holy ash) in many pilgrimage centres in Ethiopia. These are used as medicines to heal patients suffering from various sicknesses (Pankhurst 1994: 948). In addition, it is widely believed that leaders

of pilgrimage centres are endowed with supernatural powers of healing and performing various miracles such as raising the dead, enabling the blind to see, making the deaf able to hear and the disabled to walk (Pankhurst 1994: 948).

The fourth attraction for pilgrims to various religious centres and shrines is the practice of handing over of gifts for fulfilled wishes (Pankhurst 1994: 948; Stoddard 1997: 56). These gifts attest to the presence of a reciprocal relationship or exchange between devotees, on the one hand, and a supernatural entity on the other (Pankhurst 1994: 948-949). Fifth, many people motivated by trade also undertake journeys to pilgrimage centres during major periods of pilgrimages in order to sell various items such as food and drinks, cigarettes, sweets, matches, religious objects, traditional medicines, etc. (Pankhurst 1994: 949). Sixth, pilgrimages, especially those located close to towns also attract large numbers of curious onlookers who travel to the centres to visit the caves and springs located there (Pankhurst 1994: 950).

2.3.3 Types of pilgrimage in Ethiopia

There are many pilgrimage centers in Ethiopia, some of which are visited only by members of a single ethnic group. This case is best illustrated by the *Abba Muuda* traditional Oromo pilgrimage.²⁷ It exclusively attracts the various Oromo groups belonging to diverse social, economic, political, and geographical backgrounds. The presence of pilgrimage centers that cater only to a certain group is not limited to the Oromo. Many other ethnic groups in Ethiopia have their own pilgrimage centers (Pankhurst 1994: 937-938).

However, there are other pilgrimage centers that are not confined to a single political, religious, ethnic and linguistic entity. Pilgrimage centers are meeting grounds for people of diverse religious backgrounds. Islam and Christianity in Ethiopia are syncretistic and this makes it easy for members of one religious group to attend various rituals of the other (Levine 1974: 44). Pankhurst (1994: 940) also states that the accommodating nature of Christianity, Islam, and indigenous religions in Ethiopia is the most important factor for the emergence of pilgrimage centers that cross religious boundaries. The crossing of religious boundaries may happen either when indigenous beliefs are influenced and displaced by Christianity or Islam's adoption of the existing religious center and some of the rituals, or when indigenous beliefs survive accommodating pilgrims with a superficial adherence to Islam or Christianity (Pankhurst 1994: 941).

²⁷ *Abba Muuda* (Father of Anointment) is the traditional Oromo chief religious leader.

Pilgrimage centers in Ethiopia also bring people of diverse ethnic backgrounds together (Levine 1974: 44-50). For example, there are pilgrimage centers whose followers are not confined to a certain political boundary. For instance, the Borana Oromo of Kenya travel to Ethiopia to pay homage to their spiritual leaders residing at the Borana ancestral shrines (Pankhurst 1994: 938). Additionally, some pilgrimage centers attract pilgrims belonging to different ethnic groups. The main precondition for this development is the existence of a coherent common religious element that crosses ethnic differences (Pankhurst 1994: 939). A good example of this type of pilgrimage center is the shrine of Sheikh Hussein of Bale that attracts various groups of the Oromo. It also attracts large numbers of pilgrims from other ethnic groups such as the Gurage, Sidama, Somali, and the Amhara (Eshetu Setegn 1973: 28).

PART II: CASE STUDIES

CHAPTER THREE: WAAQEFFANNAA: INDIGENOUS RELIGION OF THE OROMO

Waaqa nu uumetti amannaa, uumamaan We believe in *Waaqa*²⁸ who created us, and
Waaqa kadhanna we pray carrying what he created

Today the majority of the Oromo are predominantly followers of Islam and Christianity but they have also retained much of their traditional beliefs such as belief in the God, which they refer to as *Waaqa*, and performance of various rituals related to *Waaqa*, one of which is the *Irreecha* ritual. *Waaqeffannaa* is the indigenous religion of the Oromo that they have been practicing since ancient times. It is centred on belief in one God, which the Oromo refer to as *Waaqa*, the creator of all things. According to Braukämper (2005: 489) there are also supreme beings similar to *Waaqa* in other Folk religions of southern Ethiopia. Some of these are *Waa'a* of the Fandaanano, *Waq* of the Gurage, *Maganno* of the Sidaam and Kambata. Tradition has it that the Oromo were followers of *Waaqeffannaa* religion long before the introduction of the current dominant religions in Ethiopia: Christianity and Islam. The Oromo have three fundamental views with regard to *Waaqeffannaa*. They claim that *Waaqeffannaa* is a monotheistic religion because it does not involve belief in any other God or entity than *Waaqa*, the creator of the universe. Secondly, the Oromo believe in the existence of *Waaqa* by looking at his deeds, such as rain and the growing of crops. Thirdly, the Oromo thank *Waaqa* by going to various physical sites he created, such as water bodies and mountains.²⁹

The Oromo believe that *Waaqeffannaa* is a religion based on human freedom. In the Oromo tradition one cannot get credit or go to heaven for believing in *Waaqa*, nor are individuals punished for failing to do so. An Oromo who is a follower of *Waaqeffannaa* is known by the name *Waaqeffataa*. *Waaqeffataa* is a person who maintains the ancient religious and cultural practices, *kan hin salaatanne* (a person who does not bow down and pray), a person who prays to *Waaqa* carrying roasted coffee beans, a person who carries *killaa* (a wooden bowl used for holding roasted coffee) and prays to *Waaqa*, *ka tuulluu muudu* (someone who goes to mountains to pray), *ka malkaa muudu* (someone who goes to rivers to

²⁸ The term *Waaqa* refers to God in the context of indigenous religion of the Oromo, *Waaqeffannaa*. The term is often used by followers of *Waaqeffannaa*. However, many Christians and Muslims still use it to refer to Jesus and *Rabbi*, a term widely used by the Arsi Oromo Muslims to refer to Allah.

²⁹ Personal interview with Guyyee Kadir, 08 March 2011 in Dikii.

pray), *ka buttaa qalu* (a person who slaughters a bull every eight years to mark the end of eight years cycle in the Gada system), and *ka baallii- shanii geegessu* (a person who follows the five Gada grades).³⁰

3.1 *Waaqa*: God of the Oromo

The term *Waaqa* has two meanings. Gragg (1982: 394) and Tilahun Gamta (1989: 586) state that the term refers to the sky as a physical object on the one hand and God on the other. Bartels (1983: 89) further elaborates that:

The word '*Waaqa*' had double meaning. The first is 'sky', i.e. the vault of the sky as we see it. The second approximates what is meant by the English word 'God'; but... it comprises more than that, more than 'the Supreme Being, creator and ruler of the universe' in the western sense. It comprises more, since it includes countless particular manifestations of *Waaqa* in this world, particularizations of his creative work which are conceived as beings. Hence the word 'divinity' will often be a better translation than 'God'

3.2 The story of *Waaqa*

In the past, *Waaqa* is believed to have lived among humans. At that time, people were pure-hearted and truthful. Through time, however, *Waaqa* began to see people doing things he did not approve of such as lying, stealing, killing, fighting, beating each other, and other immoral things. It was at this point that *Waaqa* decided to leave and get far from the people. At this point, *abbaa-gadaa*³¹, an old wise man, a pregnant woman, and *qaalluu*³² met and discussed the decision of *Waaqa* to leave them. They decided to follow him and try to convince him to stay. They travelled for many hours; the *qaalluu* wanted to smoke tobacco leaf, so he stayed in one village. The remaining three continued their journey. They travelled for a while and the pregnant woman stayed behind because of labor. The *abbaa-gadaa* and

³⁰ Personal interview with Guyyee Kadir, 08 March 2011 in Dikii.

³¹ Asafa Jalata (2010: 8) states that he can also be called *Abbaa Bokkuu* (the father of sceptre). He is a 'chairman' who presides over the assembly. Huntingford (1955: 54) states that the *Abbaa Bokkuu* is chosen from the oldest or most respected families of wise men. The *Abba Boku* presides over the Gada parliament, proclaims the laws, and when necessary acts as ritual expert in the *gada*-ceremonies.

³² According to Asafa Jalata (2010: 16) *qaalluu* is an Oromo religious leader who has had a moral authority and social obligation to oppose tyrants and support popular Oromo democracy and *gadaa* leaders, and to encourage harmonious and democratic relations. The *qaalluu* is believed to possess sacred characteristics and acts as intermediary between the people and God [*Waaqa*]. The *qaalluu* assumes no administrative responsibilities, but possess the mandate to bless or withhold blessings from leaders, and is believed to possess supernatural power to curse individuals who put the safety of the whole community in danger by refusing God's order (Kelly 1992: 166 and cited in Asafa Jalata 2010: 16).

the wise man proceeded with the journey. After a while, the wise man was tired, so he remained under the shade of *odaa*³³ tree. *Abbaa-gadaa* continued the journey and caught up with *Waaqa*. He told *Waaqa* that he was sent by the people. The Oromo tradition of the dialogue between *Waaqa* and the *Abbaa-gadaa* is presented as follows:

Waaqa: “what is the message?”

Abbaa-gadaa: “the people want you return to us. They say you should not leave your cattle and your people”

Waaqa: “Did they send you for this? Did you travel all alone?”

Abbaa-gadaa: “I started the journey with a *qaalluu*, a pregnant woman, and a wise man. The *qaalluu* wanted to drink coffee and smoke tobacco and stayed in a village. The pregnant woman stayed behind because of labor and delivery. The wise man was tired and stayed under *odaa* tree. I caught up with you alone and I do not intend to return alone”

Waaqa: “I have a message for those people who started the journey with you but could not catch up with me. Tell the *qaalluu* (*ayyaanticha*) to remain in the village and to tell only the truth and to mediate. Tell him to be a guide and an advisor for the people. Tell him to represent me and work on my behalf. Tell the pregnant woman to give birth for a king, a medicine man, and a wise man. Tell her and everybody else that she left her home for my sake and that she shall be respected. Tell the old man to represent me and work on issues such as life, reconciliation, and truth telling. Tell him to stay under the *odaa* and deal with these businesses on my behalf. You have reached me before I disappear forever. You are the *abbaa-gadaa*. Be the father of the country. Teach and advise the people. Do not cause trouble and discipline trouble-makers on my behalf.”³⁴

3.3 Attributes of *Waaqa*

3.3.1 *Waaqa* is the creator [of the universe]: *Waaqni uumaa*

For the Oromo, *Waaqa* is the ultimate creator of the universe, with both its living and non-living inhabitants, including humans, animals, trees, mountains, rivers, and everything else that exists in the world. The concept that *Waaqa* is the ultimate creator is not only limited to the Arsi Oromo. It seems to be a general belief among all the Oromo. Bartels (1983: 91) has also collected related stories among the western Oromo. He states that *Waaqa* is regarded as the source of all forms of life and only he has the power to endow life. This is what the Oromo refer to as *uumuu* which literally means to create. The Oromo say “*Waaqa* is the one

³³ According to Tilahun Gamta (1989: 484) *Oda[a]* as a kind of tree that resembles a sycamore or fig (*cordial africana*).

³⁴ Personal Interview with Legese N, 04 October 2010 in Bishoftu.

above us.” - *Waaqni kan nu gubbaa kana* and “*Waaqa* is the one who created us” -*Waaqnii isa ka nu uumee*. *Waaqa* is also seen as an all-powerful being that can do anything he wants but cannot be held responsible for his actions. *Waaqa* does not kill someone and pay blood money, break somebody’s leg and call a healer, or destroy something and pay for the damage.³⁵ He is strong and powerful. For the Oromo the idea of a Supreme Being creating from nothing is non-existent. They have no myths about the creation of the world as we find them, for example, in the Bible. When they speak of the beginning of time, the world and even man himself are already in existence. The Oromo believe that all forms of life belong to *Waaqa* and man has no right to destroy what *Waaqa* has created. As to the animals they kill and the plants they cut as food items, the Oromo explain that *Waaqa* allows these for them (Bartels 1983: 91-92).

3.3.2 *Waaqa* is the protector of truth: *dhugaa* and justice

Waaqa is considered to be the source and guardian of *dhugaa*, an Oromo term which refers to truth as well as justice. *Waaqa* is believed to withdraw himself from liars and individuals engaged in various evil activities. The Matcha Oromo believe that any kind of calamity is a punishment by *Waaqa*. Even if the Matcha Oromo talk of *Waaqa* punishing man for evil deeds and lies, their fundamental belief under such circumstances is the withdrawal of *Waaqa* from wrong-doers. The Oromo believe that the withdrawal of *Waaqa* weakens important aspects of life, such as good health, productiveness, and prosperity. In addition, the withdrawal of *Waaqa* leaves a person without protection, exposing him/her to attack by lesser evil powers, which then expose him/her to various misfortunes such as sickness or mental problems (Bartels 1983:102-104).

3.3.3 *Waaqa* is black: *Waaqni gurraacha*

The Oromo believe that *Waaqa* does not reveal himself to humans and therefore cannot be seen. One cannot see or touch *Waaqa*. *Waaqa* helps his creatures without being visible. The only thing visible and the main reason the Oromo believe in *Waaqa* is his deed. That is why the Oromo often say “we cannot see *Waaqa* but his deeds” -*Waaqa hin agarru, hojii isaa agarra*”. He shows his existence with his deeds, such as growing grass for animals and crops for humans, creating lightening, creating life and death, causing rain in summer and stopping it in spring, and creating clouds and wind. He differentiates between winter and summer by making one season rainy and the other dry.³⁶ At the same time, the Oromo believe

³⁵ Personal interview with Guyyee Kadir, 08 March 2011 in Dikki.

³⁶ Personal interview with Legese N., 04 October 2010 at Bishoftu; Guyyee K., 08 March 2011 in Dikki.

that *Waaqa* is black- *Waaqni gurraacha* and they attempt to justify their stance by providing explanations. For the Oromo, *Waaqa* is above every creature, not only in his power but in his presumed place of residence: sky- *Waaqa*. Oromo elders state that if someone concentrates and looks up at the sky deeply, its color is black instead of blue. Many elders state that the residence of *Waaqa* is not limited to the sky. He resides in all places where there are his creatures and where there is life. There is no *Waaqa* if there are no creatures and there is no life.

Secondly, a person gives something he likes or is as an attribute to something or someone else. The Oromo like their dark skin color and they believe that *Waaqa* created them black probably because he himself is black.³⁷ An old and wise informant whom I asked about the color of *Waaqa* said to me: ‘Listen to me son. If she were able to talk, even this cat (pointing to a cat around) would have said that *Waaqa* looks like her. Christianity is the religion of the whites who claim that God looks like them. We (the Oromo), however, are black and we believe that *Waaqa* is also black just like us. Therefore the Oromo associate the color of *Waaqa* with their identity.’³⁸ This point is best explained by Knutsson (1967:48) who states that it is ‘...difficult to imagine an acting agent without attributing to it their own experience of the human actor.’ In addition, the Oromo believe that black is a sign of fertility and everything important and useful is black in color. For instance, a cloud which ultimately results in rain has a black color, and a fertile and productive soil, which grows abundant crops and grass which feed humans and animals is also black. Oromo belief that *Waaqa* is black in colour may also arouse partly from their tradition that black stands for the unknown and the sacred.³⁹

3.3.4 *Waaqa* has a ‘sea belly’: *Waaqni garaa garbaa qaba*

The Oromo state that *Waaqa* has a sea-belly, which refers to two important attributes of *Waaqa*. First, by using the term ‘sea-belly’, they are trying to justify their belief that *Waaqa* is merciful, patient, tolerant and not vengeful. The Oromo do not believe that *Waaqa* is merciless and punitive, punishing someone for a sin he/she has committed. Haberland (1963: 567) mentions that the belief in God’s retribution, vengeance in the afterlife, and even belief in the afterlife was foreign to the Oromo (my translation). *Waaqa* has created every creature, be it humans, animals, or nonliving things with *ayyaana* (spirit like beings). When a person does something breaks a *safuu* (breaking tradition, moral code), *Waaqa* removes the

³⁷ Personl interview with Legese N., 04 October 2010 in Bishoftu.

³⁸ Personal interview with Abba Banti, 05 October in Bishoftu.

³⁹ Personal interview with Guyyee K., 08 March 2011 in Dikki.

protective *ayyaana*, which indirectly means his protection. *Waaqa* does not punish directly and purposefully for sins that are committed. When *Waaqa* stops his protection, people as well as animals might face some problems and difficulties. In *Waaqeffannaa*, there is no belief or story of *Waaqa* punishing his own creatures, burning them with fire, or punishing the descendants of a sinner. Secondly, by using the term sea-belly, the Oromo are referring to the rain that *Waaqa* pours down from the sky.⁴⁰

3.4 Laws of *Waaqeffannaa*

With regard to questions about religious laws in *Waaqeffannaa*, the Oromo answer the question with another question: “Who has ever seen *Waaqa* and received his laws? -*eenyutu Waaqa argee ajaja irraa fuudhe?* Followers of *Waaqeffannaa* generally agree that there are no laws in *Waaqeffannaa* like the Ten Commandments in Christianity. The only law in *Waaqeffannaa* is what is referred to as “the law of *Waaqa* and *lafa* (the earth)”- *seera Waaqa-lafaa*. For the Oromo, for instance, the fact that a girl grows up and gets married to a man, and a young man matures and marries a girl is the law of *Waaqa-lafaa*. In Oromo tradition, a man marrying another man is one example of breaking *safuu*-tradition or moral values. In his attempt to elaborate the law of *Waaqa-lafaa* an Oromo elder once told me:

Think of a newly born calf. The moment it is born, it tries to feed on the udder of its mother. Who taught it before it is born that there is milk in the udder? Who showed it where the udder is situated? *Waaqa* did not write rules for his creatures. He also did not send people to teach us. Everything is within and with us. He created the rules within us the moment he created us. We have abandoned the ability and the knowledge *Waaqa* gave us from the beginning and accepted what people teach us. Hence we have forgotten the difference between the creator and the created.⁴¹

3.5 *Waaqa* and the earth (*lafa*)

In Oromo tradition, *Waaqa* and *lafa* (earth) are closely related entities. Bartels (1983: 108-109) states that there is a very close relationship between *Waaqa* and the earth and this is indicated in Oromo blessings such as “may *Waaqa* and the earth help you”; in their oaths “May the earth on which I walk and *Waaqa* beneath whom I walk do the same to you”; and curses “Be not blessed either by *Waaqa* or the earth”. Haberland (1963: 563) contemplates

⁴⁰ Personal interview with Dirribi D., 09 October 2010 in Addis Ababa.

⁴¹ Personal Interview with Legese N., 04 October 2010 in Bishoftu.

that here is no single monotheistic sky god at the center of the Oromo religion rather a divine pair of the sky and the earth and both divinities are invoked in prayers (my translation). The earth cannot grow grass for the cattle and crop for humans without *Waaqa* giving rain. *Waaqa* as well as the earth should also respect *safuu*- tradition and protect the people. *Waaqa* should give rain and the earth should grow grass and grain. The Oromo could stop their thanksgiving and prayers if *Waaqa* and/or the earth stop or fail to give.⁴² Knutsson (1967: 49) has also gathered a tradition among the Matcha Oromo of western Ethiopia that puts *lafa*, the earth, in close relations to *waka* [*Waaqa*]. He states that sometimes *lafa* is considered to have the same quality as *Waaqa*. *Waaqa* is considered as a father and *lafa* as the mother. According to Haberland (1963: 564) Among the Arsi, the earth is considered as God's wife. However, the emphasis on the sky god has obscured the significance of the earth. The earth appears as a subordinate entity. At the beginning, the sky begot and the earth bore and together they created the world. Later, the earth refused to be obedient to her divine husband. As a result, he struck her and turned her in dust. God rules alone ever since (my translation). Although the significance of the earth is decreasing, *Waaqeffannaa* practitioners mention both *Waaqa* and *lafa* in their prayers. The following prayer as narrated by Guyyee K., is one of many examples which indicate the importance of both *Waaqa* and *lafa*:

<i>waaqtana si haaga'u</i>	may my prayer reach you <i>Waaqa</i>
<i>laftana si haaga'u</i>	may my prayer reach you <i>lafa</i>
<i>Bona naa araarssii</i>	spare me from drought
<i>dhukkuba naa araarssii</i>	spare me from sickness
<i>waraana naa araarssi</i>	spare me from war
<i>beela naa araarssi</i>	spare me from hunger
<i>naa horsiisi</i>	multiply me
<i>Ilmma naa qajeelchi</i>	bless children for me
<i>Ka dhabee naa kennii</i>	give me what I do not have
<i>Ka qabu naa bulchi</i>	bless what I have

Below is another example that indicates the inseparability of *Waaqa* and *lafa* in the prayers and blessings of the Oromo.⁴³

<i>Waaqti dhagayii</i>	may you listen <i>Waaqa</i>
<i>Laftti dhagayii</i>	may you listen earth

⁴² Personal interview with Legese N., 04 October 2010 at Bishoftu.

⁴³ Personal interview with Guyyee K., 08 March 2011 at Dikii.

<i>Isa horsiisi</i>	multiply him
<i>Sa'aan isaa horsiisi</i>	multiply his cattle
<i>Namaan isa horsiisi</i>	multiply his folk
<i>Gobbuu namaa isaa kenni</i>	endow him with love
<i>Fiiressi</i>	Multiply him
<i>Urgeessi bookaa godhi</i>	make him smell like mead
<i>Mi'eessi damma godhi</i>	make him sweet like honey
<i>Baldhisi shaallaa godhi</i>	make him wide like Lake Shalla
<i>Bareedaa shaalluu godhi</i>	Make him beautiful and shiny
<i>Nama seeraa godhi</i>	make him man of the law
<i>Beekaa godhi</i>	give him wisdom
<i>Abbaa beekii</i>	know your father
<i>Haadha beekii</i>	know your mother
<i>Gosa beekii</i>	know your clan
<i>Nama gosaa ta'i</i>	be a member of your tribe
<i>Gosee arbaa ta'i</i>	Make him like the trunk of an elephant
<i>Qareffaa leencaa ta'i</i>	Make him like the mane of a lion
<i>Qara woraanaa ta'i</i>	may you be as sharp as a spear
<i>Ilma bifaa ta'i</i>	may you be a bright child

3.6 The concepts of spirit (*ayyaana*) and the devil (*Shaytaana*)

Haberland (1963: 561) stipulates that the Oromo religion had originally no place for other entities than God. If there were any, they were fairytale-like ghosts or Werewolves. All other recent phenomena such as spirit possession are foreign to the Oromo culture (my translation). As a result of their contact with Christianity and Islam, the Oromo have adopted many elements of these religions. This influence is visible in Oromo's world view and religious terminologies which did not originate from the Oromo language. For instance, the term *fal[a]* (Omen) is introduced into Oromo worldview either from Arabic or Amharic (my translation) (Haberland 1963: 566). Gragg (1982: 22) defines *ayyaana* as a kind of spirit whereas Tilahun Gamta (1989: 51) defines it as a deity or divinity believed to bring death, disease, happiness, etc. The Oromo believe that each creature, person, animal, and plant, has its own *ayyaana*, and they differentiate between good *ayyaana* and evil *ayyaana*. The good *ayyaana* are seen as beings (Bartels 1983: 109) and they are considered as something of *Waaqa* (Bartels 1983: 112, Van de Loo 1991: 145). This explanation, however, applies to what the Oromo refer to as good *ayyaana*. The Oromo use the concept of evil *ayyaana* in their

attempt to explain all sorts of human suffering and adversity. Bartels (1983: 120) states that evil *ayyaana* are regarded as superhuman beings that are very different than the proper *ayyaana*, and they are not considered to be something of *Waaqa*. They are believed to be unscrupulous beings that attack wrongdoers from whom *Waaqa* has withdrawn himself.

The notion of the devil, which the Oromo call *setana/shaytaana* to refer to superhuman evil powers, seems to have been borrowed from other religions, mainly Islam and Christianity. Bartels (1983: 120) states that the Oromo consider *setana/shaytana* to be types of sovereign entities that are believed to be enemies of both man and *Waaqa*. Evil spirits may attack people and the possessed should visit priests to exorcise the devils. Devils are believed to roam the earth and act on their own free will, whereas *ayyaana* come from above, from *Waaqa*, and they never possess people. With the introduction of the concept of the devil, *Waaqa* has been endowed with a new role. He has become the enemy of the devil with the power to defeat at will (Bartels 1983: 121). The concept of the devil is mentioned frequently by informants who have had exposure to Christianity and Islam at some point in their life. However, lifelong *Waaqeffataa* (followers of the *Waaqeffannaa* religion) informants refute the idea of the presence of *setana/shaytaana*: the devil. For them the devil does not exist.⁴⁴ They refer to sinners, such as killers, robbers, liars, and cheaters, as devils. Haberland (1963: 572) also affirms that among the Arsi Oromo a sinner is someone who does not speak the truth, who does not obey his parents, who does not respect the advice of the elders, someone who testifies falsely, and someone who practices black magic (my translation). A sinner who is not punished by the authorities will be punished by God. God destroys his belongings and lets his soul suffer in the afterlife (my translation). The idea of punishment, however, is nonexistent among followers of *Waaqeffannaa*.

3.7 The concept of tradition and moral values (*safuu*)

The concept of *safuu* is one of the most important concepts in *Waaqeffannaa*. Tilahun Gamta (1989: 511) defines *safu[u]* as ‘an expression of astonishment, fear, pain, pity, shame, etc.,’ while Gragg (1982: 350) defines it as tradition, culture; respect. Megersa (1998: 42) offers an elaborated and properly explained definition of the term in the later sense. He writes:

Safuu is a moral category...: It constitutes the ethical basis upon which all human action should be founded; it is that which directs one on the right path; it shows the way in which life can be best lived.

⁴⁴ Personal interview with Legese, N., 04 October 2010 in Bishoftu; Guyyee K., 08 March 2011 in Dikii.

Informants did not try to define the concept directly but explained them in examples, which are similar to Gemetchu Megerssa's definition. A well versed informant and lifetime follower of the *Waaqeffannaa* religion explains the concept of *safuu* in the following way:

Safuu is the life we are living these days. Children do not know their fathers or they do not respect them. A wife is strange to her husband. In the olden days, the Oromo used to walk barefoot. They did not have shoes. Neither the Oromo nor even the Amhara wore shoes. It is very recently that everybody started wearing shoes. This is *safuu*. The fact that the Oromo have abandoned their traditional beliefs and ceremonies is *safuu*. *Waddeessa, fi jila gatuun safuu* 'abandoning *waddeessa* (*cordia africana* tree which is the main ritual tree of the Oromo) and *jila* (pilgrimage to a shrine as an act of devotion) is *safuu*. *Baallii shanii gatuun safuu* (abandoning the five Gadaa grades of the Oromo- *Birmajii, Bultuma, Horota, Bahra, and Robalee* is *safuu*). *Uumee ufii gatuun safuu* (abandoning one's creator is *safuu*). In the olden days a woman married the person her father chose. Today she marries whoever she wishes and does not listen to her father. This is *safuu*.⁴⁵

Another informant also explains what *safuu* is in the following manner:

If I forget to take my cattle to the river when they are thirsty it is *safuu*. If a woman offered me milk to drink and I reject it because it is not fresh and replied to her sarcastically it is *safuu*. If a woman prepares porridge and offers it to me but I refuse to eat it because she put milk in it instead of butter, it is *safuu*. People have to be grateful for what they have and for what they are offered. If people 'break' *safuu*, *Waaqa* will deny them even the things they used to look down on.⁴⁶

From the two narrations above, it is possible to infer the approximate meaning of the term *safuu*. From the first narration it is possible to see that *safuu* is defined as: abandoning the old ways of life and belief, such as using the *waddeessa* tree for various ritual purposes; abandoning the *Gadaa* system, which is an age grade socio-political system of the Oromo;

⁴⁵ Personal interview with Guyyee K., 08 March 2011 in Dikii.

⁴⁶ Personal interview with Legese N., 04 October 2010 in Bishoftu.

and also disrespecting parents and their wishes. As it is stated in the second narration, being ungrateful for whatever someone has offered is also *safuu*. If animals that are supposed to travel only at night start to travel during the daytime, they have done '*safuu*, committed a sin, and they can be endangered. The Oromo believe that for all the problems we have now, there is a *safuu* in the past. For instance, if a certain individual is sick, the Oromo believe that either the sick person or his family has committed a *safuu*. Therefore, the person or his family will be advised to find the nature of the committed *safuu* and find a solution for it, mainly by praying for *Waaqa* for forgiveness and resumption of his protection.⁴⁷

3.8 The concept of sin (*cubbuu*)

The concept of *cubbuu* is closely related to the concept of *safuu*. *Cubbuu* would not have existed without the existence of the concept of *safuu*. Gragg (1982: 86) defines *cubbuu* as a sin or wrongdoing, while Tilahun Gamta (1989: 125) offers the same definition but adds that *cubbuu* is also something that is not morally right, hence unjust. Bartels (1983:106) states that *cubbuu* is the result of man's denial of dependence on *Waaqa* and trying to deal with his life on his own way. For the Oromo *cubbuu* is the consequence of breaking *safuu*-the traditions and moral codes of the Oromo passed from generation to generation. Forgetting a tradition and abandoning *Waaqa* the creator, brings a person into conflict with *Waaqa*. If this happens, *Waaqa* turns the wise (*beekaa*) into the ignorant (*wallaalaa*).⁴⁸ As stated before, when a person breaks a certain *safuu*, which means when a person commits *cubbuu*, *Waaqa* does not punish him for this directly but rather removes his protection which in turn exposes the individual to attacks by lesser evil spirits.

Waaqa's delegation of the power of protecting His creatures to spirits appears to confirm to a postulation made by Braukämper (2005: 489) that *Waaqa* is seen as a kind of *deus otiosus*, who after the creation of the world, retreated from active governing leaving the destiny of humans on subordinate spirits and demons, with whom consequently, most of the worship is associated. However, other than *Waaqa*'s delegation of protecting His creatures to spirits, the concept of seeing *Waaqa* as *deus otiosus* as elaborated by Braukämper does not fully apply to the Arsi Oromo followers of *Waaqeffannaa*. It can be seen in many of their prayers that *Waaqa* did not simply withdraw after creating the world and abandoned humans at the mercy of spirits. He is ever present in their prayers in times of difficulties such as famine, sickness, infertility and other earthly problems. In many of their prayers they invoke

⁴⁷ Personal interview with Guyyee K., 08 March 2011 in Dikii.

⁴⁸ Personal interview with Guyyee K., 08 March 2011 in Dikii.

Waaqa's name and address Him directly without invoking the names of certain spirits as intermediaries.

According to the Oromo committing a sin could be remedied by asking *Waaqa* for his forgiveness and resumption of his protection. As Bartels (1983: 104) indicates, *Waaqa* removes his protection even from animals for committing a sin. This is indicated in the following tradition he has collected among the Matcha Oromo of western Ethiopia:

Long, Long ago, *Waaqa* was living very close to the earth and people could ask him whatever they needed. When he lay close to the earth there was always plenty of rain. Once upon a time, *Waaqa* sent for all the animals and told them: 'you can speak freely to me and even complain about those things which cause you to suffer.' So the animals assembled before *Waaqa*. The first one summoned by *Waaqa* to speak was the donkey. The donkey stepped forward and said: 'O *Waaqa*, you asked me to speak, but I have only to thank you. I have no cause to complain.' Then came the horse. The horse, too behaved very respectfully towards *Waaqa*. 'I have only thanks to offer you, *Waaqa*,' he said, 'thanks for the grass you gave me to eat, for the water you gave me to drink, and for your sun that warms me.' All the other animals spoke in the same way. At last, it was the turn of the mule. The mule did complain. He said: 'O *Waaqa*, you ordered me to speak up. All right, I do have a cause to complain. You are lying with your belly too close to the earth. It is raining far too much.' And while speaking in this vein, he grew more and more angry until he actually kicked *Waaqa*'s belly. At that *Waaqa* withdrew going upwards from the earth. He withdrew from all of us, but he withdrew in a special way from the mule: from that day onwards the mule was unable to produce young.

3.9 Time and place of prayers in *Waaqeffannaa*

A *Waaqeffataa* (follower of *Waaqeffannaa*) can pray and praise *Waaqa* anytime and anywhere but most preferably on mountains, by water bodies such as rivers, lakes and springs, and in his home and compound as well. There are two types of prayers in *Waaqeffannaa*. The first one is done at home on daily basis early in the morning before leaving the house and late in the evening. This prayer is done to ask *Waaqa* to help them in their daily life, to praise him for giving them a healthy night, to ask him to do the same for the day, to give health for their

family, their cattle and for the reproduction of the stock, and to make their farm productive. The Oromo also pray for *Waaqa* to give them health, and to give them harmony between children and their fathers as well as between husbands and their wives. They also pray for understanding among themselves and to abolish hatred.⁴⁹

<i>Hayyee yaa Waaqa</i>	oh <i>Waaqa</i>
<i>Gurraacha garaa garbaa</i>	the black one with a sea-belly
<i>Kann nagaan nu bulchite nagaan nu oolchi....</i>	give us a peaceful day as you gave us a peaceful night

The above prayer is an example of daily prayer in *Waaqeffannaa* that followers of *Waaqeffannaa* perform early in the morning and late in the evening.

The other type of prayer in *Waaqeffannaa* is done when the Oromo are faced with various types of catastrophes such as drought and its consequences, such as: death of cattle, hunger, conflict, flooding, and other personal problems such as bareness, poverty, and sickness of oneself or family members. Under these circumstances the Oromo climb on hills, mountains, and other elevated grounds because they believe that a mountain and other elevated grounds are the pillars of the earth and they are closer to *Waaqa*.⁵⁰ According to Eck (2005: 6212-6215), mountains have played significant role in religious symbolism in different ways all over the world. Some mountains have been viewed as ‘cosmic mountains’ while others have been accepted as ‘places of revelation and vision’, as ‘divine residence places’, as well as ‘geographical manifestations of the divine’.

The Oromo also travel to water bodies and pray for *Waaqa*. In Oromo tradition, water represents calmness, pureness, life, and fertility.⁵¹ This view of the Oromo tends to be a universal view in most religious beliefs. According to Rudhardt (2005: 9697-9704) ‘it (water) bathes, dissolves, and purifies. Essential to human life and necessary for the growth of plants, it symbolizes a generative of life-giving quality, very similar to creative power’. Whenever a *Waaqeffataa* goes to a river and mountains for prayers, he/she always takes with him sacrificial animals of black colour (so as to resemble the presumed colour of *Waaqa*) and five people (*shanoo*) and s/he slaughters the sacrificial animal and says ‘the black *Waaqa*! May you listen to me!’ (*gurraacha Waaqa naa dhagahi*). Then he sprinkles the river with the

⁴⁹ Personal interview with Guyyee K., 08 March 2011 in Dikii.

⁵⁰ Personal interview with Legese N., 04 October 2011 in Bishoftu.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

blood of the sacrificial animal and prays for his cattle and for the end of the calamity at hand in the following way:

<i>Horaa</i>	may you multiply
<i>Gaalee baha</i>	be fat
<i>Badduu baha</i>	survive bad times
<i>Bona baha</i>	may you survive the summer/dry season
<i>Gondee baha</i>	survive <i>Gondee</i> (poisonous leaf)
<i>Goda baha</i>	may you survive the valley
<i>Shifa horaa</i>	have offspring of various colours
<i>Funyaanin ajaha</i>	may you breath with your nose
<i>Gaafan qarqaca'aa</i>	live long until your horn changes its colour
<i>Waalluu ta'aa</i>	may your skin serve as a cloth
<i>Baddaa oolaa</i>	stay in a temperate place
<i>Dirree muldhadhaa</i>	be visible on the field
<i>Malkaa dhugaa</i>	drink in a river
<i>Dhadhabaan muldhadhaa</i>	be visible in a valley
<i>Haadha coonessaa</i>	make women shiny
<i>Abbaa mooressaa</i>	make men big-bellied
<i>Bona baha</i>	survive drought
<i>Gondee balleessaa</i>	get rid of <i>gondee</i> (poisonous grass)
<i>Cinii balleessaa</i>	get rid of animal parasites
<i>Gabbadhaa</i>	be fat
<i>Horaa</i>	multiply
<i>Qorgaa hanbbisaa</i>	be free of grassless lands
<i>Falfaltuu fixaa</i>	eradicate people with the evil eye
<i>Ganama fuudhaa bahaa</i>	may you be pregnant in the morning
<i>Galgala waatiin gala</i>	may you return with a calf in the evening

3.10 Death (*du'a*) and burial (*awwaala*)

Like other religions, death and burial are integral parts of *Waaqeffannaa*. No matter what causes the death of a person, followers of *Waaqeffannaa* refer to this as a call by *Waaqa*. They state that every person has been assigned a specific date of appointment by *Waaqa* and it is impossible to surpass this day. Before burial, the corpse is thoroughly washed by its relatives and rubbed with butter. If the dead is a wise or powerful man, he is smeared with mead (*daadhii*). The body is always covered with a new white *bullukkoo* (large, heavy, home-

made cotton blanket). Even if the dead is poor and his family cannot afford to buy a new *bullukoo*, his relatives and friends contribute money and buy a new one. There is also no prayer for a dead person's soul as there is no belief in the after-life in *Waaqeffannaa*. When a person dies, relatives and friends cry (*laalimoo*), slaughter an animal in his/her name and bury the dead.⁵² *Laalimoo* during burial in *Waaqeffannaa* goes as follows:

<i>Ani bade ani bade</i>	oh I am lost
<i>Mishaa kiyyaa</i>	the nice one
<i>Gaarii kiyyaa</i>	the fine one
<i>Mootii kiyyaa</i>	the chief/leader
<i>Beekaa kiyyaa</i>	the wise one
<i>Arjj'aa kiyyaa</i>	the generous/kind one
<i>Haayyicha kiyyaa</i>	the wise one

However, if the dead is a small baby or a child, crying is not allowed, at least theoretically. Instead, the following blessing of the parents of the dead is the norm:

<i>Waaqni kan biraa sii haakennu</i>	may <i>Waaqa</i> bless you with another!
<i>Ka guddatu sii haakennu</i>	may He give you another child that grows!

Followers of *Waaqeffannaa* bury their dead where the deceased's grandfather or ancestors are buried. Opinion on how the body is placed in the grave is, however, controversial. Some elders state that there is no especially preferable direction.⁵³ Opposed to this is the narration of one informant who states that the grave is dug and the body is placed in the grave with the face of the dead looking in the direction of sunrise. The body is placed on the right side if the dead is male and on the left side if the dead is female. This is because even when alive a woman sits most of the time on the left side of her husband. For instance, a woman sits on the left side of her husband on her wedding day as well as for other social events.⁵⁴

A *Waaqeffataa* could be buried on Islamic burial grounds and vice-versa. When a *Waaqeffataa* dies, moderate Muslims who know him also attend the burial and even dig the grave, but they do not touch the corpse with their hand. They also do not allow a *Waaqeffataa* to touch their dead relatives. For them, touching the corpse of a person who died before converting to Islam and pray is unthinkable. They consider it a sin. Followers of *Waaqeffannaa*, however, have no problem if a Muslim person touches the corpse of a dead

⁵² Personal interview with Guyyee K., 08 March 2011 in Dikki.

⁵³ Personal interview with Legese N., 04 October 2010 in Bishoftu.

⁵⁴ Personal interview with Guyyee K., 08 March 2011 in Dikki.

relative. If Muslims refuse to take part in the burial of a *Waaqeffataa*, other relatives and friends who are followers of *Waaqeffannaa* bury their dead. There are, however, many moderate Muslims who attend the burials of *Waaqeffataa*. Orthodox Muslims, however, do not take part in *Waaqeffannaa* burials; they always bury their dead as far away as possible from a *Waaqeffataa* grave. Followers of *Waaqeffannaa* do not mind if a *Waaqeffataa* is buried in Islamic graveyards or if a Muslim is buried where they bury their dead.

Once the dead is buried, it is a *Waaqeffannaa* tradition to erect stone steles-*soodduu* on the grave of a *Waaqeffataa*. This is mainly done by the children of the deceased. Muslims also do this but in a different way. Muslims put one stone over the other rather than erecting it. The stones for *soodduu* are carried to the grave by the relatives of the deceased. If the deceased has ten children, about fifteen *soodduu* are erected. The number is usually calculated as two *soodduu* per child, but in practicality relatives are not allowed to erect the exact number. It must be a bit fewer than the calculation. For example, relatives are not allowed to erect twenty *soodduu* for a person who has ten children. Usually half of the children and those who are the eldest are allowed to erect two *soodduu* each, while the rest are only allowed to erect one each. The *soodduu* are then intricately decorated by craftsmen who were previously paid in kind (an ox) for their services.⁵⁵ Some of the motifs on the *soodduu* at a *Waaqeffannaa* cemetery in western Arsi include tigers, a man stabbing a tiger with a spear, a man carrying a rifle, and a man riding a horse carrying a rifle. Even if informants state that the motifs are purely aesthetic, I would like to suggest that the motives might indicate the trade of the deceased while alive. The man stabbing the tiger might have been a hunter, while the man carrying a rifle might have been a nobility of some kind and/or a warrior.

⁵⁵ Personal interview with Guyyee K., 08 March 2011 in Dikii.



Figure 6: a *Waaqeffannaa* cemetery in Dikki, Kokossaa Woreda in western Arsi.

Photo by Gemechu J. Geda, March 2011.



Figure 7: an Islamic cemetery in Dikii, Kokossaa Woreda in western Arsi.

Photo by Gemechu J. Geda, March 2011.

3.11 The concept of the afterlife

There are two opinions about the after-life. The first opinion is held by the followers of *Waaqeffannaa*. For this group of people, there is no after-life and they do not believe in the afterlife. What Oromo followers of *Waaqeffannaa* pray, it is for *Waaqa* to give them and their family health, wealth and productivity for their cattle and farmland in their earthly life. They

say it is only *Waaqa* who knows what happens after death.⁵⁶ According to Haberland (1963: 571:) the Oromo believe that the soul leaves the body when one dies and goes somewhere it does not come in contact with the living anymore and the idea of reincarnation is unknown to the Oromo (my translation). Others, however, believe in the after-life and the judgment of one's soul by *Waaqa*. This group is represented by people who accepted Christianity or Islam at some point in their life but still practice *Waaqeffannaa*.⁵⁷ An informant, who had been forced to accept Christianity thirty years ago but is still practicing *Waaqeffannaa*, states that when somebody dies, Israel, the soul taker, comes from the sky and takes his soul to *Waaqa* for judgment. Here, it seems that these individuals and their terminologies are influenced by their contact with Christianity. Similarly, some Muslim informants, who have still retained their traditional beliefs, state that *Jibril* presents the soul of a dead person in front of *Waaqa* for punishment or reward based upon how the dead has led his life on earth. It can be argued that these informants and their vocabulary are influenced by Islam, which is exemplified by their use of the term *Jibril*, which in turn is the Arabic name for St. Gabriel.

⁵⁶ Personal interview with Guyyee K., 08 March 2011 in Dikii.

⁵⁷ Personal interview with Legese N., 04 October 2010 in Bishoftu; Abba M., 09 March 2011 in Dikii.

CHAPTER FOUR: PILGRIMAGE AND RELIGIOUS TRANSFORMATION AT SHRINES OF MALE MUSLIM SAINTS

4.1 The Pilgrimage to *Dirre* Sheikh Hussein

4.1.1 The story of Sheikh Hussein

The Arsi Oromo believe that Sheikh Hussein has played a prominent role in the introduction and expansion of Islam in Arsi and Bale areas. Authors such as Eshetu Setegn (1973), Braukämper (2004), and Teshome Amenu (2008) also agree to this thesis. For instance, Eshetu Setegn (1973:1) reports that Sheikh Hussein is regarded as one of the greatest Muslim saints by the Muslims of Ethiopia, Northern Kenya and Somalia and that of all the Oromo language speakers, his cult is very popular among the Arsi Oromo. However, his ethnic origin, the period in which he lived, as well as his deeds, are still points of contention between various scholars and oral informants. Braukämper (2004: 130) also states that the genealogical data on the Sheikh are diverse and very problematic.

Sheikh Hussein was believed to have been born around 475 years AH (after *Hijrah*)⁵⁸ i.e., about 958 years ago. Another informant, Sheikh Idris, puts the birth of Sheikh Hussein about 528 AH.⁵⁹ Therefore, according to this later information, Sheikh Hussein was born about 905 years ago. Yet another informant, Abdulnasir claims that Sheikh Hussein was born 900 years ago.⁶⁰ According to a popular legend told by the local people, his birth was miraculous and already prophesized. Long before Sheikh Hussein was born, God showed a vision to a *waliyyii* (saint) named Abelqassim, who used to live on a mountain close to Anajiina, that a certain boy named Nur Hussein would be born and he was instructed to go down to the village to wash and shave the hair of the newly born.⁶¹

It is believed that Sheikh Hussein was born on a Tuesday at midnight. On that night Abelqaasim saw a bright light illuminating the sky in the direction of Anajiina. On seeing this, he thought that this was the signal for the foretold birth of Sheikh Hussein, so he went to Anajiina, he saw the baby and he went home without washing or shaving the hair of the newly born Sheikh Hussein. After a week he had another vision indicating that he had to go back to the village to shave the hair of Sheikh Hussein. He forgot to do it and when he came to the

⁵⁸ An interview with Sheikh Ahmad Sheikh Mohammed Safi on 06 November 2011 in Anajiina, also known as *Dirree* Sheikh Hussein. Sheikh Ahmad is a respected elder, oral historian and a descendant of a *kaddaamii* (servant) of Sheikh Mohammed Tilmo, who is said to have supervised the construction of Sheikh Hussein's shrine about 350 years ago.

⁵⁹ An interview with Sheikh Idris Haji Mahmoud on 04 November 2011 in Anajiina. Sheikh Idris is an elder and a versed oral historian. He is also the descendant of a *kaddami* of Sheikh Mohammad Tilmo.

⁶⁰ An Interview with Abdulnasir Ahmad on 05 November 2011 in Anajiina. Abdulnasir is the descendant of a *kaddami* of Sheikh Mohammad Tilmo. In addition, he is an employee of Bale Zone Culture and Tourism Bureau.

⁶¹ Sheikh Ahmed, 06 November 2011 in Anajina.

village a few years later, he saw Sheikh Hussein and other kids tending to cattle. Abelqaasim was surprised to see that the boy God wanted him to respect was a cattle herder. God was angry that Abelqaasim hesitated to respect the boy he was told to respect, so he told Abelqaasim that seventy years of his prayers and good deeds would be annulled. Abelqaasim cried and begged God for mercy. He returned the next morning to tell Sheikh Hussein that he was there to shave his hair as ordered by God. Sheikh Hussein told Abelqaasim that his hair would not be shaved except on a Tuesday. As a result, Abelqaasim returned to Anajiina on a Tuesday and he shaved the hair of Sheikh Hussein.⁶²

Other scholars have also reported related legends surrounding the birth of Sheikh Hussein. Andrzejewski (1972: 20) states that long before the birth of Sheikh Hussein, there lived a famous Shaikh named Abu-Al Qasim at a place called Anajina, in the northeastern part of what was called the Bale Province. He had the vision that Prophet Mohammed prophesized the birth of a famous saint in that village. He was also commanded by the prophet to stay close to the saint at the time of his birth, wash the baby, and shave the hair of the newly born baby. After the prophecy, an invisible messenger instructed Abu-Al Qasim that the time for the birth of the saint had finally come and told him to look at a particular house in the village. In this house, Abu-Al Qasim discovered that a woman named Makida was experiencing labor pains. Her pain, however, stopped when he performed *salat* (prayer) on her and she gave birth to a baby boy named Nur Hussein. Jeylan W. Hussein (2005: 33) also agrees with the above legend and states that, similar to the birth of Jesus Christ, the birth of Sheikh Hussein was already prophesized long before he was born. A certain saint, Abul-Qasim, has accepted God's *Wahy* (revelation) that a certain Sheikh Hussein would be born. God also instructed this saint to oversee and attend to the delivery of the Sheikh. It is said that the mother gave birth to the Sheik without the slightest pain and the midnight sky was filled with light at the moment of his birth.

Sheikh Hussein's family background is one of the most controversial aspects among scholars engaged in the field, as well as among oral informants, most of whom are custodians of the shrine. His father was a certain Sheikh Ibrahim who originally came from Arabia. He travelled through Yemen and Somalia and finally to Bale to preach Islam but he was not very successful. The local people refused to accept Islam and his teachings. It was during the time of his son (Sheikh Hussein) that the people of the area accepted Islam in large numbers. According to another legend, however, both his father and his mother came from the east,

⁶² Sheikh Idris, 04 November 2011, Anajiina.

from Baghdad through Berbera in Somalia⁶³. Braukämper (2004: 132) also supports this view. He states that Nur Hussein's grandfather, Sayyid Abdallah and his father Sheikh Ibrahim are believed to have come from Arabia to Merca to the south of what is today Mogadishu in Somalia. Sheikh Hussein's father, Sheikh Ibrahim later moved to Bale in Ethiopia and started to preach Islam there.

The cause for the ultimate movement of Sheikh Hussein's grandfather and father has not yet been given in oral and written sources. However, looking at the engagement of Sheikh Hussein's father in propagating Islam, one can only assume that the cause was probably purely religious. Despite the controversy surrounding the origin of Sheikh Hussein's father, whether we accept the Mecca or Baghdad origin, it is clear that he was not a local man. The major controversy involves around his mother's origin and her name. Some scholars, such as Andrzejewski (1972: 20) and Braukämper (2002: 132), state that his mother was known by the name Makida. All the informants I interviewed and conducted informal discussions with firmly state that his mother's name was Shemsiya. The name Makida seems to have been used mistakenly. It is said that when Abelqaasim arrived in the village and the house of Sheikh Hussein's parents shortly before the birth of Sheikh Hussein, he is said to have uttered the word "*wehiyel makidetu*". In Arabic it means 'the one in labour'.⁶⁴ It is this Arabic word used by Abelqassim that is wrongly understood as the name of Sheikh Hussein's mother. Shemsiya's original homeland is also one point of contestation. Abdulnasir insists that she came from Baghdad through Somalia, together with Sheikh Hussein's father.⁶⁵ Sheikh Ahmad, however, states that she was a local Arsi Oromo woman from the Ginir area, about 120 km from Anajiina.⁶⁶ The later view seems the more reliable and plausible story. As Braukämper (2002: 132) ascertains, the earliest Islamic missionaries and adventurers left their original homeland without a woman of their folk and married the daughters of the local nobility of their destination.

During that time, it is believed that followers of traditional religions livings in Bale were more numerous than Muslims. It was, however, Shaikh Ibrahim who tried to Islamize adherents of traditional religions of Bale and not his father. Sheikh Ibrahim had a very challenging time trying to Islamize the Sidama, a term used by the Oromo to refer to non-Oromo groups who were inhabitants of the area (Eshetu Setegn 1973: 2). However, even partial Islamization of Bale before the thirteenth century is disputable. According to

⁶³ Abdulnasir Ahmad, 05 November 2011 in Anajiina.

⁶⁴ Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011 and Abdulnasir, 05 November 2011 in Anajina.

⁶⁵ Interview on 05 November 2011 in Anajina.

⁶⁶ Interview on 06 November 2011 in Anajina

Huntingford (1955: 233) there might have been a relatively large Muslim population in Bale during the thirteenth century. Because of the legend that Sheikh Ibrahim, the father of Sheikh Hussein was originally from Arabia, there arose a belief that Sheikh Hussein was related to Prophet Mohammed (Eshetu Setegn 1973: 2). Contrary to this, however, Cerulli (1928: 152) claims that Sheikh Hussein was a saint of an unknown background who preached Islam during the Sultanate of Bale. Informants, however, state that Sheikh Hussein never related himself to the prophet⁶⁷. It is believed that he was of a humble family background whose importance increased after the death of Nur Hussayn. Sheikh Hussein came to prominence not because of his claimed relation to the prophet, but because of his deeds and the various miracles that he is said to have performed (Eshetu Setegn 1973: 3).

The time when Sheikh Hussein was believed to have lived and preached is also as controversial as his family background. To make it even more controversial, some scholars gave two different accounts of Sheikh Hussein. Cerulli (1927-28: 17) claims that Sheikh Hussein lived around the nineteenth century and that he was born, grew up, and died in Bale. He also states that Sheikh Hussein proclaimed a *jihad* (holy war) against the forces of the Christian Ethiopian Empire during the conquest of Arsi in the nineteenth century. However, he found himself contradicting his previous work by stating that when the Oromo came to the area in the sixteenth century, they assimilated the cult and kept Nur Hussein's center intact (1941: 12-13). Trimmingham (1965: 208) also supports the view that Sheikh Hussein lived in the nineteenth century. He claims that the role played by Sheikh Hussein, an Ahmadiyyah missionary in the second half of the nineteenth century, for the spread of Islam in Arsi was tremendous. This, however, seems improbable because the first Ahmadiyyah missionaries arrived in Mombasa only in 1934 (Fisher 1963: 181). However, Smith (1897: 125) states that Sheikh Hussein came from Baghdad to Bale around the seventeenth century with the sole purpose of Islamizing the Oromo. Contrary to his own proposition, at one point he mentioned that Sheikh Hussein might have come from Harar in southeast Ethiopia.

However, the work of Al-Umari, a writer in the first half of the fourteenth century, who was cited by Cerulli (1938: 26), states that "Bale was a Hanifite state in the days of Shaikh Hussayn". Here it is possible to argue strongly in favour of this proposition because it is difficult to imagine that a fourteenth century writer would mention the name of Sheikh Hussein if he did not exist before or during the fourteenth century. Braukämper (2002: 130-131) puts the birth of Sheikh Hussein near the late twelfth century. He bases his calculation on the genealogical data collected by Andrzejewski (1975: 140) in Somalia, which puts Sheikh

⁶⁷ Sheikh Ahmed, 06 November 2011, Sheikh Idris 05 November 2011.

Hussein's birth about 29 generations ago. He then assumes that a generation is about 28 years, an average of two assumptions on genealogy: the first by Lewis (1962: 43) which proposes 30 years for a generation, and the other by Jones (1970: 161-176), which assumes about 25.9 years for a generation. This calculation, however, does not include the legend narrated by the guardians of the shrine, which puts the birth of Sheikh Hussein in the second half of the twelfth century. Based upon the above two assumptions, I suggest that Sheikh Hussein could have been born anytime between the first half and the last quarter of the twelfth century.

Even if his power was already foretold long before he was born, legend has it that he became famous when he was between 20-30 years old. It was during this time that Sheikh Hussein's knowledge and fame reached its zenith. At the peak of his life, he is said to have had 6666 disciples, who each brought one stone to build Sheikh Hussein's first mosque, also known as *Masgiida Zurtum*. The stones for the construction were brought from the valley of Aynagegn River. The construction was started on a Thursday, it was finished in one day, and they were able to perform Friday communal prayer inside it. However, the original mosque, which is still standing in Anajjina is said to have built with 6667 stones. This is believed to be one of the earliest miracles performed by Sheikh Hussein. According to the legend, there was a big granite stone that Sheikh Hussein and his disciples wanted to use for the construction of the mosque. It was so big and heavy that they could not pick it up, let alone carry it over one kilometre. They decided to try to pick it up the next morning when they had fresh energy. When they came back in the morning, the stone was already lying on the mosque where they had left the construction the previous evening.⁶⁸

One group of the Oromo known by the name Qabila did not like his teachings of another religion (Islam), so they revolted against him and decided to chase him out of the region. Sheikh Hussein did not have any other defense mechanism than God. He prayed to God to deter the people from revolting against him. As a result, God caused drought in the area. The people lost all their possessions including camel, cattle, goats, sheep, and cereals. This made the people turn towards Sheikh Hussein. They went to him and promised that they would accept his teachings if he prayed to God, asking him to end the drought and save whatever remained of their animals and produce. Sheikh Hussein told them that he did not want anything but their conversion to Islam. He promised to pray for God to end the drought if they were willing to accept Islam. They promised they would accept Islam and they did. After that, Sheikh Hussein prayed to God, the drought came to an end, and the people even got back the possessions they had lost during the drought.

⁶⁸ Abdulnasir, 05 November 2011, Anajjina, and Sheikh Ahmad 06 November 2011, Anajjina.

There are different accounts of how long he has lived on earth. According to Sheikh Ahmed, Sheikh Hussein has lived for 280 years. Out of this, he spent the first seventy years in Anajiina. After that he travelled to a place called Sakina in Arsi where he spent fifty years. He married a woman named Sakina there whose name later became the name of the village itself. Then he moved to a place called Karjul in Bale and then Jebel-Nur in Arsi, where he was said to have stayed ten years in each place. He built mosques in all the above places and pilgrims still travel there. The most famous of all is the one located in Anajiina. There is a popular legend that Sheikh Hussein spent the remaining years travelling all over the world, preaching Islam until his return to Anajiina short before his death.⁶⁹ According to another legend narrated to me, he was believed to have lived on earth for about 250 years.⁷⁰

Sheikh Hussein is said to have had two wives- Anaji and Sakina and five to seven children, but only the names of four of his children were ever known. These were Mohammad Temam, Nurallah Ahmad, Fatuma, and Suleiman.⁷¹ According to another legend, Sheikh Hussein travelled frequently to preach Islam; in all the places he stayed for a relatively longer period, he might have had other wives and children. One of his wives was named Hajina and the second one was called Woqina.⁷² It was Nurallah who was designated by Sheikh Hussein to assume the responsibility of looking after the center and teaching Islam to the people. After the death of Nurallah, his son Zekeriya took over. After the death of Zekeriya the responsibility of looking after the center and teaching Islam passed onto a number of *ulama*. The disciples who studied Qur'an under Sheikh Hussein spread to the rest of the world to preach Islam.⁷³

The circumstances surrounding the death and burial of Sheikh Hussein are mysterious. Even informants who claim descent from Sheikh Mohammad Tilmo have various opinions. On his death, messengers were sent to many places to tell the news of his passing away here in Anajiina. At the same time, there were messengers who came from other places such as Sakina in Arsi to Anajiina to inform his followers of his death. Both his birth and death are referred to as birth. The Oromo do not talk of the death of a respected and venerated holy man.⁷⁴

Sheikh Idris states that the clan and the exact burial place of Sheikh Hussein are unknown. Sheikh Hussein hid the name of his clan so that members of his clan would not

⁶⁹ Sheikh Idris, 04 November 2011 in Anajina; Abdulnasir, 05 November 2011 in Anajina.

⁷⁰ Sheikh Ahmed, 06 November 2011 in Anajiina.

⁷¹ Abdulnasir, 05 November in Anajina; Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011 in Anajina.

⁷² Sheikh Ahmed, 06 November 2011 in Anajina.

⁷³ Sheikh Idris, 04 November 2011 in Anajina.

⁷⁴ Abdulnasir, 05 November 2011 in Anajina.

exploit this and look down upon other clans or get unfair privileges because of their relation to Sheikh Hussein. His burial place is also hidden. Before his death, he has cursed those who might expose the exact location of his grave. According to this story, it was on the site of Sheikh Hussein's birth as well as his residence that his shrine was erected.⁷⁵ Sheikh Ahmad, however, states that the place where his shrine is located was his birthplace, residence and grave. According to him, Sheikh Hussein's curse on those who might expose the location of his grave was invented as deterrence at the death of Sheikh Hussein and spread intentionally. At that time there were many *awaama* (the popular term in the area used for followers of *Waaqeffannaa* religion) and there was a fear that these people might open the grave and steal the body. As a disguise, about forty graves were dug to confuse any person planning to steal the body of Sheikh Hussein. In effect, his actual place of burial is where his shrine is erected. The site was his place of residence. It was only after his death that it was used as his burial ground.⁷⁶

According to informants, today there are no groups of people or clans that claim descent from Sheikh Hussein. This view is also supported by Braukämper (2002: 132) who states that no Arsi Oromo clan in Arsi or Bale claim direct lineage with the name of Sheikh Hussein, and they also do not include him in their genealogies. Braukämper (2002:132-133) states that:

This fact is the more striking as a distinct inclination can be observed among the Arsi Oromo to refer to Muslim saints of noble Arabic origin as their ancestors. It can even be shown that recently Islamized individuals have changed or manipulated their genealogies by eliminating "pagan" Cushitic names in favour of Arabic names... It is difficult to ascertain why such manipulation, aimed at gaining higher prestige within society dominated by Muslim value concepts has never occurred with respect to Shaik Husayn. It can hardly have been because the saint and his family were not fully integrated into the ethnic body of the autochthons but stayed outside as strangers....Did Nur Husayn's family or lineage die out or discontinue for an unknown reason? Was there a kind of numinous respect for the saint which created a taboo to be

⁷⁵ Interview on 04 November 2011 in Anajina.

⁷⁶ Interview on 06 November 2011 in Anajina.

linked with him? This would go against the common Muslim tendency to strive for testimonies of sharific connections....

Even the Darga, the custodians of the shrine, do not claim direct or indirect descent from Sheikh Hussein.⁷⁷ They say that they are descendants of Sheikh Mohammad Tilmo's *kaddamis* (sing. *kaddami*), i.e., servants in the shrine.⁷⁸ Sheikh Ahmad further says that

...only God knows the truth if there are any direct descendants of Sheikh Hussein. The person who supervised the building of his shrine was our ancestor from about five generations ago. However, we still do not claim that even this person is our forefather. We say we are descendants of his *kaddami*.⁷⁹

But today, membership to the Darga community does not depend on descent from the servants of the founder of the shrine. Anyone who is a zealous follower of Sheikh Hussein and who decides to stay at the village permanently can be accepted as a Darga.⁸⁰ Sheikh Ahmad explains that:

Darga refers to people like me who are residing at *Dirree* Sheikh Hussein permanently. In Arabic language it means *saakina* and it refers to the permanent residents of this village. It is not a tribe name of the people living in the village or in the area. It does not matter where the person comes from. The person may come from far places like Jimma, Wollega, Harar or somewhere else. As long as he/she decides to reside here permanently, he is referred to as Darga or *saakina*. Some of the ancestors of the people living here came about seven generations ago, while others came five generations ago. There are also people who came here a year and two years ago. It is mixed now and together we are called Darga. There is no agriculture or commerce here. We live with Sheikh Hussein's blessing and alms given to us by pilgrims who come here twice a year.

4.1.2 The establishment of Sheikh Hussein's shrine

One of the earliest and most important structures in the shrine is the original mosque built by Sheikh Hussein and his disciples around the second quarter of the twelfth century.

⁷⁷ For further explanation on the Darga and the administration of Sheikh Hussein's shrine, see Umar Nure (2006).

⁷⁸ Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011 in Anajjina; Sheikh Idris, 06 November 2011 in Anajjina.

⁷⁹ Interview on 06 November 2011 in Anajjina.

⁸⁰ Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011 in Anajjina.

After the death of Sheikh Hussein, his favourite son, Nurallah took the responsibility of administering the center and teaching Islam. After the death of Nurallah, his son Zekeriya took over⁸¹. The period until the second quarter of the eighteenth century is vague. The oral traditions as well as the scarce written sources do not provide almost any information on developments at the shrine. The only information available is about the administration of the shrine by seven consecutive *imams*.⁸² Short after the death of Sheikh Hussein, there was famine and epidemic in the area and the people as well as wild animals abandoned the area.⁸³

This changed about 300 years ago with the arrival of a certain Sheikh Mohammad Sheikh Aliyi. He is popularly and affectionately known by the name Sheikh Mohammad Tilma Tilmo. Local Oromo people gave him this name, which means “the one who is liked”. He was staying in the country of the Adere people (Harar in south-eastern Ethiopia) and studying the Qur’an. One night, Sheikh Hussein is said to have revealed himself to Sheikh Mohammad and ordered him to go to Anajiina to build a shrine for him. Sheikh Mohammad, however, refused to go there. The reason for his refusal was related to events that unfolded in this place shortly before. There was drought there and there was also a bad *jinni* which prevented humans and cattle from multiplying. As a result, some of the inhabitants of the area died while the remaining left the area and went to places as far as Merca in Somalia. Only seven *imams* remained there to pray for Sheikh Hussein’s *karaamaa* for the alleviation of the problems devastating the region. When Sheikh Hussein asked Sheikh Mohammad to come, the latter was also afraid that he would not be able to have a child. Hence, he refused Sheikh Hussein’s order. He also felt that the remaining *imams* would not voluntarily give up their position to Sheikh Mohammad. Sheikh Hussein assured Sheikh Mohammad that he would not face any problems, be it from the catastrophe or from the *imaams*. On his arrival, Sheikh Mohammad was instantly accepted and recognised as the new *imaam* by the local *imaams*. This is how Sheikh Mohammad started the construction of the shrine and it is after the construction of this site that people started to return to the area. Most of the people that live in the village today are therefore the descendants of those people who came to the place after the construction of the shrine.⁸⁴

In his attempt to set down a probable date for the construction of the shrine, Braukämper (2002: 138) states that one of the most important developments with regard to the Shrine of Sheikh Hussein was the construction of a shrine in 1790, which was dedicated to

⁸¹ Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011; Sheikh Idris, 04 November 2011 in Anajina.

⁸² Abdulnasir, 05 November 2011 in Anajina; Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011 in Anajina.

⁸³ Abdulnasir, 05 November 2011 in Anajina.

⁸⁴ Abdulnasir, 05 November 2011 in Anajina.

the founder of the Kadiriyya order, Abd al-Kadir al-Djilani. The Muslims of Northeast Africa believe he lived in that part of the world even if he died in Baghdad in 1166 (Braukämper 2002: 138). At the same time Braukämper (2002:140) claims that even if the cult of Sheikh Hussein started in the twelfth century, the shrine in its current condition is definitely not older than 250 years; even if it is difficult to date the shrine exactly, it was constructed sometime in the middle of the nineteenth century. However, Braukämper (2002: 138) is partly correct about the belief held by the Muslims of this part of Africa that Abd al-Kadir al-Djilani had lived among them. Informants have also confirmed that Abd al-Kadir at least visited Sheikh Hussein and stayed for a while in Anajina.⁸⁵ Confirming this story, Sheikh Ahmad states as follows:

Abdulqadir was contemporary to Sheikh Hussein but he was a bit older and more powerful than Sheikh Hussein. Abdulqadir had come from Baghdad in Iraq to Anajiina to visit Sheikh Hussein. Before Abdulqadir's visit to Sheikh Hussein, Sheikh Hussein was already in Baghdad to visit and learn from Abdulqadir. At that time they made an arrangement that Abdulqadir would also come and visit Sheikh Hussein in Anajiina. Sheikh Hussein had seen the golden bed, the comfortable mattress and the big house of Abdulqadir. Sheikh Hussein did not have such things and did not worry about earthly luxury. He could even spend a night under a tree. He was worried how to host Abdulqadir. Sof Omar, who was Sheikh Hussein's favourite disciple, said that they should bring the items Abdulqadir had in Baghdad. On arriving at Anajiina, Abdulqadir saw a replica of his golden bed and asked how his bed came to Anajiina. Sheikh Hussein replied that it was his disciple's work. Abdulqadir was impressed and did not even want to imagine how powerful the *karaamaa* of Sheikh Hussein might have been if his disciple had such power. Hence, Abdulqadir denounced his title of Sultan in front of Sheikh Hussein. The shrine was built in Abdulqadir's name in memory of the exact place where his tent was erected and he was hosted.. Abdulqadir was buried in Baghdad and not here.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Abdulnasir, 05 November 2011; Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011, Anajiina; Sheikh Idris, 04 November 2011, Anajina.

⁸⁶ Interview on 06 November 2011, Anajina.

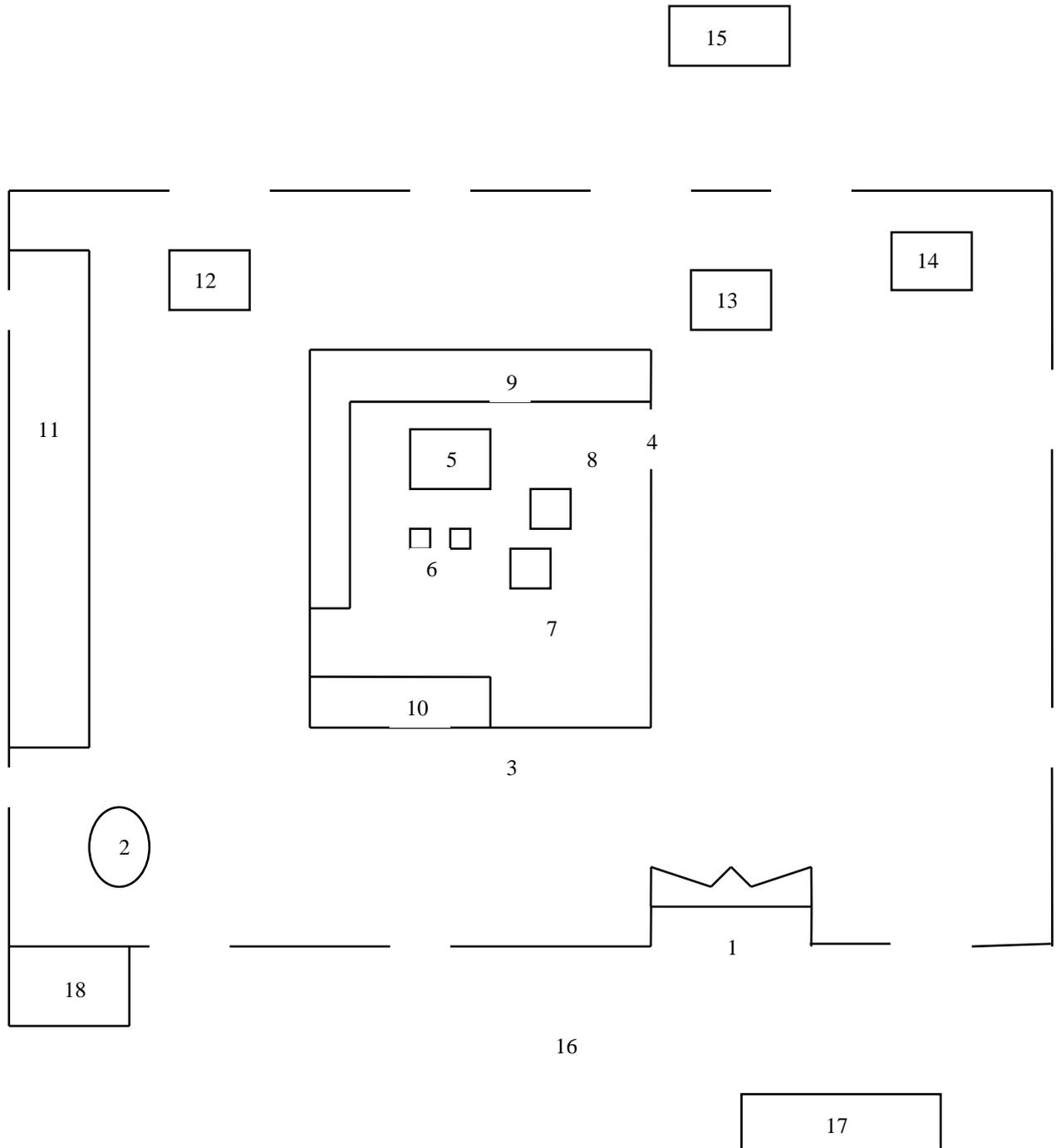


Figure 8: a sketch of Sheikh Hussein's shrine.

Legend

1. Main gate (*karra guddoo*)
2. Limestone (*haash*) preparation place
3. Main building (*gamoo guddoo*)
4. Second gate (*karra lammaffaa*)
5. Shrine of Sheikh Hussein (*gamoo Sheikh Hussein*)
6. Shrine of Mohammad Adileen (*gamoo Mohammad Adileen*)
7. Tomb of Fatuma (*gombisoo Fatuma*)

8. Tomb of Mohammad Tamam (*gombisoo* Mohammad Tamam)
9. *gombisoo Qur'aana*
10. *gombisoo Imaamaa*
11. *gombbisoo Iidaa*
12. Shrine of Abd al-Kadir al-Djilani (*gamoo* Abdulqaadir Jeylaani)
13. Pond of chicken (*Haroo Lukkuu*)
14. Shrine of Sheikh Mohammad Ahmad (*gamoo* Sheikh Mohammad Ahmad)
15. Sheikh Hussein's Mosque (*Masgiida* Sheikh Hussein), also called *zurtum*
16. Plain at the gate of Sheikh Hussein (*dhooqoo karraa*)
17. *gombbisoo Aayyoo haadha Garaadaa*
18. *jajjabaa Mawlida*- a tree under which *Mawlid* is celebrated

The entire fenced compound of the shrine is known by the name *foonaa /moonaa* Sheikh Hussein (the enclosure of Sheikh Hussein). Braukämper (2002:138) refers to the compound as *Fora*, which is otherwise known as *foonaa/moonaa*. It seems that this probably arose because of his unfamiliarity with the language and terminologies of the Arsi Oromo.



Figure 9: *foonaa* Sheikh Hussein.

Photo by Gemechu J. Geda, November 2011.

The entire compound has twelve gates. Opinion about the significance of the number of gates is divided. According to Sheikh Ahmad the number and position of the gates have no special significance. He states that it was built this way to facilitate easy entry to the villagers living around the shrine instead of walking around to enter through only one gate.⁸⁷ But according to Abdulnasir, each gate represents the twelve months of a year. Regardless of the

⁸⁷ Interview on 06 November 2011 in Anajina.

controversy surrounding the reason for the existence of the twelve gates, two of them are very important. The first one is what is called *karra guddoo* (main gate) and the other important gate is one at the back which leads to the original mosque built by Sheikh Hussein himself, and which is now situated outside of the fenced compound. The importance of the main gate lies in the fact that it is the main gate of entry to the compound, which is considered by many as a sacred place and it is in front of this gate that the most important rituals take place. The importance of one of the gates at the back is due to its location, which leads to the original mosque of Sheikh Hussein. The whole compound is about 200 meters by 150 meters. Inside, there are many structures, including the Shrine of Sheikh Hussein. One of the structures located within the main fence is a pit where *haash* (limestone) is prepared. The powder is obtained by burning the limestone with a type of wood named *doddotii*, which produces white ash when burned. The limestones are collected from a nearby river named Aynagegn, located about one kilometre from the center. Every year in October, the powder is mixed with water and the various structures of the shrine are painted. The pit is also a storage place for the remaining powder and limestone for the coming year.⁸⁸

Haroo Lukkuu (pond of chicken) is another important structure in the site. It is believed that the origin of the pond goes back to the time of Sheikh Hussein himself. According to the legend, the pond emerged when he performed *tahara* (ablution) and a chicken came and drank the water drops. The sheikh saw this, so he dug a small hole and filled it with water so the chicken could drink from it without difficulty.⁸⁹ It is roughly about 35x25 meters in size, even if it is difficult to have the right depth. Informants' statements on the depth of the pond are diverse. According to Sheikh Ahmad, nobody knows the exact depth of the pond for sure but he believes it might be around two to four meters deep. The pond was not so big and deep before. It was during the time of Sheikh Mohammed Tilmo that it was dug deeper.⁹⁰

The entire pond is covered by algae and therefore green in colour. Nobody seems to know when and how the lake came to be totally covered by the algae. Informants, however, claim that their forefathers told them that it has been there a long time, even since the time of Sheikh Hussein. From time to time, when the pond is dug, the algae seem to disappear only to reappear within a week when it rains and the pond is filled with water. It is believed that the algae is very good for the water in the pond because it cools and preserves the water for many

⁸⁸ Abdulnasir, 05 November 2011 in Anajiina.

⁸⁹ Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011 in Anajiina; Abdulnasir, 05 November 2011 in Anajiina; Sheikh Idris, 04 November 2011 in Anajiina.

⁹⁰ Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011 in Anajiina.

months. The algae on the pond is even considered to be a miracle. There have been some attempts to cover the other ponds in the village with algae but it does not grow anywhere other than *Haroo Lukkuu* and *Dinkuree*.⁹¹



Figure 10: *Haroo Lukkuu* (Pond of Chicken)

Photo by Gemechu J. Geda, November 2011.

The water of the pond is believed to have a healing power and pilgrims even refer to it as *Zemzem*. The healing power of the water is attributed to Sheikh Hussein's prayer and blessing that the water and the soil from places where he stood up and/or sat down and prayed should heal his followers from all sorts of sicknesses.⁹² After he dug the pond, he recited the Qur'an at the place forty times. There are many pilgrims who claimed to have been cured of their sicknesses by drinking the water or washing themselves with it.⁹³ Pilgrims who suffer from various internal sicknesses such as belly pain drink the water while those with external problems such as wounds, blindness or lameness, wash the sick part of their body with it.⁹⁴ There are also people who take the water to their home. They keep it in their house and use it when their family member or cattle become sick. They mix it with normal water and wash with it or simply drink it.⁹⁵

The other structure that can be found within the compound is *Gamoo* Sheikh Mohammad Haji Ahmad, a shrine dedicated to Sheikh Mohammad Haji Ahmad. It is the burial place of Sheikh Mohammad, who supervised the extension that encircled the original

⁹¹ Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011 in Anajina.

⁹² Abdulnasir, 05 November 2011 in Anajina; Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011 in Anajina.

⁹³ Informal conversation with pilgrims, 04-06 November 2011 in Anajina.

⁹⁴ Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011 in Anajina; Abdulnasir, 05 November 2011 in Anajina; Sheikh Idris, 04 November 2011 in Anajina.

⁹⁵ Informal conversation with pilgrims, 04-06 November 2011 in Anajina.

mosque built by Sheikh Hussein on three sides. Even if he supervised the work, the local people living in the village played a crucial role. The extension is believed to have been built about fifty years ago because of an increase in the number of people coming to pray in the Mosque on Fridays.⁹⁶ Despite the need to extend the Mosque, in the beginning there was a disagreement between Sheikh Mohammad and the local people. He wanted to dismantle the original Mosque and built a bigger one. The local people, however, were not willing to allow him to dismantle the original mosque built by the hands of Sheikh Hussein himself. As a result, they reached an agreement to build a bigger mosque that would encircle the original Mosque on three sides.⁹⁷ At the beginning, Sheikh Mohammad was buried in an unmarked grave, but later his son insisted on building a shrine commemorating his father. But normally it is not allowed to erect a shrine at the location of the shrine of Sheikh Hussein. Because of the contributions of Sheikh Mohammad and his son's complaints, the hereditary guardians of the shrine finally permitted Sheikh Mohammed's son to build the shrine towards the end of the *Dergue*⁹⁸ regime.⁹⁹

The shrine of Abd al-Kadir al-Djilani, which the Arsi Oromo refer to as Abdulqadir Jeylaanii, is another revered structure situated within the main compound of the center. According to Arsi and Bale Oromo legend, Abdulqadir Jeylaanii came from Baghdad to visit Sheikh Hussein. He was the father of all *awliyyaa* (saints). His power exceeded that of Sheikh Hussein. He has heard about Sheikh Hussein and he decided to visit him. When Sheikh Hussein heard about this, he was so worried of how to host him that he asked God to bring the ground Abdulqadir had been sitting on in Baghdad to Anajjina. On arriving here, Abdulqadir saw the same ground he had been sitting on in Baghdad. As a result, he was angry because he thought that Sheikh Hussein was trying to show him his own power. Sheikh Hussein, however, explained to him that he did this because he respected him and tried to make the place as comfortable and as familiar as possible to his place in Baghdad. Now his shrine is situated at the exact spot where he was hosted during his stay here in Anajjina.¹⁰⁰

According to Abdulnasir, however, the site of the shrine was where Abdulqadir's tent was erected during his stay at Anajjina.¹⁰¹ Baxter (1987: 142), Braukämper (2004: 138), and Trimmingham (2008: 240) state that the construction of the shrine of Abd al-Kadir in Anajjina

⁹⁶ Sheikh Idris, November 04 2011 in Anajjina; Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011 in Anajjina; Abdulnasir, 05 November 2011 in Anajjina.

⁹⁷ Sheikh Idris, 04 November 2011 in Anajjina.

⁹⁸ *Dergue* is the name given to the military junta that governed Ethiopia from 1974-1991.

⁹⁹ Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011 in Anajjina.

¹⁰⁰ Sheikh Idris, 04 November 2011 in Anajjina.

¹⁰¹ Interview on 05 November 2011 in Anajjina.

was initiated by *Amir* Abd al-Shakur of Harar (1783-94). Braukämper states that the ‘... shrine of Abd al-Kadir was established by Aw Muhammad, a Somali *shaikh* from Berbera...’ These notions, however, are sternly opposed by informants, some of whom are descendants of assistants to Sheikh Mohammad Tilmo, who oversaw the construction of the shrine. According to Abdulnasir, there is in fact a shrine in memory of Abd al-Kadir built by the orders and supervisions of *Amir* Abd al-Shakur but it is in the country of the Adere people in Harar.¹⁰² This is also a view supported by Ammi (2004: 83) and by Braukämper himself (2004: 116).



Figure 11: *Gamoo* Abdulqadir Jeylaanii (the shrine of Abd al-Kadir al-Djilani).

Photo by Gemechu J. Geda, November 2011.

Another important feature within the fenced perimeter of the enclosure is what is called *Gombbisoo Iidaa*. It is a structure of about 40x3 meters. It used to be a place where *Id al-fitr* prayers were conducted until 2008. The number of pilgrims increased tremendously through time and a decision was then made to move the prayer to another place in the open, which could accommodate the ever-increasing number of pilgrims, especially during Arafa.¹⁰³ Even if it is not a prayer place anymore, there are some people who still pray there on individual or small group basis.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Interview on 05 November 2011 in Anajina.

¹⁰³ Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011 in Anajina; Abdulnasir, 05 November 2011 in Anajina.

¹⁰⁴ My own observation, 04-06 November 2011 in Anajina; Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011 in Anajina.

The most revered place and the focal point for almost all pilgrims is another stone fenced structure called *Gamoo Guddoo* (the big/the main shrine). It is about 30x20 meters big and the wall is about three meters high. The gate of entry to the fenced compound is known as *karra lammaffaa* (the second gate). This structure is revered because the shrine, which is believed to have been built on the final resting place of Sheikh Hussein, is situated within this wall. In addition to this, it also contains the shrines of one of his sons, Mohammad Tamam, and his only daughter, Fatuma. Mohammad Tamam and Fatuma passed away long before Sheikh Hussein and they were buried close to the residence of their father, which was later turned into his burial place on his death. The inner enclosure also contains the shrines of two of Sheikh Hussein's *kaddaamiis* (sing. *Kaddaamii*), both of which were commonly known by the name Mohammad *al-Adilee* (the honest and the truthful). These two individuals fairly distributed whatever food was available among the disciples and guests ,without favouring anyone, including themselves.¹⁰⁵



Figure 12: *Gamoo Guddoo* (the big/main shrine).

Photo by Gemechu J. Geda, November 2011.

Gombbisoo Imaamaa (hut of the *Imaams*) is also located within this inner compound. At the beginning, it was not a burial place. People used to eat their lunch under it while renovating the shrine. A certain *Imaam* Abdulqadir, four generations after Sheikh Mohammad Tilma Tilmo, died here during one of the biggest pilgrimage periods. He was a much-respected *imam*; his relatives demanded that he not be buried far from Sheikh Hussein. As a

¹⁰⁵ Abdulnasir, 05 November 2011 in Anajina.

result, they decided to bury him on the spot and the name of the place was changed to *Gombbisoo Imaamaa*. Now there are about eight tombs under it. Three of them (Abdulqadir, Mohammad Seid, and Mahba) were *imaams* and the rest were their close relatives.¹⁰⁶ There is also another building within the inner compound of *Gamoo Guddoo* (the big/main shrine) and that is called *Gombbisoo Qur'aanaa* (hut for the recital of the Qur'an). It is a place where the Qur'an is recited for various purposes. When society faces various natural and man-made calamities, such as drought, war, epidemics, and excess rain people gather there, recite the Qur'an and pray for the alleviation of the difficulties they face.¹⁰⁷

The most revered and the holiest of all the shrines is what is called *Gamoo* Sheikh Hussein (the shrine of Sheikh Hussein). It is the burial place of Sheikh Hussein and the shrine is built over his grave.¹⁰⁸ It is also believed that the site of Sheikh Hussein's shrine was not only his grave but also the place where he was born and where he also sat as a grown man while praying and teaching Islam. The shrine is about 8x7 meters large and around 8 meters in height. It is rectangular at the base with a conical shape at the top. Animal fat was used as cement for the construction of the conical shape of the shrine. A man named Gano Adama Lola, a member of the Sabro clan of the Oromo of Bale, gave many bulls as a gift. After slaughtering the animals, the fat was collected and used as cement. The other part, however, is made of stone that uses mud as cement.¹⁰⁹ Inside the shrine, there are six big pillars. The grave is believed to be sandwiched between four of them so that nobody will try to remove the body.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Abdulnasir, 05 November 2011 in Anajina.

¹⁰⁷ Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011 in Anajina; Abdulnasir, 05 November 2011 in Anajina.

¹⁰⁸ Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011 in Anajina.

¹⁰⁹ Abdulnasir, 05 November 2011 in Anajina.

¹¹⁰ Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011 in Anajina.



Figure 13: *Gamoo* Sheikh Hussein (shrine of Sheikh Hussein).

Photo by Gemechu J. Geda, November 2011.

In addition to the structures that are located within the enclosure of the shrine, there are four other important structures that are located outside of the fence. The first one of these is *Dhooqoo Karraa* (plain at the gate), found in front of the main gate of the compound. It is an empty space of about 50x20 meter. This is an important space because it is here that the *waaree* (noon/evening) ceremony, which is composed of many other rituals takes place. The other item located outside of the main compound but itself fenced is a tree called *Jajjabaa*¹¹¹ *Mawlida*. It is an old *Berchemia discolor* tree. It is said to be more than 400 years old.¹¹² Sheikh Ahmad, however, claims to have heard from his forefathers' that the tree has been there since the days of Sheikh Hussein.¹¹³ *Mawlid*, the birth of Prophet Mohammed, is celebrated under the tree annually on the 12th day of the month of *Rabi-ul-Awwal* in the Islamic calendar.¹¹⁴ There are, however, many people who celebrate *Mawlid* at their home as well.¹¹⁵

What is commonly known as *Gombbisoo Aayyoo Haadha Garaadaa* is also located outside of the fence. It is a house that is roughly 15x5 meter large. That house is built for the daughter of Sheikh Mohammad Tilmo. She recited the Qur'an and she stayed and prayed in the house. In the beginning, it was not as big as it is now. It was rebuilt and expanded about

¹¹¹ *Jajjabaa* is an Oromo term which means very strong. The wood is called this because it is a very strong tree that can live longer than most trees. It is also believed to be the strongest of all wood types that are found in and around the area.

¹¹² Abdulnasir, 05 November 2011 in Anajina.

¹¹³ Interview on 06 November 2011 in Anajina.

¹¹⁴ Abdulnasir, 02 November 2011 in Anajina.

¹¹⁵ Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011 in Anajina; and Abdulnasir, 05 November 2011 in Anajina.

sixty years ago. Now it is used as a store to keep different tools used in the maintenance of the buildings and the pond.¹¹⁶

Surprisingly enough, the original mosque of Sheikh Hussein, which is also known as *Masgiida zurtum* or *Zaawiyaa*, and which is said to have been built by him and his disciples, is located outside of the fenced compound. The mosque is about 12x8 meter large and inside there are four big pillars that are all approximately three meters tall with a circumference of 3.3 meters. It has one small door and four small windows. The walls and the floor of the mosque are still in their original state with the exception of the annual limestone paint. The roof, however, is said to have been renewed during the construction of the shrine about 360 years ago. The roof was made up of *hindheessa* (*Juniperus procera*) wood and could not survive up to these days.¹¹⁷

Over time, the number of people who came to the mosque of Sheikh Hussein to pray increased, and a decision was made to enlarge the mosque by adding a bigger extension on three sides of the original mosque. However, the period when this extension was made is contentious. According to Abdulnasir, the extension was done about 70 years ago.¹¹⁸ Sheikh Idris, on the other hand, states that it was done about 50 years ago.¹¹⁹ Sheikh Ahmad, however, states that he has personally observed when the extension was done about 40 years ago, so this seems to be the reliable version. The extended mosque is now 27x15 meters large, with five doors and nine smaller windows. Inside, there are about 31 pillars, each three meters tall. The pillars circumferences vary from 1.70-2.80 meters. Within the extension, a partition was made with a curtain for a separate place for Friday prayers for women.

¹¹⁶ Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011 in Anajina.

¹¹⁷ Abdulnasir, 02 November 2011 in Anajina.

¹¹⁸ Interview on 05 November 2011 in Anajina.

¹¹⁹ Interview on 04 November 2011 in Anajina.



Figure 14: *Masgiida Sheikh Hussein (Sheikh Hussein's Mosque), also known as Masgiida Zurtum/Zaawiyaa.*

Photo by Gemechu J. Geda, November 2011.

Another important place of worship is a cave in a hill on the eastern escarpment of Aynagen River, located about two kilometres from the shrine. It is where Sheikh Hussein is believed to have stayed and prayed before the construction of the mosque. According to a legend narrated by Sheikh Ahmad, while Sheikh Hussein was praying on the hills, the stones and the trees around bowed down for him. On witnessing this, he is said to have understood the power he had and because he was afraid this might turn him into an arrogant individual, he left the hill and retreated to the cave so he would not see stones and trees bowing for him.¹²⁰ When I was in the cave, people showed me what they called *Harmma* Sheikh Hussein (Sheikh Hussein's breast). It is a protruding stone within the cave with a shape of a nipple where water drops very slowly. Pilgrims wait for water drops from the rock to apply to their body and drink. It is a symbolic way of praying to Sheikh Hussein's *karaamaa* for good fortune and health.¹²¹ According to a legend, this is also where milk sprung from the rock for Sheikh Hussein to drink.¹²²

¹²⁰ Interview on 06 November 2011 in Anajina.

¹²¹ Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011 in Anajina; informal conversations with pilgrims, 05 November 2011 in Anajina.

¹²² Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011 in Anajina.

4.1.3 Periods of Pilgrimage

Many pilgrims visit the shrine during the two major pilgrimages a year. The first pilgrimage takes place a few days before the day of *Arafa*, when pilgrims travel to the shrine to take part in the communal prayer. Most of the pilgrims are those who do not have enough money to travel to Mecca. The second period is known as *Zaaraa*¹²³ *Galgala Goobanaa* (the time when the moon becomes full). This is two weeks after the new moon. This period is chosen for pilgrimage in order to commemorate the birth of Sheikh Hussein. Pilgrimage to Anajiina is said to have started during the time of Sheikh Hussein. The beginning of pilgrimage to the place seems to have emerged out of practical considerations. According to the legend, Sheikh Hussein is believed to have had 6666 disciples who came from different parts of the country to study the Qur'an. Therefore, the parents of these individuals would travel to the village twice a year, carrying food items for their respective children and for the local people as well.¹²⁴ People can travel to the shrine the whole year round, and the center is open twenty-four hours a day throughout the entire year.¹²⁵ However, there are two major periods of pilgrimages where thousands of pilgrims gather at the site. The rituals that take place at the center are similar during both periods of pilgrimages.¹²⁶ The descriptions and analysis of rituals at the Shrine of Sheikh Hussein are based on observations during the field research trip and stay at the center from 2-8 November 2011.

I left Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia early in the morning of 1 November 2011 to travel to Anajiina, also called *Dirree* Sheikh Hussein, where the shrine of Sheikh Hussein is situated. It is located 630 kilometres to the southeast of Addis Ababa. Even though I had the information from my contact that the majority of the pilgrims arrive as of the 4th of November, I decided to travel early so that I would be able to look for well-versed informants, establish contacts, and observe how pilgrims arrived and their behaviours upon arrival at the site. Even on the 1st of November, in the bus I met many pilgrims who were travelling to Sheikh Hussein. Some of them came from northern Ethiopia, traveling more than 700 kilometres. Pilgrims travelling to Sheikh Hussein's shrine are easily identifiable because of the *dhanqee*, a distinct Y-Shaped stick they carry. After travelling for about ten hours, covering 430 kilometres, and crossing many towns such as Bishoftu, Mojo, Meki, Ziway, Shashamane, Kofele, Dodola, Dinsho and many other smaller towns and villages, we arrived at Robe, the capital of Bale Zone. Because of the length of the remaining journey and the

¹²³ *Zaaraa* is a corruption of the Arabic word, ziyara which means pilgrimage (Abdulnasir, 05 November 2011 in Anajina).

¹²⁴ Abdulnasir, 05 November 2011 in Anajina.

¹²⁵ Abdulnasir, 05 November 2011 in Anajina; Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011 in Anajina.

¹²⁶ Abdulnasir, 05 November 2011 in Anajina; Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011 in Anajina.

difficulty of the terrain, a decision was made to spend the night in Robe and continue the next day early in the morning.

On 2 November, I woke up early in the morning, at 5:30 to be exact, walked to the Bus station in Robe and boarded a mid-sized bus travelling in the direction of *Dirree* Sheikh Hussein. After travelling for about 105 kilometres we reached a small town named Dallo-Sabro. The bus stopped there for a little less than an hour to drop off some travellers and wait for other travellers to board. The bus continued its journey and reached another small town called Jaarraa, located only 64 kilometres from *Dirree* Sheikh Hussein. At this point, almost all of the travellers were pilgrims to Sheikh Hussein and I observed clear signs of excitement. They started to sing *baharo*, a song made of hymns in praise of Sheikh Hussein. The loud music streaming from the stereo of the bus was also *baharo* and the pilgrims sang to its tune. The closer we got to the village, the more the pilgrims were excited and restless. Most of them left their seats, stood up and started calling the name of Sheikh Hussein, followed by loud ululations. Some even started to cry, which they said was out of happiness to be back in the village of the saint, i.e., Sheikh Hussein.

Upon arrival in the village in the afternoon of 2 November, I was met by my contact, Sheikh Abdulnasir, and went to the place I would be staying for the upcoming few days. After taking a short break, we went to the shrine and I took measurements and pictures of various structures in the complex. Then together with Abdulnasir I identified possible informants and made contact with them. The fact that he resides there permanently, that he is one of the descendants of a *kaddaamii* of Sheikh Mohammad Tilma Tilmo and an employee of the local office of culture and tourism, made my contact with informants easier and they agreed to provide me with the information I wanted. Having accomplished this, as it was getting late, I returned to my resting place.

Large numbers of pilgrims, *Muuda*¹²⁷ Sheikh Hussein, arrived at the village from 3-5 November. Based upon my observation during the *Arafa* prayer on 6 November 2011, I can confidently estimate the number of pilgrims anywhere between 18-20,000. Braukämper (2004: 141) and Eshetu Setegn (1973: 25) state that the number of pilgrims in 1971 was about 100,000. This estimate, however, is difficult to accept for various reasons. Sheikh Ahmad states that the number of pilgrims has increased in the last five years tremendously and that the communal prayers are not taking place in the shrine compound anymore but on an open

¹²⁷ Pilgrims to the shrine of Sheikh Hussein are known by a common name, *muuda* Sheikh Hussein. Some of the pilgrims are also known as *jaalaloo* Sheikh Hussein. These are fervent followers of the cult of Sheikh Hussein. They travel from place to place and they live on alms donated to them by the community in the name of Sheikh Hussein. In the past they were known as *gariibaa* Sheikh Hussein. But because of the negative connotations (being high on drugs, confused, unclean) the term *gariibaa* has come to acquire, it is now very rarely used.

space, about one kilometre from the shrine.¹²⁸ The available ritual space, as well as accommodations in the small village cannot realistically take in such a large number of pilgrims. Most pilgrims arrive on buses because of the remoteness of the shrine and the hilly topography of the area makes it extremely difficult to walk over a long distance. Added to this is the very high temperature of the area at this particular period of the year, which reaches up to 35 degree Celsius. There were also large numbers of pilgrims riding horses and mules.. There were many pilgrims living in nearby villages who walked between one to three days on foot to reach the village. Abdulnasir states that there are many pilgrims who travel by foot for many weeks to reach the shrine.¹²⁹

Most pilgrims to Sheikh Hussein carry a Y-shaped stick known as *dhanqee (ulee)* Sheikh Hussein (Sheikh Hussein's cane/stick). It is mostly made up of a wood called *harooressa*. First, the wood suitable for the *dhanqee* is cut and placed on fire while it is still fresh. Once it is placed on fire, it is even possible to make it straight, then the bark is peeled off and the stick is cut to the desired length. Sheikh Hussein used to carry a stick similar to this, but with a metal spear attached to it. He used to place his Qur'an on the *dhanqee* instead of placing it on a dusty ground.¹³⁰ Pilgrims today carry it to be identified as the *jam'a* (pilgrims, followers) of Sheikh Hussein. It is an imitation of the practices of Sheikh Hussein. It is mainly to show their respect and love of Sheikh Hussein that pilgrims carry this stick whenever they travel to Sheikh Hussein's shrines.¹³¹ Pilgrims who already have the *dhanqee* from their previous pilgrimages can bring it with themselves. But those who do not have it can buy it at the village.¹³²

All pilgrims who arrive at the village on buses, on foot, and/or pack animals bring with them the items they need for their stay at the village during the pilgrimage. Some of the most important items brought by most pilgrims are flour and firewood to prepare their food. Upon arrival at the village, some proceed directly to their accommodations, commonly known as *dagale*. These are mud and/or small houses of varying sizes owned by the permanent residents of the village. Those pilgrims who are frequent visitors of the shrine on each pilgrimage know exactly which *dagale* they are staying in. Generally, the owners do not charge pilgrims staying in their *dagale*. In return, the pilgrims share whatever they bring with them, including food items and firewood. There are also many pilgrims who prepare

¹²⁸ Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011 in Anajina.

¹²⁹ Abdulnasir, telephone interview on 30 January 2012.

¹³⁰ Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011 in Anajina.

¹³¹ Informal conversation with pilgrims, 03-05 November 2011 in Anajina; Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011, in Anajina.

¹³² Abdulnasir, 05 November 2011 in Anajina.

makeshift tents in the compound of the residents of the village. After leaving the items they brought in their respective *dagale*, they proceed to the shrine. Other pilgrims however, go directly to the shrine before even going to their *dagale*.

4.1.4 Rituals

The nature of rituals during the major pilgrimages at the shrine can be categorized into two types. The first is what I would like to call ‘informal rituals’. These are rituals that pilgrims perform on individual and/or small group bases. They are not organized and they do not have a specific sequence or time. Pilgrims perform them as they wish and when they wish. This category includes rituals that pilgrims perform upon entering the shrines dedicated to various personalities such as Sheikh Hussein and Abd al-Kadir al-Djilani as well as during their visit to the cave at the river of Aynagen. The second category is what I prefer to call ‘formal rituals’. This refers to rituals that are formal, organized and led by the spiritual leaders of the center. They are performed at a specific time of the day and attended by the majority of pilgrims. The most important ritual of this category is the *waaree* (evening) ritual, which is composed of many other rituals. This will be discussed later in details in subsequent sections.

One of the informal rituals performed by pilgrims on their way to the *dhooqoo*, the empty ritual spaces at the main gate of the shrine, is greeting Sheikh Hussein. This ritual is known as *salaamoo*.¹³³ This ritual, however, is not limited only at the *dhooqoo*. It is also performed at the main gate of the compound, *karra guddoo* (main/big gate) also known in Arabic as *bab al-Salam* (gate of peace).¹³⁴ Braukämper (2002: 144) states that this is also the name of the northern gate through which pilgrims usually enter Mecca. During this ritual at the main gate pilgrims also touch, kiss, and smear butter on a stone named *baaji*. Braukämper (2002:144), however, calls it *darara bashu* and compares it with the *Hadjar Al-aswad* in the *ka’ba*. He also claims that Sheikh Hussein brought it from Mecca by himself. According to a legend, however, *darara bashu* is the name of a person who brought the stone from the same area during the construction of the shrine more than 300 years ago.¹³⁵ The *salaamoo* ritual is also performed inside the main shrine of Sheikh Hussein, *gamoo* Sheikh Hussein. This ritual is made up of a repeated use of hymns as follow:

¹³³ It is an Oromo corruption of the Arabic word *Salam*, meaning ‘peace’. At the Shrine of Sheikh Hussein, however, it implies pilgrims greeting to Sheikh Hussein on their arrival at the pilgrimage center.

¹³⁴ Abdulnasir, 05 November 2011 in Anajina.

¹³⁵ Abdulnasir, telephone interview on 30 January 2012.

<i>Allahu maraa Sheikh Huseenihoo</i>	May Allah show mercy to Sheikh Hussein!
<i>Guutuu biyya guutuu walitti deebinee Sheek Huseenihoo</i>	We returned to the land of the generous oh Sheikh Hussein!
<i>Allahu maraa Sheek Huseenihoo</i>	May Allah show mercy to Sheikh Hussein!
<i>Ulfaataan ulfaataa Sheek Huseenihoo</i>	The most respected one oh Sheikh Hussein!
<i>Isini wayyuu namni keessan wayyuu sheek Huseenihoo</i>	You and your followers are preferable oh Sheikh Hussein!

The other informal ritual performed by pilgrims is the lying down and kissing of the ground in front of the main gate, as well as the main Shrine of Sheikh Hussein. Sheikh Ahmad states that this is a different belief and practice. He explains this practice as follows:

It is the practice of the *awaama* (a term sometimes used by the Arsi Oromo to refer to followers of *waaqeffannaa*). The pilgrims that came here are from different religious groups. Bowing down and kissing the ground is not allowed in our *Kitaab* (Qur'an). Those who do this are ignorant of the book. They are ignorant people. They do this to show their love and devotion to Sheikh Hussein in their own way. Otherwise kissing the ground is unacceptable in our book.¹³⁶

Sheikh Idris also associates this practice with ignorance. He states that this practice does not exist in Islam nor does it exist in the history, teachings, or deeds of Sheikh Hussein or *awliya* (a saint). According to him, pilgrims who still perform this ritual are just ignorant of Islam, have no idea of the teachings of Sheikh Hussein, and are followers of an old Oromo tradition of bowing down in front of respected men. He is of the opinion that this should not be encouraged and bowing down should be done only for Allah.¹³⁷

Pilgrims also smear butter on the *baaji*, a big stone that is about 1.5 meter tall and found at the main gate, *karra guddoo*. Even if it is generally tolerated, this practice is not supported by the leaders of the shrine. Smearing the buildings with butter is the continuation of the old tradition of the *awaama*. There has been an attempt to stop this practice by advising pilgrims to smear the hair of poor women coming to the shrine instead of a stone or any other non-living structure in the compound. There is, however, resistance on the part of pilgrims to abandon this practice. For the pilgrims, it is a symbolic way of smearing it on Sheikh

¹³⁶ Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011 in Anajina.

¹³⁷ Interview on 04 November 2011 in Anajina.

Hussein.¹³⁸ The leaders do not consider this to be proper behavior. Some pilgrims do it because they wished and promised to do so while others do it because they saw someone else doing it and so they imitate it¹³⁹. The leaders do not purposefully follow pilgrims who do this and try to stop them, but I have seen many cases in which the leaders took the butter away from pilgrims caught smearing the stone or any other structure and gave it to other pilgrims who smeared their head with it.

The other practice in the informal category of rituals is the ritual of burning many joss sticks in the shrine of Sheikh Hussein, his two children, the burial place of the former *imaams*, in the shrine of Abd al-Kadir al-Djilani, and on the tombs of the *kaddaamis* of Sheikh Hussein. It is also a widespread practice to sprinkle perfume in and on the above mentioned structures. Sheikh Ahmad states that this is done to give a nice smell to the place which might have otherwise developed an uncomfortable smell because of the large number of pilgrims entering the smaller shrines.¹⁴⁰ But pilgrims' interpretation of this is different. They state that they do this to appease and make the *karaamaa* of the individuals to whom the shrines belong.

On leaving the shrines especially that of Sheikh Hussein, most pilgrims walk backwards until they are out. Pilgrims do this because they do not want to turn their backs to Sheikh Hussein.¹⁴¹ Sheikh Ahmad states that most pilgrims who do this are not Muslims or at least they are not Muslims with an adequate knowledge of the religion. This is associated with the practice of *awaama*. Muslims do not do that because it is not necessary to do it and it is also not permitted by the Qur'an.¹⁴²

The most important ritual that I term as a formal ritual is the *waaree* (noon, evening) ritual that takes place at *dhooqoo karraa* (the plain in front of the main gate). This ritual takes place every day during the major pilgrimages, which normally last for about five days. It takes place in two rounds: from 4-6 PM and from 8 PM-4 AM, hence the name *waaree* (noon/evening) ritual. The gathering at this place is said to have started during the time of Sheikh Hussein.¹⁴³ Most of the things that are performed here are believed to be continuations of what he used to do. This ritual is led by the spiritual leaders of the shrine and attended by large numbers of pilgrims. It is an interplay between many other rituals, such as the singing of a ritual song (*bahroo*), statements of miracles, handing over of votive gifts (*wareega*), asking for various favours (*niyyaa*), and *hadraa* (religious assembly for communal prayers). The fact

¹³⁸ Informal discussion with pilgrims, 03-05 November 2011 in Anajina.

¹³⁹ Informal discussion with pilgrims, 03-05 November 2011 in Anajina.

¹⁴⁰ Interview on 06 November 2011 in Anajina.

¹⁴¹ Informal discussion with pilgrims, 03-05 November 2011 in Anajina.

¹⁴² Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011 in Anajina.

¹⁴³ Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011 in Anajina.

that the *waaree* ceremony is composed of many other rituals is explained by Sheikh Ahmad as follows:

Waaree is a ritual where *jaalaloo* sheikh Hussein (fervent followers of sheikh Hussein) meet and declare the miraculous deeds of his *karaamaa*, offer gifts, help the poor in the form of clothes and cash. In the olden days, I know of people who came here because they did not have a mule to ride and they were given money to buy one. There were also quite many pilgrims who asked for a cow to milk and who were offered this. Today, money is collected from pilgrims for the needy. There are also Christians who came here and converted to Islam, declaring that Sheikh Hussein ordered them to do it. Money is collected and given for such people even if they do not need it or do not ask for it. The money collected during the *waaree* ritual is not kept aside. It is shared among the needy pilgrims and people who permanently live in this village. Since the money is collected from the pilgrims themselves, we give it back to those pilgrims who need it instead of keeping it on the side for a few groups or individuals to benefit from it.

The *waaree* ritual starts with the gradual gathering of pilgrims at the *dhooqoo karraa* (plain at the main gate) from 4 PM onwards. At about 6 PM, the majority of pilgrims are already there chewing *khat* (*Catha edulis*) and the ceremony starts with the singing of *bahro* (song in praise of Sheikh Hussein). It was not started during Sheikh Hussein's time. It started after he passed away. Upon hearing that Sheikh Hussein had passed away, one of his adherents started crying, saying *bahra kiyya ho, bahra kiyya ho* (oh my *bahr* (sea)!). This is how the song that praises Sheikh Hussein is said to have started. *Bahro* is a way of comparing Sheikh Hussein, his wisdom, and his *karaamaa* (charisma, spiritual power) with a *bahr*, an Arabic term for a sea. It changed over time. Even if it started as a way of expressing sorrow, through time it has evolved into praise of Sheikh Hussein and his miraculous deeds¹⁴⁴. The individuals singing *bahro* are known as *ulee* Sheikh Hussein. They carry *dhanqee* with one hand and cover one of their ears with the other hand in order to minimize the pilgrims' noise, to listen better for pitch and to stay focused while singing. They constantly move among the seated pilgrims while singing, while the pilgrims repeat the last word of the song.

¹⁴⁴ Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011 at Anajina.

Not everybody could be *ulee* sheikh Hussein. Only individuals whom God and Sheikh Hussein choose and to whom they give knowledge of the hymns could be *ulee* sheikh Hussein. They need to possess the knowledge of composing and memorising the songs and this is only given to them by God and Sheikh Hussein's *karaamaa*. Sheikh Ahmad states that the individuals who sing *bahro* do not write or study the hymns.¹⁴⁵ Two of the well-known singers, Mohammad Aliyi and Sheikh Awel, also claim that their talent to sing *baharo* is just a gift from Sheikh Hussein and Allah. They state that the hymns simply pop into their mind and that they never studied them by heart.¹⁴⁶ The hymns show the reverence in which Sheikh Hussein is held by pilgrims of diverse ethnic, religious and regional backgrounds and at the same time it narrates miracles he is said to have performed. Some of the hymns are addressed to Sheikh Hussein and glorifying his power. There are also hymns addressed to pilgrims in general narrating the story of Sheikh Hussein and instances surrounding his birth. Still some of the hymns deal with various social problems. Below some of the *bahro* hymns representing the abovementioned categories will be presented.

<i>Jimmatu si muudee gagaariin namatii</i>	The good people of Jimma made a pilgrimage to you
<i>Wallotu si muudee gagaariin namatii</i>	The good people of Wallo made a pilgrimage to you
<i>Wallaga si muudee gagaariin namatii</i>	The good people of Wallaga made a pilgrimage to you
<i>Silxetu si muudee gagaariin namatii</i>	The good people of Silte made a pilgrimage to you
<i>Sidaamatu si muudee gagaariin namatii</i>	The good people of the Sidama made a pilgrimage to you
<i>Alaabatu si muudee gagaariin namatii</i>	The good people of Alaba made a pilgrimage to you
<i>Gujitu si muudee gagaariin namatii</i>	The good people of the Guji made a pilgrimage to you
<i>Boorana si muudee gaggaariin namaati</i>	The good people of Borana made a pilgrimage to you
<i>Birka magganaanyaa aalama maraatii</i>	The source of meeting for the whole world
<i>Teettanii Gaara Kambaataa</i>	You sat on the hills of Kambata

¹⁴⁵ Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011 at Anajina.

¹⁴⁶ Interview on 05 November 2011 at Anajina.

<i>Fuulli goobana fakkaataa</i>	Your face resembles the moon
<i>Lugaa waamaniin hawwattaa</i>	You respond to calls in any language
<i>Baahroo yaa Nur Hussein</i>	Our sea and light Sheikh Hussein
<i>Sheeka hoo yaa Sheek Hussein</i>	Dear Sheikh, Sheikh Hussein
<i>Ka Rabbiin nuun qananiisee</i>	The one given to us by God
<i>Rasuuluu biyyoo sitti dhiisee</i>	Even the prophet entrusted the world to you
<i>Baahroo yaa Nur Hussein</i>	Our sea and light Sheikh Hussein
<i>Sheeka hoo yaa Sheek Hussein</i>	Dear Sheikh, Sheikh Hussein
<i>Ka Rabbii deeme oliinii</i>	The one God put above others
<i>Harama ceena waliini</i>	We shall go to the Haram together
<i>Baahroo yaa Nur Hussein</i>	Our sea and light Hussein

This popular hymn is a direct communication with Sheikh Hussein. It addresses him directly and it narrates how strong his *karaamaa* (spiritual power) is. The mentioning of various Oromo groups living in different parts of Ethiopia (Jimma, Wallaga, Guji, and Borana) as well as other non-Oromo groups, such as Silte, Sidama, and Alaba, shows that the cult of Sheikh Hussein crosses ethnic and regional boundaries. Mentioning in the hymn that the Prophet Muhammad has entrusted the world to Sheikh Hussein's care is probably an important way of showing how reliable and powerful Sheikh Hussein's persona is.¹⁴⁷ The metaphorical expressions such as his face as a moon and his personality as a sea and light are also important.

Some *bahro* hymns narrate the birth of Sheikh Hussein and the miracles surrounding his birth, which have already been discussed. These hymns strengthen the legend and give supporting evidence to some controversial parts of the legend concerning the family background of Sheikh Hussein, especially that of his mother. An excerpt of a *bahro* of this category is presented as follows:

<i>Haati Nuur Huseen deette</i>	The mother that gave birth to Nur Hussein
<i>Darajaa guddaa geette</i>	Has become revered
<i>Abelqaasim eebbifnaan</i>	When Abelqassim blessed her
<i>Ciniinsuu malee deette</i>	She gave birth without labor.
<i>Dheeratee samii bayee</i>	It has reached the sky in length
<i>Bal'atee ardii gayee</i>	It has spread over the earth in width

¹⁴⁷ A relatively similar but extended hymn has also been collected by Hussein (2005)

<i>Dhaloonni tolaa Baalee</i>	The birth of Bale's benefactor
<i>Halkkan Kiibxataa ta'e</i>	Occurred on a Tuesday night
<i>Shamsiyyaan hiree qabdi</i>	Shemsiya was lucky
<i>Haati Nur Huseen deette</i>	The Mother who gave birth to Nur Hussein.

Some of the hymns narrate how Sheikh Hussein never forget those who trusted in him and asked for his favour. This is indicated by the following excerpt:

<i>Magaadiraa rabbi qulfiin harka keessan keessaa</i>	The key to God's domain lies in your hand
<i>Bahrii Anajiina qabaa nu jabeessaa</i>	The Sea of Anajiina, do give us strength
<i>Jaalalloomaa waliin isini milkeessaa</i>	I pray together with the <i>jaalalloo</i>
<i>Nuroo Nuroo Nuroo Nuroo Nuroo Nuroo</i>	Nuro Nuro Nuro Nuro Nuro Nuro
<i>Keessan hiriirfannaan qalbiin fayyitihoo</i>	A soul that relies on you is healed
<i>Qalbii jaalalloo maraa fayyisanii</i>	He heals the soul of the <i>jaalalloo</i>
<i>Alaa manatillee namaa baldhiisanii</i>	He helps outside and inside one's home
<i>Haadhaf Abbaa irraa nu qananiisanii</i>	He treats us better than our mothers and fathers
<i>Fiixaa jaalalloo ni qananiisanii</i>	He treats the descendants of the <i>jaalalloo</i>

Some *bahro* hymns refer to power structures, social problems, and the role Sheikh Hussein is said to have played in the spread of Islam as the following excerpt indicates:

<i>Tasaafaarin shufeera hinta'u</i>	A traveller cannot be a driver
<i>Haaga yoomii rakkoo himannaa</i>	How long are we going to talk of problems?
<i>biyya teenyaa warqiin haa ba'u</i>	May gold be discovered in our country!
<i>Abbaa jaalala teenyaatihoo</i>	Our father of love
<i>gufuu nuu jala buqqisaa</i>	Remove obstacles
<i>Gufuu nuu jala buqqisaa chiginyii jaalalloo guddisaa</i>	Remove obstacles and sow the seeds of affection
<i>Warri imaanaa hinddabssineehoo Misxiraan katabsiisanihoo</i>	He practices his faith strictly and teaches secretly
<i>Dachii torbban keessa samii torbban keessa kitaaba bansiisanihoo</i>	He taught the book in the seven continents and in the seven skies
<i>Durii Nuura ta ifaatihoo isin waama lallabeetihoo</i>	Oh leader of all the lights, I call your name loudly

Fafaan kee nullee hin hanqqatu Ka bineensa mukaa dhaqabu Your beneficent force is extended to animals and trees, let alone us

While *bahro* singers sing hymns praising Sheikh Hussein, some pilgrims often experience trance. It is during the singing of *bahro* at *dhoqqoo karaa* that the other ritual called *arjooma* (generosity) takes place. This is the handing over of money and other valuable items such as clothes, mobile phones, and scarves. In this case, at least theoretically, there is no favour attached to the money or the items pilgrims give. They do it out of happiness when they hear the name of Sheikh Hussein or mention of his miracles. Pilgrims give money to the *ulee* (the person singing the hymns, occasionally encouraging the pilgrims in the name of Sheikh Hussein to be generous) who in turn gives the money to the spiritual leaders. This money is shared between two groups of people. Part of the money is given to needy pilgrims to pay for their transportation and to help their families back home. The remaining part is put aside to be shared among the *Darga/Sakina* (permanent residents of the village and care takers of the shrine).¹⁴⁸ The materials collected during this ritual, such as clothes, scarves, and shoes, are given to poor pilgrims who do not have enough to wear.

Even if money and other materials are generated because of the hymns sung by the *ulee*, they do not normally keep the money for themselves. They hand it over for the above mentioned purposes. The leaders, however, give them a share of the money. The most important advantage they have is their recognition as *ulee* Sheikh Hussein (a person who sings songs in praise of Sheikh Hussein). According to Sheikh Ahmad, when a certain *ulee* returns back to his place of residence, he is recognised by others as the one who sings *baharo* at *Dirre* (plain/village) Sheikh Hussein and earns his living by singing songs that praise Sheikh Hussein. He gets a lot of money, cattle, and/or cereals. Because of his knowledge of *baharo* and his songs at the Shrine of Sheikh Hussein, his status changes when he returns to his community and he earns respect.¹⁴⁹

The other ritual that takes place during the evening ceremony is the *wareega*¹⁵⁰ (handing over of votive offerings) ritual. It is also known as *galata* (gratitude) and *silata*. This refers to the handing over of money and other items such as food items, perfume, joss sticks, needles, flags, animals, and even stone for their fulfilled wishes. Before handing over the items they brought, however, they have to publicly declare their fulfilled wishes that are

¹⁴⁸ Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011 at Anajina.

¹⁴⁹ Interview on 06 November 2011 in Anajina.

¹⁵⁰ Make a vow, i.e., make a solemn promise to consecrate or offer something to a divine power if one's vow is fulfilled (Tilahun Gamta 1989: 596).

commonly referred to as *hikmaa/aja'bat* (miracles). The ritual leaders then repeat these declarations through loudspeakers so that all the pilgrims can hear about the miracles. Votive offerings can be done in two different ways. The first and the most frequent is the handing over of votive gifts personally. If a certain pilgrim whose wish is fulfilled could not make it to the center for various personal and family reasons, such as sickness, he/she could send the gift to other pilgrims travelling to the center. An offering delivered through a messenger is referred to as *amaanaa*. The messenger is also expected to publicly declare the miracles told by the sender. Even if most pilgrims make their wishes at their places of residence, there are some who give some money to the leaders, stating their wishes so that communal prayers can be done for the fulfilment of their wishes. These can be related to health, wealth, cattle, productivity, etc.

Pilgrims are free to decide on the fate of their offerings except they cannot take them back to their homes. After the public testimonies of miracles, pilgrims can hand their gifts to the spiritual leaders, who in turn distribute them among needy pilgrims, or pilgrims can take them back to their hosts in the village. Once at the house of their hosts, pilgrims either distribute what they brought as votive offerings among other pilgrims residing at the same place or give them to the host so that he/she decides what to do with the item. This is especially the case with regard to animals brought as votive offerings. After publically declaring the miracle at the ceremony, the pilgrims slaughter the animals at the *dagalee* (small houses) in which they are staying and eat it with their hosts and other pilgrims, or give the live animal to their hosts with the mandate to do whatever they want with it. There are also some pilgrims who buy sacrificial animals from the local market instead of bringing them from their place of residence.¹⁵¹

Failure to bring gifts as promised is believed to be counterproductive and leads to negative consequences. It is said that failure to comply one's wishes at the shrine of Sheikh Hussein is very problematic. Some sort of problem falls upon the individual or whatever he has wished for and received. If a person has wished to have a child and failed to hand over the votive offering, the person or the child faces problems such as sickness. There are also many pilgrims who said they had visions that Sheikh Hussein accused them, so they traveled to the village to ask for forgiveness and to fulfil their vows. They declare this publically, ask for forgiveness, and a prayer is done for reconciliation with Sheikh Hussein.

¹⁵¹ Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011 in Anajina.

The other ritual at the *waaree* ceremony is *duaayii* (prayer/blessing). This is mainly conducted by the leaders of the shrine. It involves praying to *Rabbi*¹⁵² for the fulfilment of various wishes of pilgrims. In this ritual, pilgrims usually pray to the *karaamaa* (beneficent force) of Sheikh Hussein to intervene between them and *Rabbi* and to grant them their wishes. This ritual is addressed to the entire congregation, it deals with earthly matters, and it reflects the motives of pilgrims to the shrine of Sheikh Hussein as follows:

<i>Ka ilmma barbaadu ilmma haa argatu</i>	May those who wish to have children be blessed with children
<i>Ka fayyaa barbaadu fayyaa haa argatu</i>	May those who wish to regain their health be endowed with health
<i>Ka jaalala barbaadu jaalala haa argatu</i>	May those who wish to gain affection be blessed with affection
<i>Ka duniyaa barbaadu duniyaa haa argatu</i>	May those who wish to get wealth be endowed with wealth
<i>Yaadni keessan guutuu haa ta'u</i>	May all your wishes come true
<i>Sheek Hussein amaanaa</i>	Peace to Sheikh Hussein
<i>Abbiyyoon amaanaa</i>	Peace to our father
<i>Bahriin Baalee wanta barbaadu siif haa keennu</i>	May the <i>Bahir</i> (sea) of Bale give you everything you wish
<i>Hajaan kee hunduu guutuu haa taatu</i>	May all your wishes be fulfilled
<i>Biyti tee biyya roobaa fi nagaa haa taatu</i>	May your country be a country full of rain and peace
<i>Nuurri Baalee rooba bay'ee fi gogaa irraa si haa eegani</i>	May the light of Bale save you from excessive rain and drought
<i>Duayiin Sheek Huseen lafa keetiratti haa roobu</i>	May Sheikh Hussein's blessings rain on your land
<i>Abbaa kubaaniyaa ta'i</i>	May you be the owner of a company
<i>Abbaa manaa ta'i</i>	May you own a house
<i>Wantta Sheek Huseen gaafatte hunduu gutuu haa taatu</i>	May what you asked of Sheikh Hussein be fulfilled
<i>Sheek Huseen si haa eegani</i>	May Sheikh Hussein protect you
<i>argadhu</i>	Be prosperous

¹⁵² In Arabic it refers to Allah (God) and it is the most commonly and frequently used name of Allah by the Muslims of the Arsi Oromo.

<i>Abbaa konkolaataa ta'i</i>	May you be the owner of your own car
<i>Dhibee namaaf horii irraa Sheek Huseen si haa eegani</i>	May Sheikh Hussein save you from human and cattle sickness
<i>Karaamaan Sheek Huseen biyya keetitti nagaan si haa deebisu</i>	May Sheikh Hussein's <i>karaamaa</i> return you home safely
<i>Rakkoon sirra hin gayiin</i>	May you be free of obstacles
<i>Lafti kee gaarii haa biqilchu</i>	May your field be fertile and productive
<i>Bilisummaa keeti argadhu</i>	May you be endowed with freedom
<i>Sheek Huseen maqaa keeti mazgaba isaan irratti haa barreessani</i>	May Sheikh Hussein put you into his registry
<i>Yoo rakkattu Sheek Huseen sii ha gargaarani</i>	May Sheikh Hussein help you in your difficulties
<i>Waggaa nagayaa nuf haa ta'u</i>	May it be a peaceful season
<i>Waggaa roobaa nuf haa ta'u</i>	May it be a rainy season
<i>Waggaa waligala nuf haa ta'u</i>	May it be a season of understanding
<i>Waggaa waraanaa ala nuf haa ta'u</i>	May it be a season free of conflict and war
<i>Waggaa dhibee ala nuf haa ta'u</i>	May it be a season free of sickness
<i>Waggaa eedsii ala nuf haa ta'u</i>	May it be a season free of AIDS
<i>Karaamaan Sheek Huseen biyya keeti irra Eedsii haa balleessu</i>	May Sheikh Hussein's <i>karaamaa</i> make our country free of AIDS
<i>Dhibamtooni eedsii haa fayyani</i>	May AIDS patients be cured
<i>Ilmi kee fatanaa haaba'au</i>	May your children pass their examinations
<i>Ilmi kee darajaa maraa haaga'au</i>	May your children be successful
<i>Ilmi kee abbaa kubbaaniyaa haa ta'au</i>	May your children own a company
<i>Xiqqaa guddaan wal haa jaalatu</i>	May the young and the old love each other
<i>Ilmi abbaa haa beeku</i>	May children know their fathers
<i>Ilmmi haadha haa beeku</i>	Ma children know their mothers!
<i>Waljibbaan haa dhabamttu</i>	May hatred disappear

The other ritual that takes place at *dhooqoo Karraa* and *Dinkure*¹⁵³ (pond of faith) during the pilgrimages is the *hadra* ritual. Østebø (2012: 97) states that the term originated from the Arabic word *hudur*, meaning presence. Sheikh Ahmad explains that *hadra* is similar to *baharo*, the only difference being the beating of drum on the *hadra* ritual. It has a similar

¹⁵³ It is said that Sheikh Hussein used to wash the ink from a wooden board after teaching the Qur'an in this pond, hence the name *Dinkure* (pond of faith).

purpose to *baharo*, with Sheikh Hussein being the praised saint. The beating of a drum is said to have multiple purposes. On one hand, it is believed to put pilgrims into ecstasy and trance, and on the other hand it has healing powers. For instance, a person who was possessed or attacked by *djinn* is believed to become healthy again because the *djinni releases* the person it has possessed upon hearing the sound of a drum.¹⁵⁴ Information provided by informants corroborates Østebø's (2012: 97) argument that the ritual implies the ritual of exorcism of spirits and that it has an ecstatic character with the beating of drum, dancing, and clapping.

The culmination of the pilgrimage to the shrine of Sheikh Hussein during the month of *Dhu l-Hijja*, the month of the pilgrimage to Mecca, is the *Arafat* prayer. During this day, pilgrims walk to the prayer ground situated about one kilometre from the shrine as early as 6:00 o'clock. Some pilgrims walk quietly in individual and small group bases while others walk in groups while reciting *Takbir*. Both men and women walk together; there is no segregation. On arriving at the place, however, women assume position behind men even if there is a consensus that those who came first take the front places. Some men are dressed in traditional Islamic robes and cover their heads with scarves and/or Islamic huts. Most men and women, however, are dressed in their casual/day-to-day clothes. The prayer starts and ends short before 8:00. After the end of the prayer, an announcement is made for pilgrims to remain seated until *khutbah* is read. Despite this, most pilgrims leave their places in a hurry, with women's ululation resonating in the air. Some pilgrims, however, remain behind listening to the *khutbah*.

Those who come from remote areas go back to the places they stayed in, gather their belongings and proceed to the buses to start the long journey back home. Those who want to stay in the village for a while, form small groups on the roads and start singing *bahro* and blessing each other in the name of Sheikh Hussein and Sof Umar (Sheikh Hussein's favourite disciple). Others return to the shrine where spiritual leaders make blessings for a safe return home.

4.1.5 Pilgrims' motives

Pilgrims travel to the shrine of Sheikh Hussein during the two major periods of pilgrimage, as well as any time of the year, for a variety of reasons. These motives can be inferred from testimonies made by pilgrims at the *waaree* ritual where pilgrims bear witness (*hikmaa*) of the miracles performed by invoking the name of Sheikh Hussein. These motives will be discussed in the following section.

¹⁵⁴ Interview on 6 November 2011 in Anajina.

Seeking Sheikh Hussein's *barakaa* (beneficent force/holy virtues) is one of the most important motives for pilgrims to flock to his shrine any time of the year and especially during the two major pilgrimages. All the other motives that will be discussed below are all somehow related to Sheikh Hussein's *barakaa* and *karaamaa* (charisma/spiritual power), which are believed to fulfil diverse wishes of pilgrims.

One of the most important motives of pilgrims to the shrine of Sheikh Hussein is related to healing. Many pilgrims travel there either to fulfill wishes related to their health (statement 1 and 2) or to pray for their health (statement 3). The following are quotes from interviews with pilgrims.

1. I am here to tell *hikmaa*. I was sick. I had pain in my belly and it was very painful. My family and my relatives wanted to take me to a doctor. I told them that I did not want to go to a doctor because Sheikh Hussein is my doctor. I could not work and I was not able to farm my land. Within three days of asking Doctor Sheikh Hussein to cure me, I regained my health completely. Then my eyes became sick and I could not see. I started using ointments but it was not helping. Then I asked Sheikh Hussein to treat me and I regained my sight...
2. I was sick and I was in bed for four months. I visited many hospitals and I spent a lot of money but no medicine could heal me. Then I called Sheikh Hussein. He came to me in my dreams and told me that *dirree* is the place to get my health back. He told me to come here and not to go to hospitals anymore. I came here last year and I prayed and I was also blessed. I am healthy since then. I am here now to thank Sheikh Hussein and to tell this *hikmaa*.
3. I have had a kidney problem for the last five years. I have gone to health centres and hospitals but I am still sick. I came here so that you could pray for my health.

Pilgrims also travel to the shrine of Sheikh Hussein for their family members' health, as the following pilgrims personal statements indicate:

1. This is my son and he is deaf. I came here to ask our father to return his hearing. I have also brought fifty *birr* with me.

2. I made the second vow in the name of my wife. She was sick for many years. Her belly was as big as a pregnant woman and I was told to take her to a hospital for an operation. I refused to take her to a hospital before asking the father of Bale for help. She also refused to go to a hospital before asking *Abbiyyoo* (our father) for his help. Then I came here carrying a flag and begged *Abbiyyoo* to make me and my wife healthy again. I made a solemn vow to bring a bull in return. Now both of us are healthy and my wife is also here with me. We never went to a hospital as other people suggested. We just came here and prayed, asked for Sheikh Hussein's help and drank *johaaraa* (holy soil).

There are also pilgrims who travel for issues related to their cattle, as the following two testimonies indicate:

1. I lost eight of my animals for unknown reasons. I came here to pray for the health of the rest of my animals.
2. One of my cows gave birth to a calf but refused to feed it and the calf had no other choice than death. I called *Abbiyyoo* to make the cow feed the calf and I promised that I would bring a sewing needle if this happened. Now the cow is standing in one place and feeding the calf and I came with the needle I promised.

The other motive related to health that attracts large number of pilgrims is healing. The first method of healing is a prayer invoking Sheikh Hussein's name whose *barakaa* (beneficent force) and *karaamaa* (spiritual power) is believed to have a healing power.¹⁵⁵ In this case a sick person tells of his sickness to the spiritual leaders who in turn tell the crowd. The leaders then start to pray for the health of a sick pilgrim and the other pilgrims repeat the prayer as the following testimony from a sick pilgrims indicates:

May her health return to her! May she be healthy before she returns home! May Sheikh Hussein's *karaamaa* rid her of her sickness!

The other popular healing method is the use of *jawaaraa*, also called *johaaraa*. This is a soil found in the shrines of Sheikh Hussein, Abd al-Kadir al-Djilani, the tomb of the *imaams*, as well as the son and daughter of Sheikh Hussein. It is brought from a place called *ija Dinkuree* (eye of *Dinkuree* (pond of faith)). It is a pond about one kilometre from the shrine. During the time of Sheikh Hussein, Qur'an was taught on a wooden board and after the end of

¹⁵⁵ Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011 in Anajina.

the lesson the wood was washed in this pond. The soil (*kotoora*) is dug there and brought to the shrine by the local people (men, women, and children) after performing ablution and becoming clean. Once it is in the shrine, it is referred to as *johaaraa*. Referring to it as soil once it is placed in the shrines is a mistake and considered an insult.¹⁵⁶ A few days before the major pilgrimages, new soil is always brought to the shrine and placed in all the tombs, especially in the tomb of Sheikh Hussein so that pilgrims do not dig and take all the soil inside which might destabilise or even destroy the shrines.¹⁵⁷ *Johaaraa* serves as medicine because Sheikh Hussein prayed to God to turn the soil in the places he stayed into medicine and heal the sick.¹⁵⁸

Confirming the medicinal power of *johaaraa*, Sheikh Ahmad states the following:

The healing power of *johaaraa* is proven and I am a personal witness. I am a man of the book and I know what is *haraam* (forbidden) and *halaala* (permissible). But I do not doubt the power of *johaaraa*. About thirty years ago, a Christian from Dire-Dawa (Southeast Ethiopia) came here. He had had belly pain for a long time and had visited various hospitals but his situation got worse to the level of not being able to eat. He finally came here. I mixed *johaaraa* with a glass of water and gave it to him to drink. The next morning, six big snake-like creatures came out of his belly. He started to eat immediately and he became fully healthy again.¹⁵⁹

Pilgrims also attest to the healing power of *johaaraa*. I met a woman I will call Sophia in the shrine of Sheikh Hussein while she was painting her face and her child's face, legs and body with the *johaaraa* and at the same time saying, "my father, reach for me". She rubbed his body so hard that the baby started crying. She told me that she came from Awash, a town about 800 kilometres from the shrine. She had travelled to the village to seek help for her four year-old daughter who was lame and could not walk. She said that she had tried every modern medicine without success. She had also tried *tsabal* (holy water), and *emet* (holy ash) in various churches, but to no avail. She said that she had heard about Sheikh Hussein a year before and this was her second pilgrimage to the shrine. She told me that her daughter is now walking, albeit slowly.¹⁶⁰

Another pilgrim I will call Almaz is Christian. She came from a village called Jaarraa, situated about 64 kilometres from the shrine. She was sitting in the shrine of Sheikh Hussein

¹⁵⁶ Abdulnasir, 05 November 2011 in Anajina.

¹⁵⁷ Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011 in Anajina.

¹⁵⁸ Abdulnasir, 05 November 2011 in Anajina.

¹⁵⁹ Interview on 06 November 2011 in Anajina.

¹⁶⁰ Informal discussion on 03 November 2011 in Anajina.

with her six year-old son. Both of them painted their faces with the *johaaraa* and they were also eating it. She was crying deeply but out of joy in a visible way. She said that she was crying out of happiness for all the good things the *karaamaa* (spiritual power) of Sheikh Hussein did to her nine years ago. Her husband became insane and he had to be tied to restrain him from hurting himself as well as others. She said that no medication could help. Finally she brought him to the shrine and she made a vow that she would walk to the shrine on foot every year if her husband became healthy again. A prayer was made for him and he drank the *johaaraa* mixed with water. He became healthy immediately and since then she has been walking on foot to the shrine twice a year.¹⁶¹

The healing power of *johaaraa* is also reflected in the following popular hymn sung during the pilgrimages:

<i>Baalee fi sayidiin amaanaa jedanii</i>	Bale and Seid (Sheikh Hussein) greets you
<i>Marfee kuma caalaa jawaarrii jedhanii</i>	The one they call <i>jawaaraa</i> is better than a thousand injections
<i>Biyya teenya tana jawaaratu qoorsaa</i>	It is <i>jawaaraa</i> that heals our country
<i>Aduun Anaajiinaa Jawaaratin qoorsaa</i>	The light of Anajina ¹⁶² (Sheikh Hussein) heals with <i>jawaaraa</i>
<i>Haroo tokkotu jira ka Lukkuu jedhanii</i>	There is a pond known as <i>Haroo Lukkuu</i> (pond of Chicken)
<i>Nama meeqatu fayyee ka Lubbuu jedhanii</i>	Many dying people have been healed
<i>Aduun Anaajiinaa haadhufu jedhanii</i>	The light of Anajina (Sheikh Hussein) invited them
<i>Jawaara isaanii haa dhugu jedhanii</i>	He told them to drink his <i>jawaaraa</i>

Drinking or washing with the water from the pond of *Haroo Lukkuu* (pond of chicken) is the other method of healing. The water of the pond is believed to have a healing power and pilgrims even refer to it as *Zemzem*. The healing power of the water is attributed to Sheikh Hussein's prayer and blessing that the water and the soil from places where he stood up and/or sat down and prayed should heal his followers from all sorts of sicknesses¹⁶³. After he dug the pond, he recited the Qur'an at the place forty times. There are many pilgrims who claim to have been cured of their sicknesses by drinking the water or washing themselves with

¹⁶¹ Informal discussion on 03 November 2011 in Anajina.

¹⁶² Anajina is the name of the village where Sheikh Hussein's shrine is situated and "the light of Bale" is the other name of Sheikh Hussein.

¹⁶³ Abdulnasir, 05 November 2011 in Anajina; Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November in Anajina.

it¹⁶⁴. Pilgrims who suffer from various internal sicknesses such as belly pain, drink the water, while those with external problems such as wound, blindness or lameness, wash the sick part of their body with it.¹⁶⁵ There are also people who take the water to their home. They keep it in their house and use it when their family member or cattle became sick. They mix it with normal water and wash with it or simply drink it.¹⁶⁶ During the pilgrimage, a man from the bureau of culture and tourism was distributing water-purifying tablets for free, but so rarely do pilgrims accept this, instead stating that it is not necessary to put medicine into another medicine. The healing power of the water of *Haroo Lukkuu* is also narrated through hymns, as the following excerpt of an Oromoic hymn indicates.

<i>Itti ha deebinu gandda haroo birraa</i>	Let's return to the village of the <i>haroo</i> (pond)
<i>Dhibee isin malee hinfayyineetu jiraa (2X)</i>	There are sicknesses that cannot be healed without it

Taking part in the *hadra* ritual is also an important method of healing. It has already been discussed that this ritual takes place at *dhooqoo Karraa* and *Dinkure* (pond of faith) and that *hadra* is similar to *baharo* (hymns in praise of Sheikh Hussein), the only difference being the beating of *dibbee* (drum) during the *hadra* ritual. The sound of the drum is said to have healing powers, especially for people who are said to have been possessed or attacked by *djinni*. It is widely believed that the attacking and/or possessing *djinni* releases the person upon hearing the sound of the drum.

The other motive attracting pilgrims to the shrine is related to wealth. Many pilgrims ask Sheikh Hussein's *karaamaa* to endow them with wealth while some pilgrims to the fact that they have acquired the wealth they desired. The latter is shown in the following testimony shows:

I asked Sheikh Hussein to give me wealth and he did. Now I have four buses and every year I transport his pilgrims for free.

Issues related to fertility are other important motives that attract large numbers of Pilgrims to Sheikh Hussein's shrine, as best illustrated by the following testimony.

I came here to ask for a child. I have been married for a long time but have not managed to get my own offspring. The people in my village gossip about me that I am no more than a man. They have

¹⁶⁴ Informal conversation with pilgrims, 04-06 November 2011 in Anajina.

¹⁶⁵ Sheikh Ahmad, 06 November 2011 in Anajina; Abdulnasir, 05 November 2011 in Anajina; Sheikh Idris, 04 November 2011 in Anajina.

¹⁶⁶ Informal conversation with pilgrims, 04-06 November 2011 in Anajina.

also nicknamed my wife *maseena* (barren, sterile). I ask Sheikh Hussein to give me a child and remove this name from us.

For this request, the leaders and the other pilgrims blessed him as follows:

Sheikh Hussein fulfils every wish. The barren are endowed with children and the sick regain their health. May *Abbiyyoo* give him as many children as he wishes! May the *karaamaa* of Sheikh Hussein give him a child before this year is over! May his wish be fulfilled and may he come next year with an offering! May the nickname to him and his wife be henceforth removed!

There are also many pilgrims who travel to the shrine to ask for forgiveness. These are mainly individuals who previously made a vow to visit the shrine and bring an offering during the pilgrimages in exchange for some sort of favour invoking Sheikh Hussein's name. However, once their wishes are fulfilled, some either forget or face other personal problems and fail to deliver personally or send the promised gifts. When something happens to what they received or to any one of their family members, they associate this to their failure to hand over the gifts as promised, so they travel to the shrine to ask for forgiveness. The following testimony by a Christian pilgrim is a case in point.

I came from Wollo to Bale during the reign of Haile Sellasie. I was only eighteen years old. I was pregnant when I was young but I lost the foetus. After that I could not get pregnant. Once, my husband and I went to the forest to collect firewood. When we returned home we were both tired. My husband wanted me to wash his feet. I told him I would not do it because I was also tired. For this he replied sarcastically and asked me in which month of pregnancy I was to complain of tiredness. I told him that pregnancy is not a cotton that I can weave or a basket than I can knot and I refused to wash his feet. Then I cried to Sheikh Hussein of Bale and I asked him either to send me back to my country or give me an offspring. In the night Sheikh Hussein came to me in my dreams. He called me in the Oromo language. I did not understand so I kept quiet. He called me the second time and I still kept quiet. Then he called me in Amharic and I replied. He gave me two small pieces of metal. I accepted that and put it on my head. Then I woke up suddenly and I felt that Sheikh Hussein was going to give me a child and I cried.

My husband called me mad. He complained that I was crying in the evening and now late in the night. He said I should let him rest in peace. I did not tell him about my dream. There was a respected man in our village and I decided to tell him about my dream. After listening attentively, he told me that it is a miracle that I was able to see Sheikh Hussein in my dream. He told me that Sheikh Hussein does not reveal himself often, even to his staunch followers. He interpreted my dream and he said that I am going to give birth to two daughters. He told me that I should come here to his shrine. I came here carrying barley and wheat. I entered his shrine and asked him to give me a child. I told him that I would not trouble him for richness. Within a year I gave birth to my first daughter. She grew up and before I manage to bring her here there was a revolution and I was afraid to come here during the turmoil. She then left Ethiopia and travelled abroad where she died at a young age. Now I have other children as well but they are sick and no medicine can heal them. I am here to ask for Sheikh Hussein's forgiveness.

Some pilgrims also visit the shrine of Sheikh Hussein and ask for his favour to help them in their legal dispute. This case is illustrated by the following testimony.

I came from Harar and I am Sheikh Hussein's devotee. Whenever I have had problems, I have turned to Sheikh Hussein for help and he has helped me on a number of occasions. Now an individual has accused me falsely for something I have not done. I have to appear before a judge tomorrow but I came here, abandoning that order. I came here to ask you to pray for me that the case against me would be dismissed.

Pilgrims travel to the center to ask Sheikh Hussein's *karaamaa* help them find the whereabouts of their lost relatives as indicated by the following two cases

1. My son joined the army and I have not heard from him for two years now. If Sheikh Hussein's *karaamaa* helps me find my son, I will come back next year and bring ten *birr* with me.
2. My son joined the federal police and I have not heard from him for two years. I came here so that you pray for the safe return of my son. I know that every wish expressed at this gate is

fulfilled. I came here so that Sheikh Hussein searches for my son. His name is Amin.

Some pilgrims who travel to the shrine of Sheikh Hussein to seek success for members of their family as the following testimony shows:

I am here to bring *wareega* (offering). I promised Sheikh Hussein that if my son became a medical doctor I would bring a bull with a flag of Ethiopia tied to its horn. Now my son has become a doctor and I am here with the gift as promised.

I also met a pilgrim in the main shrine of Sheikh Hussein. He was walking around Sheikh Hussein's grave for more than two hours saying nothing, and only crying. Another person told of the miracle that Sheikh Hussein woke him up from death. He said that Sheikh Hussein picked him up with his right hand while dying and when he woke up his relatives were crying because they thought he was dead.

4.2 The pilgrimage to Sof Umar Guutoo: *Muuda* Sof Umar Guutoo

4.2.1 Location of the Pilgrimage Center

The Sof Umar Guutoo pilgrimage center is dedicated to Sof Umar. Although Braukämper (2010: 716) states that Sof Umar originally came as a missionary to Bale from the Tigray region in northern Ethiopia he also correctly comments that information about the life and deeds of Sof Umar is almost non-existent except the miracles attributed to him (Braukämper 2010: 716). However, informants stress his local origin and state that he was the favourite disciple of Sheikh Hussein.¹⁶⁷ The Sof Umar Guutoo pilgrimage center is situated at a place called Tememo, also known as Sof Umar, in the Nansabo *woreda* of Western Arsi. It is situated about 500 kilometres to the southeast of Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia.

For individuals travelling from Addis Ababa, the bus journey takes them through cities and towns of all sizes such as Bishoftu, Zway, Shashamane, Kofele, and Dodola and ends in Worqa, the last and smallest town, where the road in this direction comes to an end. From Worqa one has to walk or travel on horseback for more than 50 kilometres to reach the pilgrimage center. Except those who own their own horses, walking is the only option for the majority of pilgrims and others travelling to the centre. Theoretically, renting horses is an alternative, but it is difficult to find owners willing to rent their horses for two major reasons.

¹⁶⁷ Personal interview with Sheikh Tahir Godana, 23 December 2010 at Tememo; personal interview with Sheikh Garad Hussien, 22 December 2010 at Tememo. Sheikh Tahir claims his knowledge of this place as he has been visiting it every year since 1968. Sheikh Garad is one of the two administrators of the site and the overseer of the rituals.

The first reason is religious. The majority of the inhabitants of the area have embraced Orthodox Islam and they consider renting their horses to people travelling to the pilgrimage center, which they consider as a pagan and un-Islamic practice, as a sin. The second reason is related to the economic activity of the region, which is famous for its coffee production. One of the two major annual pilgrimages to the center takes place in the month of December, which is dedicated to Sof Umar, the saint. This month is also the time when farmers living in the area gather their coffee produce and sell it for a relatively good price to coffee investors operating in the region. As a result, the farmers are not in urgent need of money so they opt to leave their horses to graze freely and use them for themselves. During the second pilgrimage in June, which is a very rainy time in the area, more farmers are willing to rent their horses, but only relatively few pilgrims brave the rain and the hilly, slippery terrain leading to the pilgrimage centre.

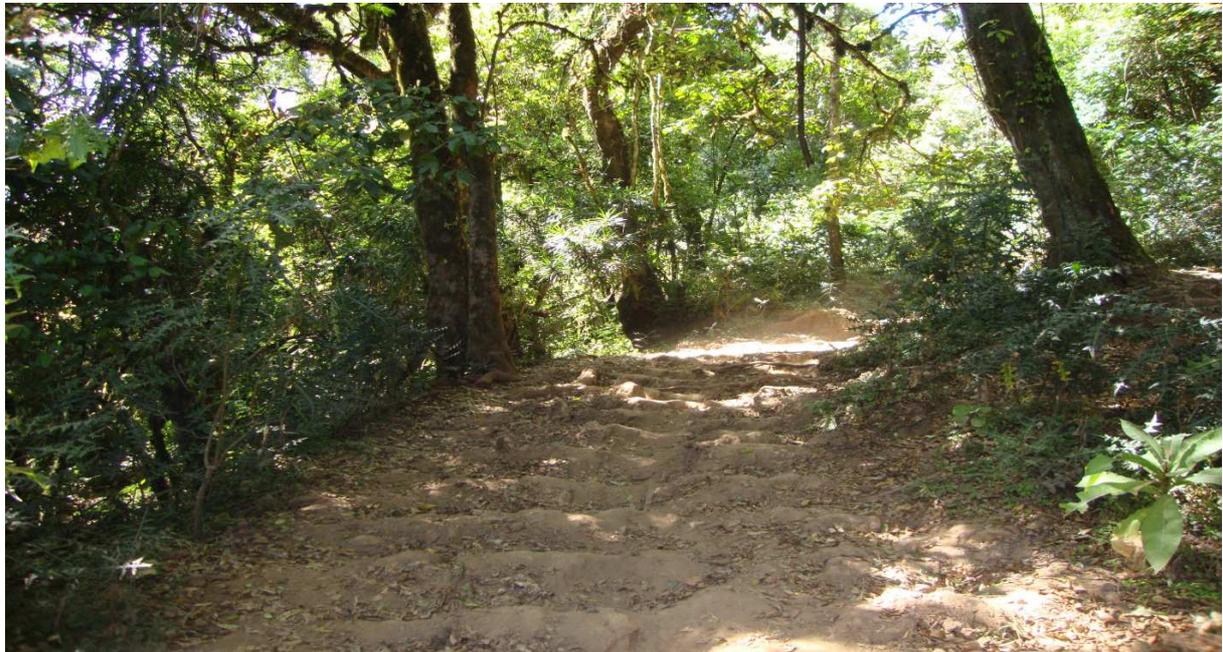


Figure 15: part of the road to the Sof Umar Guutoo pilgrimage center.

Photo by Gemechu J. Geda, December 2010.

4.2.2 The story

A long time ago there was a catastrophe caused by *qollee* (*djinni*). This killed all the animals and humans living in the area about two *jaarrraa* (centuries) ago; then this happened again seven years later. After the catastrophe was over and other people moved to the area, they found the only survivor, a woman named Urji Korma in the *holqqa* (cave), which later became the apex of pilgrimages to the area. When she was found, she was carrying a spear and hunting wild animals to feed herself and survive. Even though she was a woman, she was not married and she carried a spear and a knife, which are usually only carried by men. It is

because of her survival in the cave while other people perished that people started to believe in the spiritual power of the cave and started to travel to the site to pray. Peoples' prayers invoking the site started to be fulfilled so they started to return with votive offerings. Those who could not bear children, who were sick, and who lost their horses or cattle would pray for the center. When they received what they desired, they would bring *galatu* (votive gifts).¹⁶⁸ Similarly Sheikh Garad, who travels to the site every year and has been taking part in various rituals for the last 67 years, said that the place where pilgrims are congregating now is not the original worshipping place for the pilgrimage. It used to be down in the cave. Over time it was changed to the open space to avoid chaos because of the ever-increasing number of pilgrims and the lack of enough space in the cave to accommodate all the pilgrims at one time.¹⁶⁹

About 67 years ago the pilgrimage site was moved from the cave to the open plateau. A well-respected individual named Haji Tamam Haji Adam Zikri came to the area from Anajina in Bale. He observed that the cave was too small for the large numbers of pilgrims visiting the area and that they were also suffocating from the smoke inside, so he decided the site should be moved to the open plateau not far from the cave. The land where the site is now located was claimed by eight individuals who were quarrelling over its ownership. Haji Tamam Haji Adam Zikri advised them not to quarrel over the holy ground, which belongs to the *awliyaa* (saint). He suggested they and their descendants should be the *saddeetta* (eight) administrators of the site. In this manner, the claimants donated the land as a pilgrimage site and they became the first *saddeetta*.¹⁷⁰ According to another story, Sof Umar was said to have elected eight individuals to oversee the various activities at the pilgrimage center in Bale, so the pilgrims to Sof Umar Guutoo in Arsi also selected a *saddeetta*, following Sof Umar's original actions.¹⁷¹

There are three groups who are responsible for the administration of the site. The highest level is composed of two *Abbaa-wanbbaraa* (lit. father of the chair), who are the main *bulchaa* (administrators) of the site. The two *Abbaa-wanbbaraa* (chairmen) are the highest authority figures who are responsible for the center, but they do not lead rituals nor do they do not walk around and attend every ritual. Instead, pilgrims come to where they are sitting and pay their respect; the two leaders simply wait at their designated place. Although there is nothing that forbids them from attending rituals, it is considered more respectable and

¹⁶⁸ Personal interview with Sheikh Tahir Godana, 23 December 2010 at Tememo.

¹⁶⁹ Personal interview with Sheikh Garad Hussien, 22 December 2010 at Tememo.

¹⁷⁰ Sheikh Tahir, 23 December 2010 at Tememo.

¹⁷¹ Sheikh Garad, 22 December 2010 at Tememo.

acceptable for them to sit at their place and meet pilgrims.¹⁷² The *saddeetta*, the next administrative group, is subordinate and assistant to the *Abbaa-wanbbaraa*. This group is made up of eight elders who organize people under themselves and take the responsibility of administering different aspects at the site during the pilgrimages. Nothing is done without their knowledge and approval. Even those who want to come and pay homage, and ask for financial or other forms of assistance, should first consult with them.

The third group of administrators is known by the name *torbbii* (seven). It is made of seven individuals who are mostly assistants to the *saddeetta*. If something happens and the *saddeetta* are needed and thus busy or unavailable, the *torbbii* step in their place and take the responsibility of overseeing the various activities at the center. The *torbbii* can also ask the *shanoo* (five) for help. Each person in the *torbbii* and *shanoo* is selected from a different *gosa* (clan). If there is a need to choose from only two or three tribes, the numbers selected from each tribe are equal in number. If four individuals are selected from one tribe, the other four are chosen from another. The *Abbaa-wanbbaraa* and the *saddeetta* are not replaced as long as they are alive. When they pass away, their responsibility passes to their children and their descendants who then assume the role of *Abbaa-wanbbaraa* and *saddeetta*. It does not leave their lineage. The reason for this is that the clan of the *saddeetta* and *Abbaa-wanbbaraa* is one of the most respected and honourable clans of the Arsi Oromo living in the area. They are believed to have the ability and responsibility to maintain the social cohesion of pilgrims.¹⁷³

The pilgrimage site became known as Sof Umar about 100 years ago. At that time, Haji Adam, a known and respected *qaallicha* (traditional Oromo priest, wise man) who lived in the area, prayed in the cave and named it after Sof Umar. Until that time, the place was simply known by the name *guutoo* (fulfilled or one who fulfils) because every wish made at this place was fulfilled.¹⁷⁴

4.2.3 Pilgrimage periods

Before the advent of Haji Temam from Anajiina 67 years ago, people used to go to the center and pray any time they wanted. Haji Temam, who came with his experience of the pilgrimage to *Dirree* Sheikh Hussein, decided that people should make a bi-annual pilgrimage to the center.¹⁷⁵ Pilgrims now travel to Sof Umar Guutoo twice a year, i.e., every six months. The first pilgrimage is called *Ashuura*. It takes place in the month of *Arfaasa* (December), also called *ji'a* Sof Umar (the month of Sof Umar). The second pilgrimage is known as

¹⁷² Sheikh Garaad, 22 December 2010 at Tememo.

¹⁷³ Sheikh Tahir, 23 December 2010 at Tememo.

¹⁷⁴ Sheikh Garaad, 22 December 2010 at Tememo.

¹⁷⁵ Sheikh Tahir, 23 December 2010 at Tememo.

Rajaba and it takes place in June.¹⁷⁶ At the moment, there are no permanent religious/ritual houses at Sof Umar Guutoo. Pilgrims erect temporary huts known as *dagalee*. This is due to a incident six years ago, when unknown vandals dismantled and burned down more permanent huts that had been used for various ritual purposes at the center.

On their journey to the centre, most male pilgrims carry *halanggee* (whip), *dhanqee/ulee/baallaa* Sheikh Hussein (a Y-Shaped stick), and *eeboo* (spear) while female pilgrims carry *gaadii* (leather and/or rope for tying the back legs of cows during milking) and *siinqee* (ritual stick). The Y-Shaped stick is named after Sheikh Hussein because the first person to carry a stick with such form was Sheikh Hussein himself. Since he was a great sheikh and teacher of the Qur'an, he placed his Qur'an on the stick during his studies. He also used it for safe keeping from *najaasaa* (dirt). Following the practices of Sheikh Hussein, pilgrims come with their own *dhanqee*. Those who come without *dhanqee* will also buy one before they return home.¹⁷⁷ This serves as a confirmation that an individual has come on pilgrimages to the centre. Even if the stick has no religious function, such as a walking stick (*ulee*), it is always good to have some kind of stick with oneself. A person who travels without carrying a stick may encounter problems. He/she is not able to defend himself/herself from danger. For example, if a dog dares to attack him, he/she is not able to stop the attack. There are criteria for choosing or making sticks: most sticks are made of strong types of wood; and they must consider the nature of the branches that make the Y-shape since woods with straight shapes, such as *harooressa* (*Grewia bicolor*), are preferred. Other than these criteria, there is no special type of wood that is chosen for this purpose. Male pilgrims carry a whip and a spear because they are symbols of masculinity.¹⁷⁸ A whip is used to whip a horse/mule to ride faster, and a spear has always been used as a weapon by the Arsi Oromo since ancient times.

People travel to the area to pray in the name of Sof Umar and Sheikh Hussein for various reasons. Those who are not able to bear children pray to *Rabbi* to give them (a) child/children that they will ultimately receive. Poor people travel to the site to wish for prosperity; they obtain the wealth they are seeking. Sick people also visit the place and pray for their and their relatives' health and well-being. People who are not able to find a husband or a wife travel to the site during one of the pilgrimages to pray for a life partner. It is widely believed that it does not matter how long it takes, but everybody who travels to the center or

¹⁷⁶ Personal interview with Sheikh Faannoo on 10 February 2011 in Nansabo.

¹⁷⁷ Personal interview with Sheikh Tahir, 23 December 2010 at Tememo.

¹⁷⁸ Whips are used for much more than just riding fast which is considered masculine. They are also markers in negotiations, weddings, dispute resolution ceremonies, etc. They have actual physical and ceremonial purposes. And the spear could be associated with hunting, war and ceremonies.

simply invokes the name of Sof Umar while at home and wishes for something will ultimately obtain it; they will then travel to the center during the pilgrimages to express their gratefulness.¹⁷⁹ Some of the motives of pilgrims to undertake pilgrimages to Sof Umar Guutoo are best illustrated by the following two personal testimonies told in public:

1. My wife was pregnant and she had complications. I made a vow to Sof Umar that I would bring a flag of Ethiopia and *killa* (wooden container filled with butter and roasted coffee beans) if she gave birth safely. This was six months ago. Now she has given birth to a healthy baby. I brought the flag and *killa* as *galatu* (gratitude) as I promised. My wife and the baby are also here with me now (Hussein Genemo).

2. This is a place of *awliyaa*. Many times I have asked for help and I have received it. I brought a bull as *galatu*. When I came here for the first time in 1989, I did not own property and I did not have a family. I was poor. Here they prayed for me and I was blessed with riches and a family (Kadir Tiffo).

In addition to the two personal testimonies above, Sheikh Garad, one of the two *Abbaa-wanbbaraa* told the following story:

There was a person who was sick and spent about ten years in bed. They (he and his family) visited many health centres but he could not be treated to regain his health. He finally made a prayer with the name of the center and promised to bring a sacrificial animal if he became healthy again. He also sent a message for people to pray for him at the center and they prayed for him. He immediately became healthy and came here within six months. This is a big story and miracle. Because I am one of the *Abbaa-wanbbaraa*, I know of thousands of people whose wishes are fulfilled. There are people for whom we prayed so that they would be endowed with children and they obtained them. There were people who suffered from poverty and who came and asked us to be free of poverty. Their wishes have been fulfilled and they brought many sacrificial animals. Even when thieves steal the property of an individual, he prays to this center for the thieves to be caught. Even if the thieves take property such as cattle to a distant land, it does not take long for the thieves to be caught and for the cattle to be returned to the owner. This is all the work of *Rabbi* and the power of this place and not that of a human being. The miracles performed at this center cannot be easily narrated and remembered because there are so many. Pilgrims publicly declare what they wished and what they received and they bring the promised gifts with them.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ Personal interview with Sheikh Garaad, 22 December 2010 at Tememo.

¹⁸⁰ Sheikh Garaad, 22 December 2010 at Tememo.

4.2.4 Rituals

Showing gratitude- *hamdaa galfachuu*

Most pilgrims travel on foot to reach the site of Sof Umar Guutoo, while few travel on horseback. Shortly before reaching the ritual site, pilgrims rest at an open place named *lafa hamdaa* Sof Umar (land of thanking Sof Umar). It is an open space completely devoid of trees even though it is located deep in the middle of a forest. It is said that it has always existed naturally without trees. It is also the place where Sof Umar took rest. Since then, all pilgrims have stopped there to rest and to thank God for bringing them back there safely.¹⁸¹ They praise *Rabbi* and Sof Umar for returning them to this plain again, saying, ‘*Alhamdulillah Rabbi La Alamin* (praises and thanks be to *Rabbi*). There are three directions that lead pilgrims to the center. All three directions have their own *hamdaa* where pilgrims take rest and praise *Rabbi* and Sof Umar. The first road comes from the direction of Tememo, the second from the direction of Orera and the third from Faca’aa.¹⁸²



Figure 16: *Lafa hamdaa* Sof Umar on the road from Tememo.

Photo by Gemechu J. Geda, December 2010.

Greeting- *Salaamoo*

After thanking God and Sof Umar at *Lafa hamdaa* Sof Umar, pilgrims proceed to and gather at *Gooba Salaamoo* (plateau of greetings) on a Tuesday. All the rituals start with this gathering where the *saddeettaa* bless the pilgrims. Prayers are also made for *Waaqa* to endow them with a peaceful year, good productivity, a stable and supportive government, proper

¹⁸¹ Sheikh Faannoo, 10 February 2011 in Nansabo.

¹⁸² Sheikh Garaad, 22 December 2010 at Tememo.

rain, and abundant grass for the animals. The decision to gather on a Tuesday was made by Haji Temam 67 years ago. At *Gooba Salaamoo* pilgrims greet Sof Umar saying *weebilehoo hullee garaada kiyya deebinehoo* (Oh Sof Umar! We have come back to you!). *Salaamoo* is the Oromic corruption of *salam*, an Arabic term for peace which is used for greetings. At Sof Umar it refers to a place where pilgrims gather, greet Sof Umar and conduct prayers. Pilgrims praise *Rabbi* and *Waaqa* for their fulfilled wishes and ask him to pray for the fulfilment of their future wishes as well. Pilgrims cut *shifaa*, spiritual grass which has been an important part of any Oromo religious ritual since ancient times, and hold it during the ceremonies. At this gathering, participants also join together in singing the *bahro* (songs in praise of Sheikh Hussein and Sof Umar) by *ulee* Sheikh Hussein (a person singing *bahro*).¹⁸³ The following is part of a song that praises Sof Umar:

<i>Sheikh Ililaah amaanahoo</i>	I believe in you Sheikh
<i>Bahra jaalalloo jedhee mirgarraan silaalahoo</i>	I call you sea of love and see you on the right side
<i>Simalee nuu diddee dibbeen mana aalamaa</i>	Even the drum refuses to make sound without your help
<i>Nama isin jaalatu rabbiin ni araaramaa</i>	<i>Rabbi</i> forgives your followers
<i>Durriyyee fakkaatullee namni kee miaayamaa</i>	Even if they look bad, your followers are peaceful

Bahro Sheikh Hussein is sung at Sof Umar Guutoo because pilgrims who congregate at the site also revere Sheikh Hussein, invoking his name in songs. In effect, pilgrims invoke both Sheikh Hussein and Sof Umar's names in their prayers, in the way they mention the name of the *nabi* (Prophet) Mohammad, in order to ensure reliable fulfilment of their prayers. Sheikh Hussein is regarded as *awliyaa hanggafa* (eldest saint) among the Ari Oromo. Sof Umar and his contemporaries were his *darasaa* (disciples). It is also believed that Sof Umar Guutoo is one of the places visited by Sheikh Hussein. As evidence of this visit, my informants showed me *faannoo gaangee* sheikh Hussein (hooves of Sheikh Hussein's mule). These are a series of fossilized hoof prints at a river bank at place called Hooraa Horem, close to Sof Umar Guutoo. According to the story, Sheikh Hussein travelled in this direction during one of his journeys across the country. Because the ground, which is covered with stones, was so slippery, the sheikh's mule could not walk properly. *Rabbi* saw the problem, so he made

¹⁸³ Sheikh Garaad, 22 December 2010 in Nansabo.

the stone soft, which enabled the mule to walk easily. This is how the sheikh managed to continue his journey.

When the *ulee* sing *bahro*, pilgrims give money to him and the *saddeettaa*, who in turn distribute it to: the needy living in the area, poor pilgrims, such as those who are unable to work or who do not have enough to eat, and fatherless or parentless children. This money given by pilgrims is called *arjooma* (generosity). *Arjooma*, however, does not refer only to the money given during *bahro* singing but to any other useful item that pilgrims give, such as clothes, shoes, and ornaments. Some pilgrims give money for their fulfilled wishes while others give money to ask for a favour, including to be granted: a child, wealth, health and the alleviation of other personal problems.¹⁸⁴ Pilgrims also give two birr each. This money is called *kaayoo*. It is then shared among the *saddeettaa* and *Abbaa-wanbbaraa* because they do not get paid for organizing and administering the site and the ceremonies during the pilgrimages.¹⁸⁵

The singing of *bahro* is accompanied by the beating of *dibbee salaamoo* (drum of the *salaamoo*). The beating of a drum has no religious function. It is to arouse and encourage pilgrims to sing and to give beauty to the songs. Informants claim that the beating of a *dibbee* does not oppose the religious practices at Sof Umar Guutoo and the Qur'an. In the past, even in Islam, the *dibbee* was used. Recently orthodox Muslims have been against beating *dibbee* because they are following a stricter, ultra-Orthodox interpretation of Islam. That is actually a cause of disagreement between Muslims who travel to Sof Umar Guutoo on pilgrimages and those who do not. The person beating a drum is simply known as “*namicha dibbee dhahu*” (a drum beater). Individuals who beat *dibbee* at Sof Umar Guutoo rarely make even slight mistakes in the process. These individuals have acquired the skills from other individuals who play and through practice. Someone who is experienced and who plays better than all the others is chosen by ritual leaders to beat a *dibbee*. As long as this expert player is around, only he can beat a *dibbee*. When this person is not around, the leaders look for someone else to do it. This applies to *ulee* Sheikh Hussein as well. As long as he is alive and at the centre during the pilgrimages, he is not changed or replaced by somebody else. He always sings the *bahro*.¹⁸⁶

At the end of the *salaamoo* gathering, the *saddeettaa* distribute *shifaa* among the pilgrims. *Shifaa* has been a ritual tree for the Oromo since ancient times. Oromo religious and social rituals make use of the following tree types: *leemman* (*Arundinaria alpina*), *garambbaa*

¹⁸⁴ Sheikh Faannoo, 10 February 2011 in Nansabo, Sheikh Garaad, 22 December 2010 at Tememo.

¹⁸⁵ Sheikh Tahir, 22 December 2010 at Tememo.

¹⁸⁶ Sheikh Garaad, 22 December 2010 at Tememo, Sheikh Tahir, 23 December 2010 at Tememo.

(*Hypericum revolutum*), *xiribbaa* (*Bersama abyssinica*), *anshaa*, and *waddeessa* (*Cordia abyssinia*). After receiving *shifaa*, pilgrims walk to the place where the major rituals such as *wareega* (votive offering/sacrifice), *waziiza* also called *wasiisa* (ritual fire), *ciincaa* (burning the heads of sacrificial animals), *hadraa* (group prayer and dance around the ritual fire), *waarida* (song praising Sof Umar), *dhibaayyuu* (libation), *killa* ('slaughtering' coffee beans), and *xiliitee* (roasting coffee beans with butter) take place. After reaching the main place, where the *wasiisa* ritual is held, the *saddeettaa* collect the *shifaa* from the pilgrims and set in front of them.¹⁸⁷

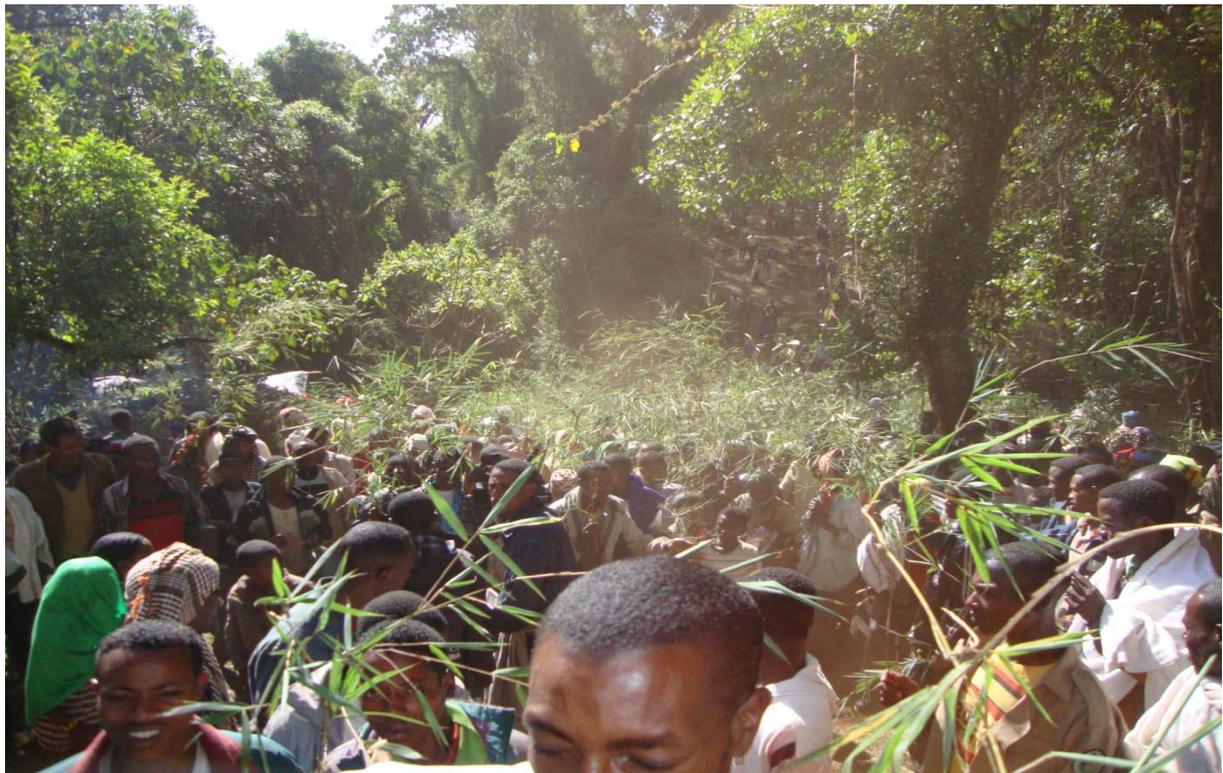


Figure 17: pilgrims carrying *Shifaa*.

Photo by Gemechu J. Geda, December 2010.

***Wareega* (votive offering/animal sacrifice)**

After the *salaamoo* gathering and walking the short distance to the main ritual place, the two *Abbaa-wanbaraa* (administrators) of the site sit on the *shifaa* collected from the pilgrims under a big *anshaa* tree. The tree and the soil under the tree, which is called *johaaraa*, has healing powers. If sick people are brought under it, the *anshaa* tree and the *johaaraa* heal them and they become healthy again. At this point in the pilgrimage, the *saddeettaa* start the task of overseeing the rituals taking place, one of which is the *wareega* (handing over of votive offerings). This is what people do when their wishes are fulfilled.

¹⁸⁷ Sheikh Faannoo, 10 February 2011 in Nansabo.

They pray in the name of Sof Umar at the site or even from their area of residence when they are faced with various problems such as sickness, lack of children, and poverty, and at the same time they make various vows to keep if their prayers are answered. For example, they make a prayer for *Rabbi* to fulfil their wishes through the intermediary of Sheikh Hussein and/or Sof Umar and they promise to bring items as votive gifts. Some pilgrims promise to bring a bull or a sheep of a certain colour. In all cases, pilgrims should bring what they promised. If they promise to bring a black bull, they must do so. If they promise to bring a sheep, they should also do as they stated. If they promise to bring five *birr*, then they must bring the five *birr* and nothing more or less or a replacement for the five *birr* they pledged. The general name for all the items pilgrims bring is *galatu* (gratitude).¹⁸⁸

There is no restriction on items that pilgrims should bring as votive offerings. Pilgrims are entitled to promise whatever they want and bring only what they have promised. They can bring black, grey or white coloured animals, as long as they vowed to bring animals of certain colours. No one forces pilgrims to prefer a certain type of colour. It is up to them to decide by the time they make their vows. Pilgrims also bring butter as offerings for their fulfilled wishes. This is especially the case when a cow of a certain pilgrim is sick. They usually promise to bring butter prepared from the milk of that particular cow if the cow becomes healthy again. When the cow is healthy again, the owner milks it, prepares butter out of it and brings it during one of the pilgrimage periods as a votive offering.

If a person believes in the power of Sof Umar and the center, and if s/he prays for the fulfilment of his/her wish and the wishes are fulfilled, s/he must bring what s/he promised. If s/he does not keep this promise, it is widely believed that some kind of misfortune falls upon this person, his/her family, and/or property. If something like this happens to individuals or any of their relatives or their belongings, they normally assume that it happened to them because they did not keep their vow and they will ask for forgiveness and fulfil their vows immediately. If a person does not know what caused this disaster to him/her, his/her family or property, then he/she goes to a *Raagaa* (fortune teller with the ability to predict what has happened to someone in the past as well as what will happen in the future) to find out what caused the misfortune. If the *Raagaa* finds out that the suffering is caused by the individual's failure to honour his/her vows, he advises this person to fulfil his promises.¹⁸⁹

Animals brought as offerings during the pilgrimages are all slaughtered and the meat is distributed among pilgrims. Nothing should be taken back home. No one is allowed to take

¹⁸⁸ Sheikh Faano, 10 February 2011 in Nansabo.

¹⁸⁹ Sheikh Tahir, 23 December 2010 at Tememo.

it and use it for personal benefits. It does not matter how small or big, the meat from a sacrificial animal is distributed among the pilgrims on an equal and fair basis. No one is left out intentionally. The distribution is done by *manguddoota* (elders). Sacrificial animals are slaughtered on Tuesday around 3-4 p.m. Pilgrims who are followers of *Waaqeffannaa* touch the blood of the sacrificial animal and paint their foreheads and/or their faces. This action is called *dhiiga tuquu* (touching blood). The skin of sacrificial animals is not sold. It is cut into smaller pieces and tied on top of every woman's *siinqee*.

The offering of sacrifices started about 150 years ago. There was a rich man named Dambalo. He had a lot of cattle but did not have any offspring who could inherit his property. He was passing by the centre during one of the pilgrimages when the pilgrims asked him to give them an animal for slaughtering. He told them he would give them an animal if they prayed for him to receive a child. One year later, he had a child, so he returned to the pilgrimage centre with a sacrificial animal. This was the first animal to be offered as a gift and sacrificed at the centre and this tradition is still practiced.¹⁹⁰

Ritual fire (*Waziiza*)

The burning of the ritual fire, *waziiza*, (also called *wasiisa*) takes place after the *wareega* ritual. It takes place on a Tuesday at about 6 PM. Pilgrims go to the nearby forest to gather wood. It is not allowed to cut a tree for this purpose. Pilgrims collect wood that is already dry and has fallen down. They create fire by friction, i.e., by rubbing one piece of wood against another. It is not permitted to use a lighter, matches, or an already existing fire to light *waziiza*. According to oral histories, the Oromo have been using friction to light a fire. The Oromo have always created fire this way whether it was for when they went to war, when they travelled from one place to the other, or when they travelled on pilgrimages.. The task of burning *waziiza* is entrusted to the *saddeetta*.¹⁹¹

This ritual is said to be the decision of Sof Umar himself. It is believed to be one of the three important *murtii* (decisions) of Sof Umar. These *murtii* are *salaamoo*, *waziiza*, and *killa*. In order to fulfil Sof Umar's decisions and to follow his actions, pilgrims prepare the fire and sing, pray, and bless each other around the fire while invoking his name. Sof Umar chose Tuesday for this event.¹⁹² Another reason *wasiisa* is prepared on a Tuesday evening is it is also the date when Sheikh Hussein and Sof Umar were said to have been born. Pilgrims sing songs honouring and praising Sheikh Hussein and Sof Umar the whole night while standing

¹⁹⁰ Anwar Garaad, 22 December 2010 at Tememo.

¹⁹¹ Sheikh Faannoo, 10 February 2011 in Nansabo.

¹⁹² Sheikh Garaad, 22 December 2010 at Tememo.

around the *wasiisa*. A third reason why *wasiisa* is burned is to give light and warmth to pilgrims who have spent most of the night singing songs praising Sof Umar, Sheikh Hussein, and *Rabbi*. There is no tradition or rule that forbids the burning of *wasiisa* in the morning or during the daytime. The main reason they start the fire in the evening is to wait until the end of the day, when most pilgrims have arrived. Although many pilgrims arrive earlier, some do not arrive until late afternoon on Tuesday. It is only after the arrival of the last pilgrims on Tuesday evening that the *wasiisa* ritual starts.

After the wood is burned, elders look for the direction(s) in which the burned wood falls. It can fall to the east, south, north, or west. Some wise people use this falling direction to interpret what the coming months or seasons will probably look like. If it falls to the north as well as to the east, it indicates a good and peaceful time to come because the east is the direction of sunrise, and therefore it is a sign of light. If it falls to the south and west, it indicates a bad and difficult season ahead. *Wasiisa* was started at the centre about 67 years ago with the coming of Hajji Adam from Bale who brought the practice with him when the decision was made to move the centre of the pilgrimage from the cave to the open plateau. Before that time the Oromo of the area did not prepare *wasiisa*. They used to prepare simple and small fires during their various social and religious rituals.¹⁹³



Figure 18: Waziiza.

Photo by Gemechu J. Geda, December 2010.

¹⁹³ Sheikh Tahir, 23 December 2010 at Tememo.

While *waziiza* is burning, pilgrims perform the *hadra* (also called *shubbisaa*) ritual around it. It is a kind of dance performed in a circle around the *waziiza* fire. There is a person sitting on the ground beating a drum. Other drum beaters help him in turns. There are also individuals who take turns as lead singers. Other pilgrims attending the ritual repeat what is sung by the lead singers, in a call-and-response form. The pilgrims also clap quickly and jump occasionally. The contents of hymns sung at the *hadra* ritual at Sof Umar Guutoo praise Sof Umar, just as the following hymn indicates:

<i>Wayyu argee osoma horii tiysuu</i>	I saw the respected one while tending to cattle
<i>Nuura ceeku lamaan irraa ibsuu</i>	Light emanates from his body
<i>Gaafa walloo hulluqa gaafa walloo</i>	While in a cave in the country of Wollo
<i>Rufaan aannaan roobe gaafa Dalloo</i>	Milk rained in the land of Dallo because of his prayer
<i>Canaan karra canaan karra</i>	The tree at the gate is dry and waits for devotees
<i>goggogee nama eega</i>	Welcome back to the river of Weebaa
<i>baga deebine aanessa weebaa</i>	The tree at the gate is dry and it needs watering
<i>canaan karra goggogee bishan ittii</i>	We tell our issues to him (Sof Umar)
<i>haajaa teenna himna isaanitti</i>	Saints do only what God wants them to
<i>mura eegdi awliyaan mura eegdi</i>	He is the friend of Abelqaasim Juneeydii
<i>wadaajii Abalqaasim Juneeydii</i>	Nothing troubles his followers
<i>nama sheeka hindanddeettu rakkoonii</i>	<i>Aayyoo</i> Makkoo rides a horse
<i>boora yaabbatti aayyoo Makkoonii</i>	He is the father of Mekka and a friend of Bale's patron (Sheikh Hussein)
<i>Abbaa Makkaa wadaajii tolaa Baale</i>	Your shrine is built by <i>Jibriil</i> (Saint Gabriel)
<i>Gamoo keessan jibriilttu ijaaree</i>	The branch of Canaa tree reaches the ground
<i>Canaa karraa waadamee lafa geetti</i>	Saints pray under it
<i>Waliyyoonni asraa jala teetti</i>	We came to the land of Riifusa
<i>Riifussa baanee Riifusaa</i>	And then to the land of Giraangiraa
<i>Achumaan giraangiraa</i>	The village of Sof Umar
<i>Gandda Sof Umar Abbaa-muraa</i>	I saw the respected one at the river
<i>Wayyu argee wayyu argee wayyuu gurree latti</i>	
<i>Isaaniin gala deema weebatti</i>	I travel to the river of Weebaa

***Ciincaa* (burning of sacrificial animals heads)**

This ritual takes place after the *wareega* ritual where sacrificial animals are slaughtered. At about 9 PM, the *mataa* (head) of sacrificial animals such as cattle and sheep is then burned in a ritual that is known as *ciincaa*. It is done to protect the people from attacks by *djinnii*. It is said that there are many *djinni* in the river valley and around the cave and they can attack pilgrims. But when *ciincaa* is burned, they feed on the smell and they are satisfied. As a result, they do not usually attack humans. Even if a *djinni* attacks an individual by accident, it usually abandons him/her once it smells *ciincaa*, which is like a feast for them.¹⁹⁴



Figure 19: *Ciincaa*.

Photo by Gemechu J. Geda, December 2010.

***Waarida* (*faaruu awliyaa*: praise of a saint)**

On Tuesday evening, pilgrims retreat to their respective *dagalee* (temporary huts) and perform the *waarida* ritual until the early hours of Wednesday. This is said to have started at Sof Umar Guutoo very recently: about 20 years ago. It is not something the Oromo had practiced in the past. *Waarida* is simply a *faaruu* (praise) of the *awliyaa* (a saint). It is a song in which pilgrims praise Sof Umar and Sheikh Hussein. It has no other spiritual purpose or meaning. Pilgrims sing it because they think Sof Umar likes it. Similar to *bahro* and *hadra/zeekkara*, *waarida* is used to praise *awliyoota* (saints). During *waarida* rituals, prayers are done for various things such as for the prosperity of the country, for rain, for agricultural productivity, for health and productivity of cattle, for a stable government and for peace.

¹⁹⁴ Sheikh Garaad, 22 December 2010 at Tememo.

Usually pilgrims who come from the same area occupy one hut. No one opposes pilgrims from different parts of the country from mixing up, but pilgrims themselves prefer to be with other pilgrims they know. Since they come from the same place, they also have the same references in the songs or the lyrics, so they can participate actively rather than being passive onlookers as they would in the hut of strangers. Pilgrims make fires in their respective huts and sit with their legs crossed. The fires have no spiritual meaning; they are only done to give pilgrims warmth and light. In the evening, many pilgrims chew *jimaa/khat* and smoke cigarettes. Although the *khat* and cigarettes may not have a direct religious meaning in themselves, they are part of this spiritual ritual. Without them, pilgrims would not be able to achieve the needed level of trance for these spiritual songs. *Khat* and cigarette stimulate pilgrims and keep them awake and alert throughout the long night.¹⁹⁵ During the singing of hymns, pilgrims clap and move their heads slightly in a trance back and forth movement. Most pilgrims also close their eyes and move their upper body sideways. These behaviours are considered as a sign of satisfaction and stimulation by the contents of the hymns, some of which are repeated many times as one of the hymns presented as follows indicates:

<i>Yoo si waamu fayyaree</i>	I am healed with the mere mentioning of your name
<i>Leenci fardda digalee mal wayyaree</i>	The lion rides a horse and we do not know what to do
<i>Haraaraa baatii golfa</i>	A spirit should get what he asks for
<i>Yoo inni kaan leenjisu kuun hinkolffa</i>	When he disciplines one the other laughs
<i>Leenci fardda digalee mal wayyaree</i>	The lion rides a horse and we do not know what to do
<i>Kabbaadin gulufa</i>	He rides quickly
<i>Naan dura deemi an si faana dhufaa</i>	Travel ahead of me and I shall follow you
<i>Leenci fardda digalee mal wayyaree</i>	The lion rides a horse and we do not know what to do
<i>Natti seentan barii</i>	You came to me early in the morning
<i>Mazgaba kee irra naa hintsafin qanii</i>	Do not write my date on your register
<i>Leenci fardda digalee mal wayyaree</i>	The lion rides a horse and we do not know what to do
<i>Hixaana keessan naddii</i>	Incense sticks are like gums for you

¹⁹⁵ Sheikh Garaad, 22 December 2010 at Tememo.

<i>Rijaala yoo rakkinnaa hin reebu nattii</i>	He reaches out for me whenever I am in need
<i>Shirataa teettanihoo</i>	You reside in the land of Shirata
<i>Ani hinfaaqu wilataa keessanihoo</i>	I will never forget your favour
<i>Ani duruu siin himamee</i>	I am always known in association with you
<i>Situ maqaa dhaba gizzee dhibamee</i>	Your reputation will be destroyed if I ever become sick
<i>Warri nu daw'atanii</i>	Those who only watch us
<i>Marfee caala yaalan jismii kiyyahoo</i>	Your treatment is better than an injection

In addition to praising Sof Umar, pilgrims also pray for various societal issues as follows:

<i>Ya Rabbi caamtee nu hinmiidhin</i>	Dear <i>Rabbi</i> do not harm us with drought
<i>Ya Rabbi biyya teenya nagaa nuu godhi</i>	Dear <i>Rabbi</i> give peace to our country
<i>Ya Rabbi qabeenya keenya nuu guddisi</i>	Dear <i>Rabbi</i> increase our wealth
<i>Ya Rabbi mootummaa keenya ka nagayaa godhi</i>	Dear <i>Rabbi</i> give peace to our government
<i>Ya Rabbi dhara nuu keessaa balleessii</i>	Dear <i>Rabbi</i> abolish deception
<i>Dhugaa magarssi</i>	Dear <i>Rabbi</i> let honesty flourish

Killa gubbee (killa of the plateau)

The killa gubbee (killa of the plateau) ritual takes place on a Thursday, a day chosen by Sof Umar. Pilgrims perform these rituals the way Sof Umar was believed to have decided to conduct them. The killa ritual is named after killa, a wooden-bowl used by the Oromo as a container for ritual items such as melted butter and roasted coffee beans. Killa can be prepared from any type of wood as long as it is suitable for the task. It is mainly prepared from heexoo (Hagenia abyssinica), waddeessa (Cordia africana), and gatamee (Vitex doniana) trees. The ritual is named killa gubbee (killa of the plateau) to differentiate it from the other ritual, killa karraa (killa of the road/gate) that takes place in the cave. Every aspect of the ritual is the same. Killa gubbee is celebrated in the open space (plateau) because it is currently the centre of pilgrimages and rituals and killa karaa is celebrated in the cave because it was the center of the rituals until 67 years ago. It is to honour the past and the present that killa is celebrated in both places. Killa karaa is celebrated in the cave because it

was done there for the first time and pilgrims continued this tradition even if it is not the main center of pilgrimages at the moment.¹⁹⁶

The Oromo have been performing *killa* rituals for a long time to pray to *Waaqayyoo* (*Waaqa*) by saying; *killa teesse, sitti dheese Rabbiyyoo* (*Rabbi*) (I prepared *killa* and took refuge by you) and *killaan bahee, sirraa dahee Rabbiyyoo* (I came with a *killa* for you have endowed me). Even if they say they pray for *Waaqayyoo* (*Waaqa*), their continued use of *Rabbiyyoo* (*Rabbi*) shows the increasing influence of Islam on their belief system as well as their terminologies. The first step in this ritual is what pilgrims do in their homes before embarking on their journey to Sof Umar Guutoo. This first step is called *buna-qalaa* ('slaughtering' coffee). This is the process of mixing roasted coffee with melted butter. First coffee beans are roasted on a weaker fire so that it gets roasted properly rather than getting burned. Then they are cooled down for a while and butter is melted and put in a *killa*. After this, the roasted coffee is placed in the *killa* containing the melted butter and stirred with a spoon or a fork. It is not allowed to touch it with the hand. The Oromo call a coffee prepared in this manner for ritual purposes *wayyuu* (*wayyooma*). Coffee trees are well respected by the Oromo. If an Oromo breaks a coffee tree by accident, he says "*ani si'ncabsine, jaldeessatu si cabsse*" (It is not me but a monkey that broke you). The application of the term *qaluu* (slaughtering) to a coffee is figurative. Coffee is considered to be like a *korma* [bull], which is why the Oromo use the same term for coffee. In Arsi Oromo tradition, *killa* and *korma* are placed on equal footings. That is why it is referred to as *killa qaluu* (slaughtering *killa*). The Arsi Oromo roast the coffee beans at home and tell *Rabbi* "*yaa Rabbi huno korma qaladhe*" (Oh *Rabbi*, I have slaughtered a bull in your name) referring to the *buna* (coffee) as a *korma* (bull). The Arsi Oromo pray saying "*Korma qaladhe kanan naa dhagayi, sa'a tiyyas natiysi, nama tiyyas natiysi, horii tiyyas natiyis*" (I have slaughtered a bull please do listen to my prayers, protect my cow, my family, and my wealth).¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ Sheikh Tahir, 23 December 2010 at Tememo.

¹⁹⁷ Sheikh Garaad, 22 December 2010 at Tememo.



Figure 20: Killa.

Photo by Gemechu J. Geda, December 2010.

The *killa* ritual that takes place on Thursday is called *killa qabatuu* (holding *killa*) and/or *killa dibachuu* (anointment by *killa*). The ritual takes place under a big *anshaa* tree, a ritual tree for the Oromo. Other ritual trees of the Oromo include *leemman* (*Arundinaria alpine*), *waddeessa*, *garambaa* (*Hypericum revolutum*), and *odaa* (figus). The ritual is performed under this tree because the strong nature of the wood and the nice smell of its leaves symbolises a good year. *Leemman* trees are preferred because they multiply quickly. *Odaa* is preferred because of the wide spread of its branches and large, strong trunk. Oromo traditional rituals take place under these trees to signify or wish for fertility, health, wealth, and other social and religious gatherings. According to oral stories, the Oromo have used the shade of trees for rituals and as meeting places to discuss various social aspects related to society. The Oromo were always looking for a big tree such as an *odaa* for their social activities. That is why today the Oromo perform all their rituals under big trees that provide enough shade. Unless an area is devoid of woods, these rituals do not take place in a house. When the Oromo perform their rituals under a tree, they are not praying for the tree but only using the shade it provides. It does not matter what type of wood it is as long as its shade can accommodate as many of the participants as possible. The Oromo prefer to sit under *odaa* trees because these were the trees their forefathers used as meeting places. Today, it is still

preferred to other types of trees if it is available. It is because of the absence of this tree that pilgrims use the *anshaa* tree as a ritual place at Sof Umar Guutoo.

Shifaa tree leaves are then placed under the tree and the *killa* is placed over the leaves. *Killa* is brought by pilgrims whose wishes are fulfilled and/or those who want a prayer/wish to be fulfilled. The *killa* ritual is supervised and conducted by the *saddeettaa* (eight). They have their own *dura-ta'aa* (chairman) who is referred to as *hanggafa* (elder) and who starts the ritual. He also has an *itti-aanaa* (vice – chairman). Among the *saddeetta*, some of them are referred to as *hanggafa* while the others are *mandhaa* (junior, younger).¹⁹⁸ The eldest of the *saddeetta* then picks one *killa* after the other, asks for the person who brought that specific *killa* to present him/herself, conducts a blessing, and stirs its contents with his fingers. In this stirring action, which is called *killa dammaqsaa* (startling *killa*), the *hanggafa* tries to separate the coffee beans from the butter. Just like startling a sleeping animal, the *saddeettaa* have to ‘startle’ the *killa* before using the content for ritual purposes: for eating “*killa nama nyaachisaa/ killa afaanin nama qabsiisaa*”, and for anointing “*killa nama dibaa*”.¹⁹⁹



Figure 21: *Killa dammaqsuu* (startling *Killa*).

Photo by Gemechu J. Geda, December 2010.

¹⁹⁸ Sheikh Garaad, 22 December 2010 at Tememo.

¹⁹⁹ Sheikh Tahir, 23 December 2010 at Tememo.

After ‘startling’ the *kill*a, the eldest of the *saddeetta* raises the *kill*a above his head four times (in a symbolic representation of the four nipples of a cow’s udder which produced the milk for the preparation of the butter for *kill*a) and prays as follows:

<i>yaa Rabbi nuu dhagayii</i>	Oh <i>Rabbi</i> listen to our prayers
<i>Quufa olfuudhi</i>	Bless us with abundance
<i>Nagaa olfuudhi</i>	Bless us with peace
<i>Aadaa olfuudhi</i>	Bless our culture
<i>yaa Rabbi waan gubbaa kana irraa dhufurra nuu eegii</i>	Oh <i>Rabbi</i> ! Save us from whatever comes from above (the sky)
<i>Yaa Rabbi nutti araarami</i>	Oh <i>Rabbi</i> forgive us

Then he puts the *kill*a down and prays as follows:

<i>Nagaa lafaan gayii</i>	Bestow peace upon the earth
<i>Quufa lafaan gayii</i>	Bestow abundance upon the earth
<i>Rooba lafaan gayii</i>	Bestow rain upon the earth
<i>margga kana sifeessii</i>	Make the grass productive
<i>horii’lee sifeessii</i>	Make the cattle productive
<i>Ka qotan kana’lee nu sifeessi</i>	Make what is sown productive
<i>Diina dhiibi</i>	Protect us from enemies
<i>Dhukkuba dhiibi!</i>	Protect us from sickness
<i>Waraana dhiibi</i>	Protect us from war

In addition to the prayers, the *kill*a ritual is also accompanied by songs which praise *Rabbi* (God). Songs that praise *Rabbi* are called *faarfannaa Rabbi* (*Rabbi*’s songs of praise). It is a prayer for *Rabbi* to keep children and cattle safe. The Oromo usually perform their prayers early in the morning; as the first act of the day, this marks the beginning of the day. The Oromo have had always *kill*a at home and it remains a major part of their daily prayer rituals. They hold their *kill*a up to pray, then they take four pieces of coffee beans from the *kill*a and put one in each direction in the compound. However, during the pilgrimages at Sof Umar Guutoo, pilgrims just place four coffee beans under a tree, without regards to a particular direction. This practice, though not found in Islamic practices, is an ancient

tradition and practice of the Arsi Oromo.²⁰⁰ One of the *faarfannaa Rabbi* that praise *Rabbi* is presented as follows:

<i>Killaan bahee, sirraa dahee Rabbiyyoo</i>	I pray holding <i>killa</i> for my prayers have been answered by you
<i>Killaan bahee balaltaa Rabbiyyoo</i>	I come out with a <i>killa</i> early to pray for you
<i>Sirra dahee agarttaa Rabbiyyoo</i>	You see that I have got from you
<i>Killaan bahee, sirraa dahee Rabbiyyoo</i>	I pray holding <i>killa</i> for I have got from you <i>Rabbi</i>
<i>Ciicoon meexa qabdii</i>	<i>Ciicoo</i> (milk container) has <i>meexa</i> (metal ring)
<i>Nuu keennittee nutti hingaabbinn Rabbi</i>	Do not take away whatever you gave us
<i>Killaan bahee balalttaa</i>	I come out with a <i>killa</i> early to pray for you
<i>Sirra dahee agarttaa Rabbiyyoo</i>	You see that I have got from you
<i>Killaan bahee, sirraa dahee Rabbiyyoo</i>	I pray holding <i>killa</i> for I have got from you <i>Rabbi</i>
<i>Killa guuree situu nu uumee Rabbiyyoo</i>	I brought <i>killa</i> and pray for you for you are my creator

After the prayer, in an action called *eddo*, the *saddeettaa* then place four coffee beans on the ground under the *anshaa* tree. They do this to protect the area as well as the pilgrims from attacks by spirits.²⁰¹ The eldest of the *saddeettaa* begins by tasting the content before passing it on to the next *saddeettaa* member. After all the *saddeettaa* have taken a bite from the contents of the *killa*, it is passed to the person who brought that specific *killa*. S/he can theoretically either pass it on to other participants of the ritual or eat it her/himself. But at Sof Umar, the person who brought the *killa* always passes it over to other pilgrims attending the ritual. At Sof Umar, the person who brought the *killa* passes it on to others because eating it him/herself (or taking it home to eat) would be in contradiction/opposition with the fact that it is an offering. Sharing with all present is part of the process of praying to *Waaqa/Rabbi* and an important part of all the ritual activities at Sof Umar. The purpose is not to eat as much as one would like, but rather to distribute whatever is brought among all pilgrims. The *saddeettaa* always try to estimate the number of people in attendance at the ritual and the amount they should be distributing so that there will be no shortage. Shortage results in

²⁰⁰ Sheikh Tahir, 23 December 2010 at Tememo.

²⁰¹ In the past, the Oromo used to not only place *killa* under a tree, but also in many other places such as in their homes and in the *moonaa/foonaa* (a fenced enclosure for cattle).

suspicion: pilgrims may suspect that what has happened to the *kill*a will be brought on to the ritual and their prayers may not be answered or blessings not bestowed. Even during the *wareega* ceremony, if only one animal is slaughtered, all pilgrims get a piece of the meat.²⁰² In addition to feeding pilgrims attending the ritual, members of the *saddeettaa* anoint the head of pilgrims in a process called *fala/muuda* (anointment). According to Arsi Oromo tradition, this helps a person in various ways, such as by: protecting pilgrims from various dangers, such as attacks by spirits, ensuring healthy breeding of an individual's cattle and protecting a person's wealth from danger.²⁰³

***Dhibaayyuu* (libation)**

The *dhibaayyuu* (libation) ritual takes place on a Thursday, simultaneously and at the same place as the *kill*a ritual. The *dhibaayyuu* ritual involves the dropping of the contents of a *mijuu* (milk container) on a *siinqee* (Arsi Oromo women's ritual stick), on a *gaadii* (skin/rope strap for tying the back legs of a cow during milking) *shifaa* (tree leaves), and on the ground.²⁰⁴ The *siinqee*, *gaadii*, *shifaa* are chosen for several reasons: *siinqee* belongs to Arsi Oromo women who use it in ceremonies and for prayers and it is directly linked to their respect. *Gaadii* is libated as a way of thanking it for the role it plays in milk production, because it ties the hind legs of a cow during milking; and *shifaa* represents the grass that cows graze to produce milk, and the ground for it grows grass that cows eat. The milk containers that can be used for the *dhibaayyuu* ritual include: *qodaa* (milk container made up of animal skin), *ciicoo* (a vessel for milking), *guchuma* (a big gourd with long narrow neck), and *sabaree* (milk container made up of calabash).²⁰⁵

Mijuu (milk container) implies *guutuu* (fullness) in the Oromo language. It implies the fulfilment of one's wishes, which is why *mijuu* is always brought full. Since pilgrims do not bring half-filled *mijuu*, they bring what they can afford: those who have many cows to milk bring in larger containers while those who have fewer cows bring in smaller containers. The pilgrims fill the container with fresh milk but it curdles and becomes yoghurt during the long journey to the site and over the course of the night before the ritual. But it is not important what the *mijuu* contains by the time it is opened for the ritual as long as it was filled with milk at the beginning of the journey.²⁰⁶

²⁰² Sheikh Tahir, 23 December 2010 at Tememo.

²⁰³ Sheikh Garaad, 22 December 2010 at Tememo.

²⁰⁴ Sheikh Faannoo, 10 February 2011 in Nansabo.

²⁰⁵ Bariisoo Duubee, 23 December 2010 at Tememo.

²⁰⁶ Sheikh Faannoo, 10 February 2011 in Nansabo.

During the *dhibaayyuu* ritual, elders hold the containers high and sing a song known as *weedduu*. It is a prayer for *Rabbi* and/or *Waaqa* to give them more milk and to make their cows productive, thereby increasing the size of their stock. One of the songs goes as follows:

<i>Aanolee tiyyaa aananiin galii</i>	Oh my cow! May you come with milk
<i>Ka gama raachoo aananiin galii</i>	May the cow return from the field with milk
<i>Dhaltii mandhachoon aananiin galii</i>	May the mooing cow return with milk
<i>Aanann naa wayyaa aananiin galii</i>	May you return with milk for I prefer milk

The eldest *saddeettaa* then drops a little milk onto the *siinqee*, *gaadii*, *shifaa*, and the ground and leads a prayer, which is repeated by the attendants of the ritual. The following is an excerpt of one of the prayers:

<i>Waaqnii dhagahii</i>	May <i>Waaqa</i> listen
<i>Lafti dhagahii</i>	May the earth listen
<i>Akaakoon dhagahii</i>	May the grandfathers listen
<i>Abaaboon dhagahii</i>	May the great grandfathers listen
<i>Hokkaan dhagahii</i>	May the <i>Hokkaa</i> (vice to the <i>abbaa-gadaa</i>) listen
<i>Bookkuun dhagahii</i>	May the <i>Bookkuu</i> (<i>abbaa-gadaa</i>) listen
<i>Kan dhageettee nu oowadhu</i>	Respond to our prayers
<i>Muka raaqaa isa godhi</i>	Make him strong and a sign of hope for all
<i>Nama raagaa isa godhii</i>	Make him a fortune-teller
<i>Kutaa nyaaphaa dhabsiisi.</i>	Make him free of enemies

After the prayers, the eldest *saddeettaa* tastes the milk, followed by the other members of the *saddeettaa*. Then the person who brought that particular *mijuu* drinks and passes it over to the pilgrim sitting closest to him/her. After this, the rest of the pilgrims drink the milk until it is finished.



Figure 22: containers holding milk for the *dhibaayyuu* ritual.

Photo by Gemechu J. Geda, December 2010.

In Oromo tradition, it is not allowed to disrupt a ritual before its completion.²⁰⁷ During the *killaa* and *dhibaayyuu* ritual, complete silence is observed. The *saddeettaa* are the ones leading the rituals so they are the ones who are allowed to talk and lead prayers. The rest of the pilgrims must follow what they say instead of trying to talk without permission.

Xiliitee

The *xiliitee* ritual takes place on Thursday after the *killaa* and *dhibaayyuu* rituals. Similar to the *killaa* ritual, *xiliitee* also involves coffee and butter. There is, however, a big difference in preparation. The coffee used for *killaa* and *xiliitee* rituals is different. The coffee for the *killaa* ritual is first roasted on a pan. Then butter is melted, poured in a container, and the roasted coffee is mixed with butter. For *xiliitee* ritual, however, a pot filled with butter is put on the fire, then raw coffee beans are placed in it. The raw coffee beans are roasted with the butter instead of on a pan. 99 coffee beans are used for the *xiliitee* ritual. This number is meant to correspond to the 99 names of Allah. *Tasbee* (Islamic prayer bead) also has 99 *callee* (beads).²⁰⁸ In the past, there were no physicians and doctors like we have today. Instead, whenever sickness broke out, there were elders to whom *Rabbi* showed the path out of the sickness and they in turn advised the community. They organized the *xiliitee* ritual and prayed for *Waaqa*, and people became healthy again. With the enactment of *xiliitee*, people can find

²⁰⁷ Sheikh Tahir, 23 December 2010 at Tememo.

²⁰⁸ Bariisoo Duubee, 23 December 2010 at Tememo.

cures for various troubles, such as the sickness of a cow or a child. *Djaanii* (*djinnii*) also do not attack people who perform or take part in the *xiliitee* ritual.

The person responsible for the *xiliitee* ritual is called *nama xilitee qalu* (a person ‘slaughtering’ *xiliitee*) and he is chosen by the *saddeettaa*. The task of preparing *xiliitee* is mostly entrusted to individuals whose ancestors have performed the task in the past and who is a member of a respected clan. The person responsible for this at the moment is from the Hawaxxuu clan, which is one of the largest and most respected clans in the area. The person in charge of the ritual puts butter in a pot and melts it. He then puts raw coffee beans in the melting butter. He then pours a small amount of water in the boiling butter. This makes the butter cooler and it makes it smell even stronger and more intense.²⁰⁹ It is believed that this protects pilgrims from bad luck for the smell satisfies *Waaqa*, *awliyaa* (a saint), and spirits. It is widely believed that when spirits are satisfied they do not have the desire to attack pilgrims when they go down to the river to fetch water, to wash clothes or to bathe.²¹⁰

After the coffee beans are properly fried, the leader of the ritual takes the pot off the fire to wait until it cools down. Then he hands it over to one of the *Abbaa-wanbbaraa*, who in return holds the pot containing the fried coffee beans over his head and conducts prayers in Oromo. While the *Abbaa-wanbbaraa* is holding the pot over his head, all the pilgrims raise their hands up to accept the blessings while saying “amen”. This act of raising hands also symbolizes helping the person holding the pot. One of the prayers conducted in Oromo during the ritual is as follows:

<i>Yaa rabbi nutti araarami</i>	Oh <i>Rabbi</i> forgive us
<i>Awliyoota Rabbi nutti araaramaa</i>	Oh Saints of <i>Rabbi</i> ! Forgive us
<i>Aarri xiliitee kun isiin haagayu</i>	May this smoke of <i>xiliitee</i> reach you

The *Abbaa-wanbbaraa* also conducts the prayer in Arabic as follows:

<i>Bismilah</i>	In the name of Allah
<i>subhana Allah</i>	Glory be to Allah
<i>wala alhamdulillah</i>	All praise is to Allah
<i>wala Illah Illalah</i>	There is no God but Allah
<i>wala Allahu akbar</i>	Allah is greater
<i>wala haula wala quwata illa Billah</i>	Power and knowledge are with Allah

²⁰⁹ Sheikh Garaad, 22 December 2010 at Tememo.

²¹⁰ Sheikh Faannoo, 10 February 2011 at Tememo.

The use of Arabic in rituals and prayers is said to have started around the time of Sheikh Hussein, with the arrival of Islam in the region. The Oromo used to pray in the Oromo language, but when Arabic was introduced to the region with the introduction of Islam, they decided to use the language in their prayers for they believed it did not alter their beliefs or practices. The use of the Arabic language corresponds to about the time the Arsi Oromo first began to conduct the *xiliitee* ritual.

After the prayers, the *Abbaa-wanbbaraa* places four fried coffee beans under the *anshaa* tree where he is sitting. The Arsi Oromo believe that God will protect them as long as the coffee is under the *anshaa* tree.²¹¹ After placing four coffee beans under the tree, the two *Abbaa-wanbbaraa* eat first and then they distribute the rest among the pilgrims attending the ritual. The amount given to each pilgrim depends on the number of people attending the ritual. If there is a shortage due to large attendance, pilgrims may only receive one coffee bean each, but if there are enough fried coffee beans or few pilgrims in attendance, pilgrims can receive more coffee beans. In order to receive the coffee beans at the *xiliitee* ritual, pilgrims are expected to sit down. One cannot receive a coffee bean while standing. The Oromo always performed the *Xiliitee* rituals seated. Standing represents walking and walking represents instability. Oromo elders have always advised to attend rituals sitting.

The other component of *xiliitee* ritual is the roasting of *dhandhama* (rib meat) of sacrificial animals. During the *wareega* ritual, animals brought as votive gifts are slaughtered and the *dhandhama* is set aside for this purpose, while the rest of the meat is distributed among pilgrims. The rib meat is placed directly on a fire prepared for this purpose in front of the temporary hut of the *Abbaa-wanbbaraa* and in the same place where the fire for the *waziiza* is lit. It is also where *ciincaa* and *xiliitee* rituals take place. This location was decided by the *saddeetta* and the *Abbaa-wanbbaraa* in the past, supposedly based on an original decision and action by Sof Umar himself, and the current leaders have continued practicing in the way of their forefathers. In this ceremony, the meat is roasted, and cut into small pieces so that all the pilgrims present can receive a piece. The meat is then taken to the *Abbaa-wanbbaraa*.²¹² The eldest *Abbaa-wanbbaraa* holds the plate containing the meat above his head and conducts a prayer as follows:

²¹¹ If the *xiliitee* ritual is conducted at home, some coffee beans are also placed in the *boroo* (back of a room) (Sheikh Garaad, 22 December 2010 at Tememo).

²¹² Sheikh Garaad, 22 December 2010 at Tememo.

<i>Bariitee nagayaan nabalchite, nagayaan naa oolchi</i>	It is morning, you have given me a peaceful night, give me a peaceful day
<i>Ya Rabbi balaa narraa deebisi</i>	Oh <i>Rabbi</i> , save me from misfortunes
<i>Maqaa keetin si kadhadhe balaa narraa deebisi</i>	Save me from misfortunes for I pray in your name

Then he and the other *Abbaa-wanbbaraa* eat the first pieces and the rest is distributed among pilgrims. If the animal is brought as an offer to the *awliyaa* (saint), the person who brought it should not eat the *dhandhama* in front of other pilgrims. But if the animal is slaughtered at home, the owner of that animal has the right to eat the *dhandhama* first. There is no ritual significance in number of *dhandhama* roasted; it is in function of the number of pilgrims present. If there is not enough for everyone, pilgrims just take a bite and pass it over to the next person. The purpose here is not to eat one's content but to share among all participants and to show camaraderie.²¹³

Killa karraa (killa at the gate/road)

The *killa karraa* ritual is similar to *killa gubbee* (*killa* on the plateau). There are no differences in the nature of the rituals. The main difference is the place where the rituals take place. *Killa gubbee* takes place on the open plateau while *killa karraa* takes place in the cave. Pilgrims perform this ritual in the cave because that is where the ritual started, and today many pilgrims do not want to stop performing it there as well.²¹⁴ It has been a tradition since the time of Urjii Kormaa, the woman who survived in the cave. During this ritual, many pilgrims paint erected stones in the cave with a lot of butter as thanks to *Waaqa* for listening to their prayers. Before entering the cave, pilgrims take off their shoes. There are two reasons for this. The first one is related to the period when pilgrimage to this place started. At that time, there were no shoes and all pilgrims used to walk bare foot to reach the site and that is still how most pilgrims do it. The other reason is to show respect to this sacred place, the site of *awliyaa* (saint). There is, however, no prohibition of wearing shoes upon entering the cave and there are no stories of people who have faced bad fortunes for doing so. Some pilgrims, who have made a *silata* (vow) in exchange for the fulfilment of their wishes, place coffee beans in the cave and burn joss sticks. Most pilgrims make a vow to bring coffee beans if their wishes are fulfilled.²¹⁵

²¹³ Sheikh Faannoo, 10 February 2011 in Nansabo.

²¹⁴ Bariisoo Duubee, 23 December 2010 at Tememo.

²¹⁵ Sheikh Tahir, 23 December 2010 at Tememo.

In the cave there is also *jawaara* (holy soil), which is believed to have healing powers. It is regarded as medicine for humans and animals. Pilgrims also believe that it prevents different kinds of sicknesses and a person who eats it will not be exposed to malaria and/or other sicknesses. The medicinal power of the soil is said to emanate from its association with Sof Umar and is therefore blessed. *Jawaara* is not collected by everybody but instead should be given by the *saddeettaa* as long as they are around. If members of the *saddeettaa* are not nearby, it can also be taken by the pilgrims themselves. It can be applied externally on humans and cattle and it can also be mixed with water and drunk for any kind of internal sickness.²¹⁶ After the ritual in the cave, elders bless pilgrims as follows:

<i>Abba irratti bulchi</i>	Grant long lives to our fathers
<i>Haadha irratti bulchi</i>	Grant long lives to our mothers
<i>Akka hammaate nurra qabii</i>	Save us from malicious things
<i>Akka jabaate nurra qabi</i>	Save us from serious problems
<i>Diina nurra dhiibii</i>	Protect us from enemies
<i>Ciisa nurra dhiibii</i>	Protect us from sickness
<i>Waan sa'aa hintolle waan namaa hintolle nurra qabi</i>	Protect us from things that are not suitable to cattle and humans
<i>Sa'aa sifeessii</i>	Make the cow productive
<i>Margga sifeessii</i>	Make the grass productive
<i>Nama sifeessii</i>	Make the people productive
<i>Sayyidana Umar aadaa teenyatti nuu deebisi</i>	<i>Sayyidana Umar</i> (Sof Umar) return us to our culture
<i>Sayyidana Umar uumatti nuu deebisi</i>	<i>Sayyidana Umar</i> (Sof Umar) return us to our creator
<i>Sayyidana Umar sii kadhanne</i>	<i>Sayyidana Umar</i> (Sof Umar) I pray to you
<i>Nagaa ol fuudhi</i>	Put peace above all
<i>Aadaa ol fuudhe</i>	Put custom above all
<i>Diina balleessi</i>	Eradicate the enemy
<i>Ciisa balleessi</i>	Eradicate sickness
<i>Arsii itichi</i>	Let the Arsi prosper
<i>Diina huqqisi</i>	Make the enemy poor
<i>Quufa lafaan gayii</i>	Satisfy the earth

²¹⁶ Sheikh Faannoo, 10 February 2011 in Nansabo.

This blessing marks the official closing of the *zihaaraa/muuda* (pilgrimage). After this event pilgrims are allowed to do whatever they want. Those who want to return home can return and those who want to stay at the center for a while can also stay there.

CHAPTER FIVE: PILGRIMAGE AND RELIGIOUS TRANSFORMATION AT A SHRINE OF A FEMALE MUSLIM SAINT

5. 1 Introduction

The Faraqqasaa pilgrimage center, which is situated in eastern Arsi, was established by a woman named *Aayyoo* (mother) Momina. For almost a century now, Faraqqasaa has been one of the predominant and well-known pilgrimage centers in Ethiopia. Momina, tenderly called *Aayyoo* (mother) Momina in the Oromo language by her followers, is credited with the establishment of Faraqqasaa and other shrines in various parts of Ethiopia. Momina's establishment of various shrines is an interesting development in Ethiopian history. Even today, women do not normally play an important role as establishers of religious groups, or as their leaders. However, this pattern of the negligible participation of women as founders and leaders of religious groups and supervisors of rituals and other religious activities is not only restricted to the Ethiopian case. King (1993: 32) states that although many women take part in various rituals and religious beliefs, their involvement as founders and leaders in world religions is extremely minimal. This is in spite of the fact that there were and are many women in the world who have achieved top positions and have good reputations in their respective communities because of their high standards of morality and spirituality. Furthermore, King explains that women's involvement in various religious traditions of the world has increased tremendously in less institutionalized religions and communities. Generally, women exercise tremendous authority and more power in "archaic, ancient, tribal, and relatively non-institutionalized forms of religion (such as shamanism, possession rites, spiritualism, or in non-hierarchical groups...) than in the highly differentiated religious traditions with their complex structures" (King 1993: 37).

In highly institutionalized and diversified religious activities and communities, spiritual power, similar to that of secular power, is entrusted to men. Hence, many religious and social activities, such as initiation, teaching, blessing, sacrifice, and preaching appear to lie most frequently within the male domain (King 1993: 39). The male tendency to monopolize religious, social and political power and leadership has not changed in recent times. Despite this, however, there are many women who offer religious leadership to their communities, particularly in less structured and non-hierarchical forms of religious traditions (King 1993: 89). Woodhead (2002: 343) points out that in indigenous religious traditions, there are many important opportunities for women to serve as spirit mediums, a role that enables them to acquire important power over an entire community. Momina's historical and

contemporary significance is twofold: her leadership broke into a sphere that had been traditionally dominated by men, and her following led to the establishment of a ritual cult which has flourished over several decades and keeps expanding in contemporary times.

5.2 The history of *Aayyoo Momina*- the founder of the pilgrimage center

The reconstruction of the early life and career of *Aayyoo Momina* is a daunting task due to the obscurity of her early life and career. There are two main reasons for this. The most important factor is the lack of written historical records or accounts of her life from her contemporaries. The lack of written historical accounts of her life is exacerbated by her frequent mobility from one part of the country to the other as a result of various factors. Her frequent travels and relatively short stays at many places are mostly accredited to her spiritual power that forbade her to remain at one village for a relatively longer period of time. In subsequent sections, I will discuss in detail additional factors that required Momina to travel and stay in various places. The other setback to reconstructing the life and early activities of Momina is the lack of consensus among informants on her religious and family backgrounds. The narrations and stories about Momina appear to be influenced by the religious affiliations of informants. The majority of Muslim informants state that Momina was born a Muslim, while Christian informants state that she was Christian. This challenge, however, appears to be a normal phenomenon when it comes to local religious traditions in different parts of the world. Gore (2002: 207) states that because many local religious traditions and rituals are based upon oral traditions it is difficult to trace their historical development and the changes they underwent over the course of time.

There are diverse and often contradictory accounts regarding Momina's origin, religious background, and ethnic origin. The first controversial point is her area of origin and her family background. Some writers and informants state that Momina was a local Arsi woman. For instance, Braukämper (1984: 769) states that she is "... an Arsi woman who established the famous center of magic in Faraqqasaa..." Habib Qasim (2001: 6) is the other writer that supports this proposition. He writes that *Aayyoo Momina* was born, grew up and died in present day Arsi zone. However, some informants, especially her relatives and descendants of her servants and assistants, oppose this proposition and ascertain that her original homeland was a place known by the name Sanqa in present day Wollo zone in northern Ethiopia. There is a consensus that her father was *Dejjazmach* Yimer Woldu. There is, however, a great deal of disagreement about her mother, and this has been a point of controversy among her followers and scholars. Some followers of her cult state that her

mother was a woman named *Woizero* Mersha Akalas while others, including her descendants and descendants of those who served her, claim that the name of her mother was Dinqitu Gedlu. One informant still claims that her mother's real name was Worqit Gedlu.²¹⁷

On her father's side

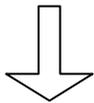
Emperor Fasil's brother



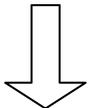
Mi'raf



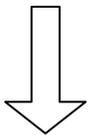
Bitderes



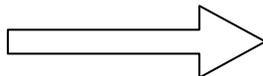
Sime



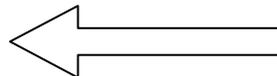
Woldu



Yimer



Shibbash (Momina)



Dinqitu

on her mother's side

Ahmed *Gragh's*²¹⁸ line

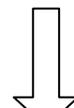
*Ras*²¹⁹ Tetemqe's sister



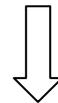
Wud Mariam Qewe



Getaw Lisige



Amele



Getaw Abuku

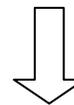


Figure 23: Momina's genealogy.

The second controversial topic among scholars is the date of her birth. Nobody seems to know the exact date of her birth. Habib Qasim (2002: 7) stipulates that Momina was born towards the end of the nineteenth century. But this does not seem convincing since it is widely believed by informants that this was the period when Momina arrived in Arsi. Taking this last point as well as Braukämper's (1984: 163) statement that Momina served Aw Ali (widely regarded as one of the nineteenth century Ethiopian Saints in Hararge, in Eastern Ethiopia

²¹⁷ Wondimu K, 21 February 2011 in Abbomsa.

²¹⁸ This is the name by which a military expert named Ahmad Ibn Ibrahim came to popularity. He led the Muslims in a number of victories against the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia from 1527 until his death in 1543 (Bahru Zewde 2001: 9). He was even referred to as "Attila of Ethiopia" (Sergew Hable Sellasie 1972: 18).

²¹⁹ It means 'head' and it is the highest traditional rank only next to the king (Bahru Zewde 2001: 276).

until his death in 1890), it seems quite rational to assume that Momina was born earlier than the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

The third controversy revolves around Momina's religious background. This is still a point of contention among Christians and Muslims of Arsi area and beyond. Most informants agree that she was a Muslim at the time she came to Arsi. The religion of Momina at birth as well as during her childhood still remains a point of contention. One narrative explains that she was born Christian but later converted to Islam. The narration of Muslim informants is that Momina has always been a Muslim and they state that she was one of the Muslim saints in Ethiopia. According to them, even her father's name, which was Yimer, originated from the Arabic name, Umar.²²⁰ Although Christians accept the narrative that Momina arrived in Arsi as a Muslim, they sternly refute the idea that she was Muslim at birth. They assert that Momina was born a Christian and it was later in her life that she converted to Islam. Some even go as far as explaining that her Christian name, *ehite* Gabriel (Gabriel's sister) was given to her because she was believed to have been born on St. Gabriel's day.²²¹

Most Christian informants do not accept the developments leading to Momina's conversion to Islam, nor the place where her conversion to Islam took place. An informant, Shiferaw contemplates that, Momina embraced Islam while she was still living with her parents.²²² However, this proposition is quite difficult if not impossible to accept, considering the social and family contexts in Ethiopia when Momina was said to have lived. Even today it is quite difficult to convert to a different religion from one's parents' while still living with them. According to another legend, Momina accepted Islam while working as a servant for a certain Sheikh Bar Ali Jami. It was Sheikh Bar Ali Jami who coined the name Momina (Gemechu J. Geda 2009: 42). Braukämper (1984: 163) also confirms the notion that Momina served Sheikh Aw Ali until his death in 1890. This sheikh played an important role in Momina's conversion to Islam. This development took place at a place called Bishoftu in Hararge (eastern Ethiopia). He blessed and endowed her with power to enable her heal and help people in need. Legend has it that while she was serving the Sheikh as a *kaddaamii* (servant), one of her duties was washing his feet. She secretly drank the dirty water afterwards. The Sheikh, however, had observed everything. He asked Momina why she drank the dirty water. Momina explained to him that she had great reverence and admiration for him and for his abilities to heal the sick. The sheikh was said to have given her his blessings and prophesied that she would be a well-known and respected woman in the Hararge and Arsi

²²⁰ Mohammed T., 16 February 2011 at Faraqqasaa.

²²¹ Alemitu B., 22 February 2011 in Abbomsa.

²²² Shiferaw J., 23 February 2011 in Nazareth.

regions because of her spiritual and healing powers. It was only after receiving the Sheikh's blessing and prophecy that she established her first spiritual and healing center at Gubbaaqoricha in Hararge and began the task of healing the sick. Shortly afterwards, her healing powers became well known and she became famous, respected, and venerated by adherents of her cult.²²³

However, the role played by Aw Ali in Momina's conversion to Islam is controversial. Instead, her conversion to Islam was attributed to the wish of her *karaamaa* (spiritual power), who ordered her to convert to Islam. But nobody seems to know the exact period when her conversion took place. Her ability to heal and perform various miracles was first recognized while she was residing at Gubbaaqorichaa when pilgrims began to travel to her shrine to seek her help for various problems. It was at Gubbaaqorichaa that Momina was said to have performed one of the earliest miracles. She cleaned her teeth with a *mafaqia* (twig for cleaning teeth) and planted it. It started to grow and through time it became a big tree, which is now used as a place for rituals. However, even if she was accepted and respected by the community, Momina did not stay in Hararge for a longer time. She moved to and lived in many places in Arsi, where she stayed for the rest of her life. During her stay in Arsi, Momina established the Faraqasaa pilgrimage center and other shrines.²²⁴

The controversies related to Momina's origin and early religious life are important for the pilgrimage center as well as the pilgrims themselves. The center became appealing to people of various regions, ethnic groups, and religions. The pilgrims, be they Muslims or Christians, probably also use the controversy surrounding the early faith of Momina as a strategy to achieve two goals. First, it is a way of justifying or legitimizing the participation of pilgrims of different backgrounds in the various rituals and involvement in the pilgrimage center. Secondly, by associating their origin, ethnic and religious backgrounds with that of Momina, pilgrims are trying to increase their own status and distinguish themselves from the others.

5.3 The arrival of Aayyoo Momina in Arsi

In the previous section, I mentioned two differing narrations about the birth place of Aayyoo Momina: on one hand some argue that it was in Arsi, and on the other hand, some say it was in Wollo. The most widely acknowledged is the latter, that she was born in Wollo and subsequently traveled to Hararge and then to Arsi. However, if we accept Wollo as her original homeland, it raises other important questions: What factors contributed to Momina's

²²³ Jilo K., 20 February 2011 in Abbomsa.

²²⁴ Sheikh Mohammed, 15 February 2011 in Gado.

departure from Wollo? Why did she choose to travel first to Hararge and eventually to Arsi, where she stayed for the remainder of her life? What historical developments in the country at the time compelled her to abandon or flee Wollo? There are different approaches to attempt to tackle these questions. The reasons for her abandonment of Wollo are as mysterious as her religion and place of birth.

The first factor that forced her to abandon Wollo is attributed to her *karaamaa* (spiritual power). According to one informant, it is known that a *bala-karaamaa* (a person with spiritual power) like *Aayyoo* Momina, is not destined to remain at one place permanently.²²⁵ The second factor is related to the political situation of the country at the time. During the reign of Emperor Yohannes IV (r.1872-1889), the Muslims of Wollo were forced to abandon their religion and embrace Christianity or face confiscation of their property and land rights (Bahru Zewde 2001: 43-49). This can be seen from the perspective of what Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992:102) call a struggle within a certain field, and in this case the religious field, where the Christian empire at the zenith of its power within the religious field was in a position to impose its principles on the people of Wollo and punish those who resisted this domination.

The people of Wollo reacted to this order in many ways. Some sections of the society, especially the local rulers and their families, relinquished Islam and completely embraced Christianity. Others, however, publically accepted Christianity just to avoid repression but secretly adopted double identities. They became Christians who prayed to God during the daytime and remained Muslims who prayed to Allah in the evening. A few others, however, chose exile instead of accepting Christianity (Bahru Zewde 2001: 43-49). *Aayyoo* Momina was one of the few in the latter group who opted to abandon their region instead of facing forced conversion to Christianity.²²⁶ If this was the cause of her migration from Wollo, it strengthens the narration that she and her family were originally Christians and Momina was converted to Islam sometime later.

There is yet another narrative explaining Momina's leaving Wollo. This was related to her beauty. A certain *Girazmach*²²⁷ Wolde-Ghiorgis, who was said to be the nephew of Emperor Yohannes IV and the governor of Hararge, wanted to marry Momina, who was then known by the name Shibbash. Her parents accepted the request and they were married. After the marriage, her sister told Wolde-Ghiorgis to take Momina with him to Hararge without telling her brothers because she was afraid that they would not allow him to take Momina far

²²⁵ Hussien F., 18 February 2011 at Faraqasaa.

²²⁶ Hussien F., 18 February 2011 at Faraqasaa.

²²⁷ It was a military title and it means commander of the left in the Amharic language.

from her home. As a result, Momina and her husband left Wollo in secret and travelled to Hararge where they settled. A few years later, she gave birth to Bayyanach, her only child. When Bayyanach was five months old, Momina left her home and family and travelled to a place called Bokke (Bishoftu) in Western Hararge. It was while she was in Bishoftu that Momina was said to have started serving Sheikh Bar Ali Jami, a well-known fortune-teller (Gemechu J. Geda 2009: 45). These controversies have placed Momina and her pilgrimage center in an advantageous position in the religious field. The belief that she possessed a strong *karaamaa* made her cult appeal to diverse groups of people, regardless of their religious affiliations. Similarly, her adherence to Islam attracted a large number of moderate Muslim followers, while her marriage to a Christian exposed her cult to Christians who later joined it.

Momina is said to have travelled to and stayed at different places in Arsi before her travelling and settling in Faraqqasaa. *Aayyoo* Momina abandoned Hararge and arrived in Arsi along with her *kaddaamii* (servants) and *aggaafaarii* (supervisor) around 1884/1885 and settled at Gado-Galama. She performed her first miracle shortly after her arrival. Upon her arrival at Gado-Galama she was resting under a small acacia tree and saw some people walking and carrying a lame person. She asked them if it was okay if she could have a look at the man they were carrying. When they brought the man closer, she commanded him to walk. The moment the man stood up and started walking, the tree under which she sat fell to the ground and assumed the exact shape of the lame legs of the man. This miracle is said to have helped Momina earn immediate acceptance and respect among the inhabitants of the surrounding areas (Gemechu J. Geda 2003: 23).

Momina requested the local *balabbats* (hereditary land owners) to give her forty *sidaajaa* (a skin/carpet used for prayers) that she and her followers could use. The *balabbats*, however, did not understand her request. After a long discussion and consultation they discovered that she was asking for a plot of land to build a religious centre for her and her followers. Most of the *balabbats* did not like her request for a piece of their precious land, but one of them was afraid she might use her spiritual power to curse them if they refused to comply to her request so he gave her a piece of his land. After she obtained the land, the surrounding community helped her build a residence and a religious hall for the various rituals and healing of patients. Soon afterwards, her popularity increased and began to spread to the neighboring areas. Pilgrims began to flock to her shrine to seek her help and her blessing and this increased the number of her followers in Gado-Galama and the surrounding

areas.²²⁸ Habib Qasim (2001: 14) even claims that the honorary name “*Aayyoo*” was given to her when she was residing at Gado-Galama.

However, despite the acceptance and respect she garnered in the area, *Aayyoo* Momina did not stay long in Gado-Galama. She soon abandoned Gado-Galama and traveled to Badu where she stayed for a short period of time. Other than attributing her frequent travels to her spiritual power, nobody seems to know for sure why she abandoned Gado-Galama. She also left Badu after a short sojourn and went to Ittisa. She again abandoned this place and travelled to the Bale zone where she ultimately established pilgrimage centers in Barbare and Zaliba. After abandoning Barbare and Zaliba, she traveled through Gololcha, where she eventually established a pilgrimage center at Sole-Qawe and then returned to Arsi. She settled at Guna-Gannate and established the Guna-Gannate pilgrimage center (Mohammed Hassen 1998: 21). This was very crucial in the career of Momina. Her popularity and reverence increased tremendously while she was at Guna-Gannate. It was at Guna-Gannate that her healing power increased tremendously. It was also here that her popularity and her ability to perform various types of miracles increased to a level never seen before (Gemechu J. Geda 2009: 46-47).

Momina’s popularity at Guna-Gannate was only eclipsed with the establishment of the Faraqqasaa pilgrimage center few years later. This pilgrimage center became her final destination; she spent the rest of her life here. This center became the most famous and most revered of all pilgrimage centers established by her and one of the well-known pilgrimage sites in Ethiopia. Her eventual arrival at Faraqqasaa was, however, triggered by a chain of events which were caused by antagonism to her and her activities while at Guna-Gannate (Gemechu J. Geda 2009: 47).

5.4 The establishment of the Faraqqasaa pilgrimage center

The Faraqqasaa pilgrimage center is named after the village where it is situated, Faraqqasaa. It is situated about 22 kilometers southwest of Abbomsa, the closest major town. Pilgrims have three options to reach the shrine. The first one is walking the rugged road from Abbomsa to Faraqqasaa. The second option is boarding a bus to Angada, the smallest neighboring town to Faraqqasaa and then either walking for about two hours or hiring horses. The third option is using a vehicle along a rough seasonal road linking Faraqqasaa and Abbomsa. This road crosses various small villages on the way.

²²⁸ Sheikh Mohammed, 15 February 2011 in Gado.

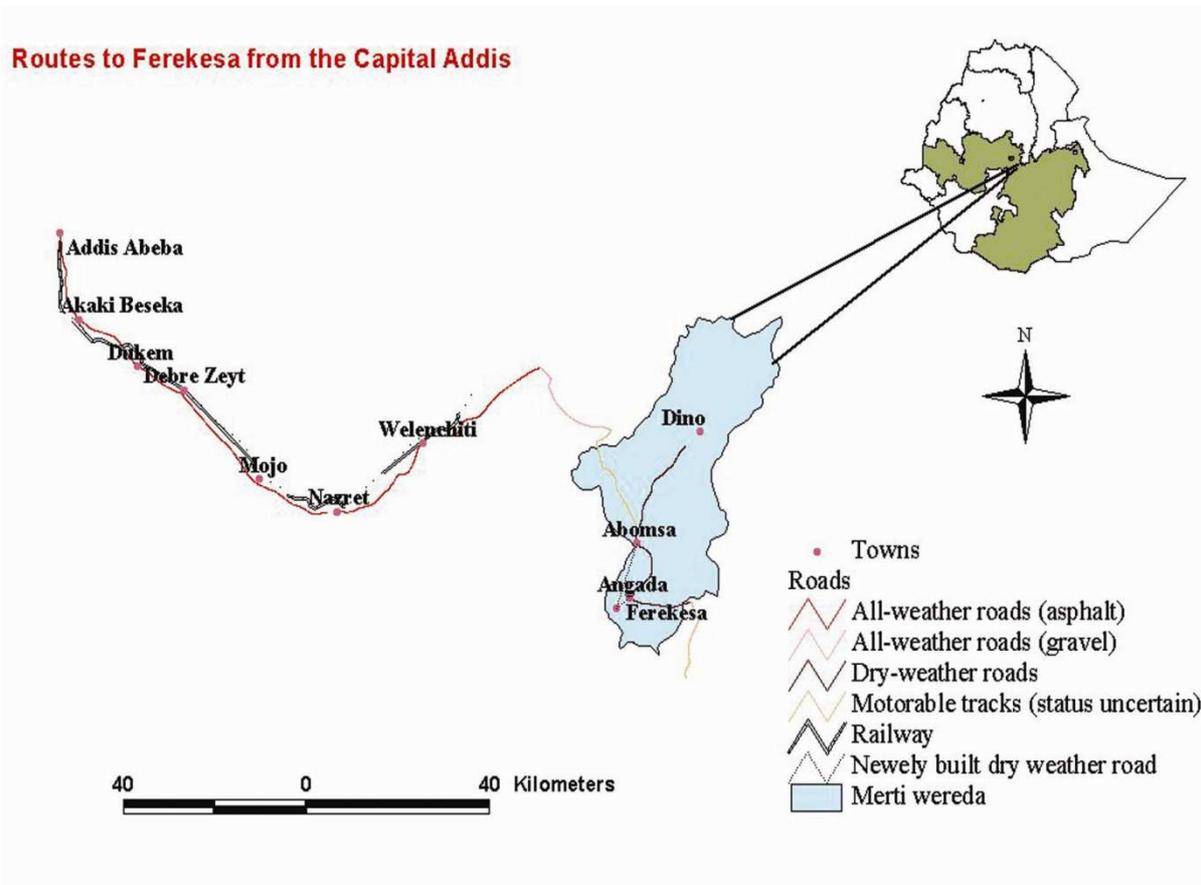


Figure 24: routes from Addis Ababa to Faraqasaa.

At the very beginning, Momina and her shrines existed mostly harmoniously with other religious groups, such as Islam and Christianity and their adherents, as well as with politicians at different levels. She was not confronted with serious challenges to her religious activities in Arsi. Furthermore, she was said to have had a good relationship with some of the regional administrators. This, however, was to change as her fame grew, and various kinds of challenges and oppositions began to repeatedly appear from various political and religious groups (Gemechu J. Geda 2003:27; Mohammed Hassen 1998: 24; Habib Qasim 2001: 16). The earliest and the sternest of all challenges came from settled soldiers, the *naftannas*²²⁹ and the local governors. This opposition was motivated by political grievances. The eventual increase in the popularity and influence of Momina among the local community led to a gradual decrease of the reputation and power of the regional political elites and their instructions and wishes were no longer unconditionally accepted by the local people. It was at this point that the local governors started to view Momina's ever increasing power and influence as a serious menace to their power and decided to take measures to counter this

²²⁹ It was derived from the Amharic word, *naft*, which means rifle and later it was given as a name for Emperor Menelik's soldiers of Northern Ethiopian origin who later settled in the conquered parts of Southern Ethiopia (Bahru Zewde 2001: 277).

development. They used various methods aimed at undermining Momina's reputation and enhancing their own. However, they did not take any personal action to this end. Instead, they indicted Momina to the highest political authority of the region for stirring up opposition to undermine the government. Momina's opponents appealed for a strong and quick measure against her before the situation spiraled out of control. The authorities, however, did not heed the accusation put against Momina and decided not to act against her or her shrines. They were convinced that Momina had no political ambition and she did not attempt to raise any sort of opposition against the administrators (Gemechu J. Geda 2009: 48). The Arsi Oromo, the majority inhabitants of the area where Faraqasaa and Momina's other shrines are located, were strong enough to oppose the authority of the central government at the time because the Arsi Oromo were already under the strong control of the imperial government as of 1886 (Darkwah 1975: 103).

The imperial government had conducted six campaigns of conquest from 1882-1886 to bring about the final occupation of the Arsi Oromo (Bahru Zewde 2001: 62). The conquest resulted in the emergence of a different socio-economic and political system that was antagonistic to the Arsi Oromo (Abbas Haji Gnamo 1982:44). An example of the hostile system introduced in Arsi after the inhabitants' bloody subjugation is the introduction of a new land ownership system that was alien to the Arsi Oromo before their conquest. Until its occupation by the imperial government, land had always belonged to the entire community in Arsi (Bizuwork Zewde 1994: 534). After the conquest, however, the Arsi Oromo were deprived of their communal land and their right to its exploitation and it came under the control of the few, mainly the political elites associated with the imperial government and its state structures. The other destructive outcome of the subjugation was the introduction of the *gabbar* (serfdom) system in Arsi. Most of the fertile land was confiscated from the Arsi Oromo and granted to those who collaborated or helped the regime at some point during the course of the occupation. This turned the majority of the Arsi Oromo into *gabbars* (tribute payers) to the owners of the land on which they were living and worked. The conquest also led to the decline in the importance of the *Gada*, the socio-political system of the Oromo, and its replacement by the imperial administration. The conquest by the imperial government and its adverse consequences infuriated the Arsi Oromo. They became antagonistic to the commands of the local administrators channeled from the imperial regime. This state of affairs might have also compelled the Arsi Oromo of the region to follow Momina's cult as a means of opposition to the religion of their subjugators (Gemechu J. Geda 2009: 49).

Economic grievance also played a crucial role in inciting opposition against Momina, her practices and shrines. Instead of working as *gabbars* in the fields and in the households of their masters, the majority of the Arsi Oromo started to spend most of their time in Momina's shrine and working on the land given to her by the local people. This led to a decrease in the income of the local elites working in the administrative structures of the imperial government. The *gabbars* also failed to fulfill their tax obligations on time as they spent most of their time off the field. In addition, some of the local governing elites own families started to visit Momina's shrine. All these factors increased the determination of local officials to disrupt Momina's power and influence among the local people.²³⁰

Instead of acting themselves, the *naftannas* and the local officials whose political and economic advantages were threatened by Momina's popularity complained to the imperial regime led by Empress Zewditu and King Tafari. However, the representatives of the *naftannas* and the local governors that took the complaint to the central government did not state their economic and political resentments against Momina. Instead, they used a pretext to accuse her. The people of Arsi had given Momina numerous affectionate names, such as *Aayyoo Momina* (Mother Momina), *Ye-Gunaw Nigus* (King of Guna), and *Ye-Arusiwa Emmebet* (The Lady of Arsi). The representatives of the *naftannas* and the local officials abused the good intentions of her followers and used her affectionate names as a foundation of their accusation against her. They informed the imperial government, rather falsely, that a certain woman of unknown background has emerged as a serious political menace to the imperial government and that she had declared herself as the king of the area.²³¹

Momina and her activities also faced stern opposition from local Christian priests and orthodox Muslim clerics. They were determined to decrease the number of Momina's followers by convincing Christians and Muslims of the surrounding areas not to visit Momina's shrines and to avoid taking part in any of the rituals. They also declared that any Christian and Muslim visiting Momina's shrines and taking part in any event organized by her and/or her shrine community would not be allowed to be buried in graveyards belonging to the numerous churches and mosques.²³²

In reaction to the ever-increasing pressures against Momina the imperial government finally sent a delegation to Arsi in 1923 to look into the allegation branded against her. The delegation conducted its investigation, mainly by talking to the regional authorities that

²³⁰ Kebede A., 18 February 2011 at Faraqqasaa.

²³¹ Mengistu W., 21 February 2011 in Abbomsa, Gemechu J. Geda (2009: 50).

²³² Kebede A., 18 February 2011 at Faraqqasaa.

accused Momina and submitted their findings that confirmed she was the culprit. Acting upon these findings, the imperial government decided to demolish her shrine and confiscate her property, such as cattle, large plots of land, gold and silver, money and other items brought by pilgrims and followers as votive offerings, and they imprisoned her at a Guna. The imperial government also gave permission to the local Christian priests to use the confiscated property to construct a church on the exact site of Momina's demolished shrine. All the land that previously belonged to Momina was shared among the state, the local governors, and the church. Momina was soon released from prison, instructed to abandon the area as soon as possible and ordered never to set foot in the area again. She was also strongly warned against recommencing her religious activities.²³³

After this incident, Momina abandoned Guna and went to Araya where she stayed for about four years in exile. The local people were opposed to the decision and actions of the imperial government but they were powerless to protest publicly because of the presence of many imperial soldiers in Guna. She had the sympathy of the local people as they were convinced that she had done nothing wrong other than trying to alleviate their suffering through healings and her blessings. Not much is known about her activities when she was in exile and her life and career remained obscure. It is, however, believed that she set up two shrines at Araya and Ticho. But her fame diminished at her place of exile for hitherto unknown reasons. It seems that she did not intend and endeavor to increase the number of her followers at her new place, probably due to the warning she received from the imperial government and the fear of possible punishment. However, Momina did not abandon her activities entirely. Even though she was banned from Guna and her shrine had been demolished, her devotees continued to gather and worship her in secret. Some of her followers were even believed to have travelled to Araya secretly to show their devotion and respect to her (Gemechu J. Geda 2009: 51).

In 1926, the imperial government pardoned Momina and ordered the local administrators to reinstate all the previously confiscated land and other properties. As a result of this proclamation, Momina regained all the land that had previously belonged to her with the exception of those plots already shared among churches. Nobody seems to know for sure why the imperial government reversed its previous decision and pardoned Momina. However, there are two hypotheses for this. Firstly, it is believed that Momina was able to reach out to the imperial government and explain her innocence through the intermediary of influential individuals in the state hierarchy. These individuals were believed to have convinced the

²³³ Kebede A. 18 February 2011 at Faraqasaa.

imperial government to pardon and reinstate Momina to her former estate. This action was, however, believed to have enraged some of the local governors who had to return the land they had previously acquired. In spite of the reinstatement and the pardon she was granted, Momina was not permitted to go back to Guna.²³⁴

Momina submitted a complaint to the imperial government that Araya, the place where she was sent in exile, was not good for her health and demanded to be resettled somewhere else. As a result, she was allowed to choose any place in Arsi except Guna, where she had become popular and revered. Because of the prohibition placed on her return to Guna, Momina decided to settle at Faraqqaasaa. The driving factor for her decision to settle in Faraqqaasaa was attributed to her possession of land in Faraqqaasaa while she was still in Guna. In addition, Momina was believed to have foretold of her ultimate settlement in Faraqqaasaa. The imperial government finally accepted her bid for a settlement in Faraqqaasaa, where she moved and established the pilgrimage center. Her settlement in Faraqqaasaa was also attributed to her spiritual powers. It is believed that the government decided to pardon and reinstate Momina because they feared the calamitous consequences of her power. This convinced even the local officials and church leaders who opposed her and her activities at the beginning. They considered her pardon and return to be a miracle. Hence, they ultimately began to pay due respect to Momina. Some of these people even gave their land to Momina. The inhabitants of the area helped Momina build her religious houses and her cult was revitalized again. Followers of her cult began to flock to Faraqqaasaa in a number unseen before at the other pilgrimage centers.²³⁵ At Faraqqaasaa, Momina tried to live with the local officials and the clergy peacefully. As a token of good intentions, she was believed to have started giving gifts obtained from her pilgrims, such as umbrellas, incense, and carpets, to the churches and mosques (Gemechu J. Geda 2009: 52).

However, on 29 October 1929, Momina died of sickness. The next day she was buried on the highest ground in Faraqqaasaa. Her burial was associated with the emergence of two narratives of miracles. According to the first narration, a ball of fire was seen surging from the grave to the sky. The second narration explains that when the people entrusted with the task of burying her entered the house where they kept the body, they did not find her body on the bed where she died. After this discovery, it is believed that they buried a coffin containing only a blanket. After her burial, a *qubba* (cupola) was erected as her memorial on her grave by a certain Yemeni Arab constructor, Maulia. The expense for erecting the cupola was financed

²³⁴ Jilo K., 20 February 2011 in Abbomsa.

²³⁵ Sheikh Mohammed, 15 February 2011 in Gado.

mainly by the earnings of the pilgrimage center acquired from votive offerings (Gemechu J. Geda 2009: 52-53).

Despite being the last to be established by Momina, the Faraqqasaa pilgrimage centre is by far the most famous and respected of all. The main reason for this could be the fact that her burial site and memorial are located there; they alone attract more pilgrims to Faraqqasaa than to the other shrines she founded. This could be described as the objectified form of cultural capital, which, as Bourdieu (1986: 246-247) explains, refers to the cultural capital 'objectified in material objects such as ... monuments, and which is transmissible in its materiality'.



Figure 25: *qubbaa*: mausoleum of Momina at Faraqqasaa.

Photo by Gulilat Menbere, October 2005.

However, the death of Momina did not deter pilgrims from visiting her shrines at different places; instead, the number of pilgrims increased over time. The existence of her grave and memorial at Faraqqasaa increased its significance in comparison with other pilgrimage centres she had established and which are now regarded as branches of the Faraqqasaa pilgrimage centre. October 29, the day on which she died, became the anniversary and the major festive day at all her shrines. Most devotees and followers of her cult regard her as a saint and they continue to travel on pilgrimages to all her pilgrimage centres four times a year.²³⁶ Holt (1970: 18) states that it is customary for prominent religious leaders to be considered saints, seeing that the performance of miracles was associated with them, and that

²³⁶ Hussien S., 18 February 2011 at Faraqqasaa.

their tombs become pilgrimage destinations. After Momina's death, the oversight of the rituals during the four major pilgrimages as well as the administration of the shrines was entrusted to her loyal and closest aides until the 1940s.²³⁷

Long before her death, Momina was said to have prophesized that one of her descendants would inherit her *karaamaa* (spiritual power), and become a spiritual leader to all her shrines. She even foretold that her heir would be much more powerful than her. Accordingly, her great grandson, Tayye Meshesha, became the spiritual leader at Faraqqaasaa around 1952. It is believed that he was born around 1918/19 while Momina was still at Guna. His father was *Qannazmach* (commander of the left) Meshesha and his mother was Ye-ilfinn Endale, Momina's granddaughter. With the exception of Momina, who spent her life as a Muslim after her conversion, most of her relatives are believed to have officially remained followers of Orthodox Christianity. According to Christian practices, Tayye was baptized within forty days of his birth. Momina was said to have strongly warned his family against his baptism. Despite this, Tayye's parents did not pay heed to Momina's protest and warning and baptised him. Tayye's father died when he was still a young boy and his mother married another man. This led to Tayye being raised by Momina until her death. After her death, Momina's aides, to whom her shrines were entrusted, became Tayye's guardians, and they started to groom him to be the future spiritual leader at Faraqqaasaa.²³⁸

Around the first half of the 1930s, however, disagreements arose between Tayye and his guardians, so he travelled to Addis Ababa. He stayed in Addis Ababa for a while but returned to Faraqqaasaa due to sickness. He again returned to Addis Ababa and served in the Imperial Body Guard for some time, then returned to Arsi at the beginning of the Italian occupation of Ethiopia.²³⁹ During this period, Tayye spent most of the time hiding and travelling frequently from place to place to evade capture by the Italians who were in pursuit of him on suspicion that he had hidden weapons to be used against them. In 1938 he was finally caught and imprisoned in Guna. The Italians set him free after recovering and seizing some of his arms. However, they soon started to suspect that the weapons they confiscated were not the only ones so they imprisoned him again. They managed to retrieve more weapons that he had concealed and they sentenced him to death, which they later changed to imprisonment in Mogadishu. He remained in prison for about two years until the wake of the liberation of Ethiopia in 1941, when he was released and returned to Addis Ababa (Gemechu J. Geda 2009: 54-55).

²³⁷ Wondimu K., 21 February in Abbomsa.

²³⁸ Shiferaw J., 23 February 2011 in Nazareth.

²³⁹ Ethiopia was under the occupation of Italy from 1936-1941 (Bahru Zewde 2001: 150-176).

After his return to Ethiopia, Tayye went to Gojjam, in what is now the Amhara region, to meet Emperor Haile Sellasie on his return from exile in London via Sudan. As a compensation for his imprisonment by the Italians, Tayye was granted land and allowed to rejoin the Imperial Body Guard. He was granted the title of *Qannazmach* (commander of the right) in April 1968. He managed to acquire this title as a result of the good relationship he was able to garner with the Imperial regime. However, despite all the privileges he had acquired, Tayye's stay in Addis Ababa and in the Imperial Body Guard was short lived. He became seriously ill, which was said to have been caused as a result of his inheritance of Momina's powerful *karaamaa*. He was informed by aides at Momina's shrine that his sickness was caused by the fact that he abandoned Momina's shrine even though he had inherited her powers. Acting on their advice, he started to visit all the shrines founded by his great grandmother in various places in Arsi, Bale and Hararge. Momina's reputation and veneration helped Tayye to be easily accepted and for his arrival to be welcomed by the local people as well as devotees of the shrines. Around 1952, Tayye publicly declared that he had inherited Momina's *karaamaa*, and was hence ready to serve as the spiritual leader of all her shrines. Tayye was ordered by the Prophet Mohammed to accept the role of leadership of the shrine. He finally travelled to Faraqqasaa and built his residence close to the resting place of Momina. He immediately started the task of refurbishing the religious houses, renewing of all the shrines established by Momina and the appointment of *aggaafaarii* to run the shrines. Shortly afterwards, he was converted to Islam and changed his name to Said Nur Ahmed. He soon garnered wide acceptance and respect among his followers and various miracles such as healing the sick, endowing wealth to the poor, healing the lame and the deaf began to be attributed to him. He had many wives and hence many children. Tayye's spiritual power, especially his skill at exorcizing evil spirits from, and harmonizing guardian spirits with, possessed individuals was said to have surpassed even that of his great grandmother.²⁴⁰

Tayye started a deliberate attempt to expand the base of the cult during his leadership. He embarked on a policy of expanding the cult to other areas where Momina had not ventured and of establishing shrines in these locations. He attempted with some success to spread the cult to some of the bigger towns, such as Nazareth and Dire Dawa, by establishing new centres. He was also said to have set up his own, small, armed guards for reasons that are hitherto not clearly known. However, it was assumed that Tayye did this as a precautionary measure to protect himself while travelling from one shrine to the other from a suspected attack by bandits or other groups opposed to his activities. Tayye also reorganized the

²⁴⁰ Mohammed T., 16 February 2011 at Faraqqasaa.

structures of the Faraqqasaa pilgrimage center and its branches. He supervised the construction of various houses for rituals and other purposes, such as resting places for guests.²⁴¹

At Faraqqasaa, there are three houses, each with its own function. The first is the *sagannat*, which is used as a resting place for guests and some of the pilgrims that are close to the family, for holding the coffee ceremony (*arhiibuu*) and for handing over of votive gifts during the major annual pilgrimages. The second important ritual house is the *Hadra-bet* (*hadra* house). This house is used for healing and other religious assemblies. The third is called *Qur'an-bet* (Qur'an house) because it is the house where the Qur'an is recited. There are other smaller, but ritually less important houses used as kitchens and guest houses for pilgrims. Under Tayye's leadership the Faraqqasaa pilgrimage center reached its apex in the 1950s and 1960s. In addition to the increase in the popularity and importance of the Faraqqasaa pilgrimage center, Tayye also became famous throughout the country so thousands of pilgrims flocked to his shrines from all over the country to receive his *barakaa* (blessings).²⁴²



Figure 26: *Sagannat*.

Photo by Gemechu J. Geda, May 2006.

²⁴¹ Shieferaw J., 23 February 2011 in Nazareth.

²⁴² Mengistu W., 21 February in Abbomsa.

Tayye, his shrines and devotees, however, faced oppositions in the 1970s and 80s. Tayye reported the first of many problems facing the shrines in the early 1970s when the shrine in Robe was robbed. He filed a complaint to the local officials but he did not receive a reply. Then he decided to take the matter to the highest authority in the country, so he wrote a letter to Emperor Haile Sellasie. He stated that his prayer house and the land which he had inherited from his grandmother were robbed and desecrated in Robe. He also stated that two of his representatives at the place were killed and that there was a conspiracy against his own life. He further stated that the culprits disturbed him all the time while he was praying for his country and his emperor. He pleaded with the emperor to give instructions to the officials in Bale and Arsi provinces to bring an end to the violent actions of robbers against him and his property. The emperor then sent letters to government officials in Arsi and Bale regions instructing them to stop any illegal actions used against him and advised the governors of the two provinces to take legal actions against those who ransacked his ritual house. This intervention halted the violent actions of his opponents against him and his institution, but verbal abuses continued. These abuses came especially from the educated section of the society, increasing in severity with the outbreak of the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution.²⁴³

However, the most protracted challenge to Tayye and all his institutions came mainly after the eruption and intensification of the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution. It was in October 1974 that the first of many challenges against Tayye and his institutions took place. During this time, thousands of pilgrims were gathered at Faraqasaa and Tayye was supervising the ceremony of the anniversary of the death of Momina. Policemen arrived unannounced and he was disarmed and disrespected in front of his followers. This enraged many of his followers who later gathered and filed a complaint to the local authorities. In this letter of complaint, they stated that while thousands of Christians and Muslims gathered from the different provinces to celebrate the anniversary of the death of his mother (Momina), handing over gifts, and while prayers were conducted at the place, policemen from Arsi province showed up and entered the mosque with their shoes on. His followers stated in the letter that the policemen stamped on a Qur'an he was using, disrespected the mosque and stole money from Tayye. They also stated that the blind and the poor who had been supported personally by Tayye and his shrine were suffering from hunger as a result of his absence because of his imprisonment. They requested the local authorities to take strict measures against those who disrespected the mosque and to release him from prison. However, the local court annulled

²⁴³ Wondimu K., 21 February 2011 in Abbomsa.

their complaint. Shortly afterwards, the authorities reversed their decision and returned all the previously confiscated personal belongings of Tayye and his shrines.²⁴⁴

Following this incident, Tayye decided to abandon Faraqasaa and settled in Nazareth. He then delegated Qale-Ab one of his sons, with the task of administering the Faraqasaa pilgrimage center and the other shrines established by Momina. He lived in Nazareth, Addis Ababa, Dire Dawa and Wollo until he was arrested and imprisoned in 1981 by the military regime, the *Dergue*,²⁴⁵ which ultimately confiscated the personal belongings of Tayye and properties belonging to all the shrines. Since his imprisonment, nothing has been heard of Tayye, and his final fate remains a mystery to this day. In 1980, the military government decided to bring the income collected at Faraqasaa and all the other shrines under its direct control. In 1984, however, the military regime regarded Faraqasaa, as well as the other pilgrimage centres, relics of the feudal establishment and abolished them. They were all closed down and devotees were prohibited from paying homage to any of the shrines until 1987 (Gemechu J. Geda 2009: 59). Even though the government set up local security units to prevent pilgrims from visiting the shrines, pilgrims did not fully abandon visiting the shrines, which they visited clandestinely. Although the action of the government did not completely stop pilgrims from visiting the shrines, it tremendously decreased their number.²⁴⁶

The spiritual leader of the shrines at the time, Qale-Ab, however, did not stop applying to the central government for the reopening of the Faraqasaa, as well as the other pilgrimage centres. In 1987, the central government finally granted permission for the reopening of all the shrines. In addition to the persistent application made by Qale-Ab for the reopening of the shrines, the gradual departure of the revolution from its radicalism of the early phases was the other crucial reason for the reversal of their earlier decisions. During the later stages of the revolution, high-ranking officials within the military regime finally decided to be flexible and less harsh on religious institutions. Qale-Ab remained the spiritual leader of the Faraqasaa and all the other shrines established by Momina until his death in 2001. After his death, the responsibility of administering and supervising the shrines was commended to his brother, Sirak Tayye, who later assumed the name *Haji* Siraj after his conversion to Islam and after conducting a pilgrimage to Mecca. With the collapse of the military regime in 1991, which

²⁴⁴ Shieferaw J., 23 February 2011 in Nazareth.

²⁴⁵ *Dergue* means 'committee' and it was a new inclusion in Amharic political lexicon in the 1970's. It represented the Marxist regime that ruled Ethiopia from 1974-1991 (Bahru Zewde 2001: 234, 243).

²⁴⁶ Shieferaw J., 23 February 2011 in Nazareth.

resulted in the establishment of a democratic system in Ethiopia, this led to the improvement of conditions for Faraqqasaa and the other shrines (Gemechu J. Geda 2009: 59).

5.5 Periods of pilgrimage

There are six major periods when large numbers of pilgrims congregate at Faraqqasaa. One of the most important and revered of all these periods is October 29 of each year, which is the commemoration of the anniversary of the death of *Aayyoo* Momina. It is also believed that it was on this day that she arrived in Faraqqasaa. The other periods that attract large crowds of devotees from all corners of the country as well as devotees living outside of Ethiopia are associated with Islam. They include *Mawlid*, the Prophet Mohammed's birthday and *Id al-fitr*, which is the festival of the breaking of the Muslim period of fasting. Large numbers of pilgrims also gather at the shrine on 28 *December* and 27 May (St. Gabriel's days), and the month of *Pagumen*.²⁴⁷ In addition to these major periods of pilgrimages, pilgrims can visit the center at any time of the year.²⁴⁸

5.6 Rituals

During the major periods of pilgrimages, many rituals are performed at the shrine. One of the important rituals is the handing over of *silat/silata* (votive offerings) in return for wishes that are fulfilled with the help of the shrine and/or its founder and one of its former and/or current spiritual leaders. Votive offering is defined as "an act of the virtue of religion by which the offerer expresses recognition of God's supremacy and, at the same time, submits to his will" (Meagher et al., 1979: 3695). The purpose of any type of offering is to give weight to someone's prayer. The offering is not done with the aim of bribing God but as an incentive to promote the feeling of proper prayer in the mind of the offerer (Meagher et al., 1979: 3695). The view shared at Faraqqasaa conforms to this explanation. Votive gifts are promised and offered by devotees at Faraqqasaa to prove their devotion and to give strength for their prayers.

Votive gifts are presented at Faraqqasaa for the wishes which pilgrims claim have been fulfilled by invoking Momina's and/or Tayye's *karaamaa*. These gifts are in the form of: cash, animals such as cattle, camels and/or sheep, joss sticks, incense, perfume, carpet, gold, silver, umbrellas, butter, honey, milk, coffee beans, and other items. In addition, pilgrims also hand over gifts when they make a wish with the aim of increasing the probability of its fulfillment (Gemechu J. Geda 2009: 73-74).

²⁴⁷ The Ethiopian calendar has thirteen months and *Pagumen* is the thirteenth month. It is made up of only five days and it has six days every four years.

²⁴⁸ Mohammad T., 16 February 2011 at Faraqqasaa.

The animals brought by pilgrims as votive gifts are slaughtered. The most favored colors of sacrificial animals are red, grey, white, and black, though nobody seems to know the reason for these preferences. Some of the blood from the sacrificial animals is mixed with perfume and sprinkled around the pilgrimage center while the rest is kept in a little hut near Momina's shrine as a feast for spirits. There is also a kind of feast for the *darmu* (hyena) in which part of the meat from the sacrificial animals is given. This induces the *darmu* not to attack horses, mules, and donkeys belonging to pilgrims and animals brought as votive offerings. Hyenas also restrain themselves from attacking pilgrims, who mostly sleep on the plateau around the pilgrimage center in the evening.²⁴⁹

Votive gifts are offered at Faraqqasaa in return for wishes related to receiving children, wealth, and health that have been fulfilled by using the center and/or any of the spiritual leaders as intermediaries between pilgrims and the supernatural. Once pilgrims' wishes are fulfilled, they bring what they originally promised and hand it over publicly while announcing the *aja'bat* (miracle). They usually do this during one of the major pilgrimages, but occasionally they may come outside of the pilgrimage periods. Sometimes, pilgrims who promised to offer gifts upon the fulfillment of their wishes may not be able to show up during the pilgrimages due to various personal, family, and social problems, such as sickness, weddings, funerals and other problems. If confronted with any one of the above situations, pilgrims can give the gift to a relative, a friend, or any other pilgrim travelling to the shrine. The delegated pilgrim then publicly announces the miracle as told by the sender and hands over the gift. It is widely believed that if pilgrims fail to hand over their vows as promised, the individual, his family member, or one of his relatives could be confronted with negative consequences.²⁵⁰ The hymn below, one of many hymns sung at the center during the pilgrimages, clearly indicates the dire consequences of failing to deliver according to the promises one made:

The woman begged Momina
To give her a baby and not to live barren
And if she gave birth she promised to travel to Faraqqasaa with her baby
Before the baby is named and his hair is shaved
Soon she became pregnant
Since Momina listens to everybody's prayers
Unless one betrays her after calling her name

²⁴⁹ Kebede A., 18 February 2011 at Faraqqasaa.

²⁵⁰ Wondimu K., 21 February 2011 in Abbomsa.

Soon the woman gave birth
In less than a year and without any suffering
Some people are loyal until their wishes are fulfilled
After she gave birth, she forgot her promise
Postponing it day after day and a year had passed
And she did not bring the baby to our mother's house
The work of the saints is very surprising
They take care of what belongs to them and they save them from a fire
One day, the woman laid the baby down and went to fetch water
Soon her house was engulfed with fire
Neighbors came to retrieve some of her property
They could retrieve her property, let alone approach the house
They retreated back in fear of the blaze
When the mother of the baby heard
She was terrified because her baby was still inside and she came running
She wanted to jump into the raging fire
And perish together with her baby
People around stopped her
There were many elders around her
And they scolded her saying,
"What is the problem if a baby dies?
God will replace him in the future"
She suddenly came to her senses
And remembered our mother, Momina
"I asked you to give me a baby and not to burn him
Do not make all my effort fruitless"
As she knew that her baby could not survive the fire
She asked the people to search for him
In case its bones survived the fire
And to bury him for her properly
This is better than leaving him there
After the house was fully consumed with fire and burned down
The roof and the wall collapsed to the ground
The house was totally consumed and only ash remained

People began to search for the baby
The heat did not let them get closer
And they did not know how the baby could survive such an inferno
After a while, the fire was extinguished
And they began to search for the baby
Shibbash's *karaamaa* extinguished the fire
And the baby was found well asleep
Immersed in sweat as a result of the heat from the fire
It was saved without even having burned his clothes
The work of the *Woliyis* (saints) is very surprising
The mere mentioning of their name saves (us/people) from a lot of misery
There is nothing more frightening than fire
Their name saves us/people from fire
As he survived the fire
Protect us as well, Momina (Gemechu J. Geda 2009: 74-76).

During the pilgrimages, pilgrims burn incense and joss sticks under big trees that are considered holy (*adbars*), and they smear them with butter because it is believed that Momina sat under their shade, healed the sick and performed various other miracles. They are so revered that worshippers have to take off their shoes before sitting and praying under them, and they must anoint them with butter and perfumes. Pilgrims bow down and kiss the *adbars* as well as the ground around them. These performances indicate pilgrims' devoutness and veneration for Momina. Devotees believe that this practice would enable their prayers to be heard by Momina's *karaamaa*.²⁵¹

²⁵¹ Alemitu B., 22 February 2011 in Abbomsa.



Figure 27: a pilgrim smearing an *adbar* with butter.

Photo by Gemechu J. Geda, May 2006.

Another important ritual performed at Faraqqasaa is the *wadaajaa* ritual. It refers to a religious assembly in the *hadraa masjid* (*hadraa* or religious assembly mosque). The *wadaajaa* ceremony is led by the *hadraa-mari* (leader of *hadraa* or religious assembly). The *wadaajaa* ritual existed among the Arsi Oromo long before the coming of Momina to Arsi. According to Trimmingham (2008: 262), the *wadaajaa* is the main religious event of the Oromo. It is a family or collective prayer, which is accompanied by a feast, drinking coffee and occasionally sacrifices of sheep. However, at Faraqqasaa it refers to praying, chewing *khat*, drinking coffee, and singing of songs reciting the life and miraculous deeds (*qissaa*) of Momina and Tayye (Gemechu J. Geda 2009: 77). It is widely believed that taking part in a *wadaajaa* ritual and reciting the names of Momina and Tayye is one way of healing various physical and mental sicknesses and alleviating other problems. Taking part in this ritual also helps to expel evil spirits such as *budaa* and *jinni* (*djinni*) and harmonize guardian spirits with the possessed.²⁵²

5.7 Healing methods

Healing is one of the most important factors that attract thousands of pilgrims annually to Faraqqasaa. Eliade (1987: 226) states that healing has a significant place in all religions of the world and that it is the most important characteristic of any religious tradition. There are

²⁵² Hussien F., 18 February 2011 at Faraqqasaa.

many ways to heal various physical and mental illness at Faraqqasaa and they are presented as follows.

5.7.1 The spiritual power (*karaamaa*) of the leader

The most important and efficient method of healing is considered to be the spiritual power of the leader, especially that of Momina, who is usually considered a saint by her devotees, and the invocation of the names of past and present spiritual leaders. Spiritual leaders are believed to have possessed the power to: heal the sick, endow children to the barren, endow wealth to the poor, and even raise the dead. A translation of one of the hymns indicating Momina's power to raise the dead is as follows:

This is Shibbash Work Yimer, Momina
Allah has endowed her with the power of raising the dead
The goat died before being slaughtered
Momina ordered the *qaallicha*²⁵³ to go and recite on her
And raise the goat from the dead with the blessings of the Qur'an
He replied that he has no power to raise the dead
Even if he recites the entire Qur'an
Momina instructed him
To tell the goat that Momina commands her to wake up
When he told the goat that she was instructed to wake up [by Momina]
The goat rose from death.
She [Momina] raised the goat from dead without being asked
She will never forget us if we pray to her
Come quickly our mother
Heal the sick and feed the starved (Gemechu J. Geda 2009: 78-79).

By examining the above hymn one may infer that even the invocation of Momina's name is enough to raise a creature from the dead. In the hymn, Momina was not directly involved in the raising of the dead goat; rather it was the mentioning of her name by the holy man that raised the goat. By analyzing the message and content of the hymn, one may see the remarkable spiritual power ascribed to Momina. There are diverse attitudes on the methods employed by Momina and her successors to heal the sick. Orthodox Muslims and Christians consider Momina a sorcerer and a witch, while others, mostly moderate Muslims, Christians

²⁵³ He is regarded as a holy man who is in touch with the ancient spirits that reside on the *adbars*. He may not be touched, not even to shake hands. He is respectfully referred to as "Master of the Spirit" (Messing 1968: 92).

and followers of indigenous faith systems, perceive her as an intermediary between the supernatural and humans.²⁵⁴

5.7.2 Traditional healing methods

In addition to the healing power attributed to past and present spiritual leaders, there are various traditional healing methods practiced at Faraqqasaa. The WHO report (2000: 1) defines traditional medicines as a combination of the knowledge, skills, and practices that are unique to a certain tradition and used in the maintenance of health, prevention, identification, and healing of various sicknesses. Some of the traditional medicines used to heal patients at Faraqqasaa include *tabal* (holy water), *emat* (holy ash), *hawza* (boiled *khat* leaves) and the zar cult. *Tabal* is commonly found in many pilgrimage centers and it is used to cure various forms of sicknesses such as headaches and other internal sicknesses (Pankhurst 1994:948). It is also widely believed that it can cure sicknesses caused by evil spirits such as *budaa* (evil eye). The springs where the holy water is fetched are located in a remote valley. For most pilgrims, it takes more than an hour's walk to fetch the *tabal*. There are people who look after the springs. Pilgrims suffering from internal sicknesses drink it while those who have external problems wash themselves with it. Pilgrims are not permitted to take the holy water with them upon their departure. This decision was made very recently due to some pilgrims who started selling the holy water.²⁵⁵

The other item used as traditional medicine is *emet* (holy ash). It is produced by burning incense and mixing the resulting ash with holy water. It can either be drunk or applied externally. Drinking is mostly recommended for internal and mental sicknesses while applying it externally is advised for skin sicknesses and healing a wound. Pilgrims can also take *emet* to their sick relatives who are not able to come to the center for various reasons. The other traditional medicine used at Faraqqasaa is *hawza*. This is prepared by boiling fresh *khat* leaves in a pot. Sick pilgrims then drink it as medicine. Healthy pilgrims also use it as prevention against various abdominal sicknesses (Alemitu B.).

5.7.3 Spirit possession

There are two types of spirit possessions in Ethiopia: possession by evil spirits, and possessions by guardian spirits. Evil spirits are generally known by the name *sexaana*, *shayxaana*, or *jinnii*. It is difficult, if not impossible, to control and manage evil spirits. Hence, it is strongly recommended that they should be exorcized as they mostly result in

²⁵⁴ Alemitu B., 22 February in Abbomsa.

²⁵⁵ Shiferaw J., 23 February 2011 in Nazareth.

different kinds of mental and physical sicknesses (Lewis 1984: 420-421). At Faraqqasaa a guardian *zar* spirit is known as *wuqaabii* and it protects an individual and a community (Lewis 1984: 421). Individuals possessed by *wuqaabii* help in the healing process of those possessed by various evil spirits such as *budaa* (evil eye).²⁵⁶

Zar: spirit possession cult

An important prerequisite for belief in spirit possession is belief in the existence of spirits (Klass 2003: 67). Al-Adawi *et al.*, (2001: 47) and Bourguignon (1995: 71) state that belief in spirit possession is a worldwide phenomenon. Belief in spirits and their potential to attack and possess human beings has its origin in ancient times and its influence and significance has continued to spread to the modern period (Lewis 1984: 419). However, the oldest scroll referring to the term *zar* goes as back as to the sixteenth century (Natvig 1987: 677). The term *zar* refers to possession by a spirit as well as the ritual of exorcising a possessing spirit from the possessed individual or harmonizing it with the possessed. Hence, it is associated with the entire experience of an individual attacked by spirits (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 48, Natvig 1987: 670, Boddy 1989: 131, El Guindy and Schmais 1994: 107). *Zar* refers to a type of trance dance performed with the aim of curing a person possessed by a spirit. Although it is generally stated that rhythm and rituals are distinctive features of a *zar* dance (El Guindy and Schmais 1994: 107) there is no consensus regarding the origin of the term *zar* itself. According to one narration the term has its root in Amharic, the official language of Ethiopia, while another story states that the term is a corruption of *zahr*, an Arabic word meaning “he visited” (Boddy 1989: 132, Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001. 48, El Guindy and Schmais 1994: 107).

Story of the origin of zar

There is no consensus regarding the issue of the origin of belief in the *zar* spirit. Al-Adawi *et al* (2001: 48- 49) state that there are three possible places of origin for belief in *zar*. The first narrative states that belief in *zar* started in Ethiopia and over time was adopted by many Middle Eastern and North African communities. This belief in possession by *zar* is said to have originated from the name of an ancient pagan god in Abyssinian myths. The second view states that the belief first emerged in Iran, while according to the third view, it originated in the Sudan (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 49). It is, however, widely believed that belief in a *zar* spirit was first witnessed in Ethiopia. According to Sengers (2003:89) *zar* was related to the

²⁵⁶ Alemitu B., 22 February 2011 in Abbomsa, Shito N., 22 February in Abbmosa.

cult of a traditional god, who was considered to be a demon after the population converted to Christianity.

El Guindy *et al.*, (1994: 107) also agree to the notion that belief in *zar* first originated in Ethiopia and then spread to countries like Egypt, the Sudan, Iran, the Middle East, and Nigeria. Natvig (1987: 669) further elaborates that belief in *zar* spread into Djibouti and Eritrea. The most popular Abyssinian legend regarding the origin of belief in a *zar* spirit goes back to the story of the Garden of Eden. It is believed that Eve had 30 children. One day God came to visit Eve and demanded to see her children. Eve did not know what God's real motives were and she was terrified that God might try to take her children away. As a result, she decided to hide fifteen of the better looking and smarter children. However, God already knew what she had done, so he decided to convert the hidden children into invisible creatures (spirits) with supernatural powers who could only roam the world at night (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 53, El Guindy and Schmais 1994: 109). Although they are immortal and endowed with supernatural powers, they are generally believed to be jealous creatures (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 53; Gemechu J. Geda 2009: 83).

At Faraqasaa, *zar* refers to: 1. the possessing spirit; and 2. the entire ceremony that is used to harmonize the spirit and the possessed in the case of possession by a good (guardian) spirit or the exorcising of an evil spirit from someone possessed in this way. Harmonizing good spirits with the possessed is a group action, while exorcising evil spirits is largely done on an individual basis. The procedure leading to the above actions, however, starts with the beating of a drum around 7:30 in the evening. The sound of the drum is believed to enable possession by spirits. This is done intentionally because the first step in healing the possessed is to identify the type of possessing spirit/spirits. Simultaneously, in the *sagannat* house, attendants of the center start to pour perfumes from bottles into a big container. The perfume is used as a feast for the possessing spirits and as a means of differentiating between evil and guardian spirits. On hearing the sound of the drum, pilgrims possessed by various types of spirits run to the compound. All of them start shouting and screaming on the way to the compound and they continue doing this on arrival as well. This behavior is said to be the consequence of the sound of the drum, which activates the possessing spirit(s). Identifying and harmonizing or exorcising possessing spirits is the task of the spiritual leader. He does not, however, directly communicate with the possessed. He only gives orders by whispering instructions to one of his ritual aides (*aggaafaarii*) who in turn gives orders to the spirits possessing an individual.

The *aggaafaarii* passes on instructions as given by the spiritual leader. While possessed pilgrims are performing trance dances, orders are given for evil spirits, such as *budaa* (evil eye) and *jinni*, to leave the congregation. Evil spirits are warned of grave consequences if they fail to do so. Then some of the aides and servants at the center approach the pilgrims performing *zar* dances with the bucket containing the perfume mixture. The spiritual leader then orders the possessing spirits to “behold and sit silently”. Most participants follow these instructions; only a few pilgrims continue scream further from the influence of the possessing spirits. Once the pilgrims sit silently, the aides then walk through the seated pilgrims using a flywhisk to sprinkle them with the perfume. It is believed that the perfume serves as a kind of feast (offering) to the possessing spirit. Some pilgrims even ask the aides to sprinkle them more. Although the possessed pilgrims are asking for this, worshippers state that it is the unsatisfied possessing spirits that ask for more using the possessed as a medium.²⁵⁷

When sprinkled with perfume, some pilgrims start to scream and shout louder. These are people possessed with evil spirits such as *budaa* (evil eye) and *jinni*. Worshippers believe that evil spirits do not like good smells and they are also not resistant to them. Many informants have told me that most pilgrims believe that the perfume burns these evil spirits, makes them scream and defeats them. The screaming is attributed to a spirit that uses the body of the possessed as a medium. Pilgrims possessed with evil spirits are then identified and taken away by the *aggaafaarii*. The remaining pilgrims that enjoy the smell of the perfume are possessed by a guardian *zar* and they are ordered by the spiritual leader to continue performing the trance dance without hurting each other. This permits pilgrims possessed with guardian spirits to continue the *zar* dance, which involves revolving their heads violently and shaking their torsos. The amazing thing is that, even if there are many people at the event, there are no incidents of bumping into each other during the *zar* dance.²⁵⁸

After a while, the spiritual leader gives instructions to the possessing spirits to be completely silent. He informs the spirits that they will receive offerings, which usually entails sacrifices once every year. The leader also commands the spirits not to attack the person but to help him/her until the next pilgrimage period. Blessings and prayers are made for peaceful pilgrimages and gatherings for the ensuing pilgrimage period. Prayers are also made for the prevalence of everlasting peace in the country and the family of all those who are present at the center. The possessed are also instructed to continue offering their respective possessing

²⁵⁷ Hussien F., 18 February 2011 at Faraqqaasaa.

²⁵⁸ Hussien F., 18 February 2011 at Faraqqaasaa.

spirit what they had offered it prior to this pilgrimage. Then the spirits are told to mount their “horses”²⁵⁹ and “play” in their respective places. With this instruction, the possessed leave the compound and disperse into their camps (Gemechu J. Geda 2009: 84-85).

Possession by spirit/s

There are different factors that lead to attacks or possessions by a spirit. It is believed that every individual is susceptible to possession by a spirit/spirits, the only difference being the degree of exposure to possession (Messing 1958: 1121, El Guindy and Schmais 1994: 110). Some of the most important factors that facilitate attacks by spirits are discussed as follows:

Natural conditions

Finding oneself amidst some natural geographical locations, such as bushes, increases the risk of possession by spirits. It is believed that spirits live in bushes, ride wild animals, milk them, and protect them from hunters (Messing 1958: 1121). Venturing to such places alone, especially at midday or midnight, exposes an individual to attacks by spirits that regard this action as an incursion in their territory.²⁶⁰

Inheritance

It is widely believed that a *zar* spirit can be hereditary (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 49). Some individuals deliberately encourage possession by a spirit by declaring their commitment to the possessing spirit. This only happens if they find out they are possessed by a guardian spirit (*Wuqaabii*) (Messing 1958: 1121, El Guindy and Schmais 1994: 110). Only female members of a family can inherit the possessing spirits of their parents (El Guindy and Schmais 1994: 111). Although the notion of the hereditary nature of spirit possession is accepted at Faraqasaa, a spirit can possess any member of the family without limiting itself to females. For instance, after the death of Momina, her male descendants inherited her spirit.²⁶¹

The spirit’s own choice

Zar spirits can also independently decide which individuals to possess (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 49). Often spirits tend to choose individuals with good character and beauty (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 49, Messing 1959: 1121). Sometimes spirits can attack individuals with

²⁵⁹ Many informants have told me that individuals possessed by a spirit are considered as horses to a possessing spirit.

²⁶⁰ Mengistu W., 21 February 2011 in Abbomsa, Alemitu B., 22 February 2011 in Abbomsa, Gemechu J. Geda (2009: 86).

²⁶¹ Shieferaw J., 23 February 2011 in Nazareth; Gemechu J. Geda (2009:87).

weaker characters (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 49). Possession can also happen accidentally. *Zar* spirits can also possess curious observers of the rituals that are intended to appease and/or exorcise *zar*, especially if an onlooker tries to mock the rituals or refute the belief of possession by a *zar* (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 49). *Zar* also possesses individuals who tease people possessed by spirits and all the rituals intended to appease or exorcise spirits in the possessed. Making fun of *zar* and the rituals related to spirit appeasement or exorcism may result in possession or other futile consequences, such as sicknesses.²⁶²

Possession by *zar* may also result in severe consequences, such as death to individuals resisting possession. Once possessed, the individual must take part in a number of rituals intended to harmonize the spirit and the possessed or to exorcise the spirit (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 49). At Faraqqasaa, individuals who have been attacked by a spirit but have resisted possession have to be tied up in order to restrain them from hurling themselves on the ground or against other physical objects such as walls and trees and from jumping into rivers.²⁶³ Lewis (1984: 419) states that spirit possession is viewed as social protest by women and men of low social statuses. However, I have found that the social status of an individual does not dictate spirit possession in Ethiopia nor its significance. It is also a common practice among many ethnic groups in Ethiopia. The diverse ethnic composition of pilgrims at Faraqqasaa that are possessed by spirits is a good example of the prevalence of belief in spirit possession among many ethnic groups.

In terms of gender, Al-Adawi (2001: 54) states that women's low status in society makes them easy targets of spirit possession, whereas the possessing spirits are mostly believed to be male. Lewis (1984: 419) relates spirit possession to a number of psychological and social deprivations and inferiority. He stipulates that these groups of people use spirit possession to advance their social and economic positions in the society. According to Al-Adawi *et al.*, (2001: 54) men tend to deny the presence of a *zar* spirit. This led them to deduce that men exploit the *zar* experience to exercise their authority over women without facing a meaningful challenge. However, none of these arguments are acceptable at Faraqqasaa, where *zar* have a tendency of attacking people regardless of their gender, religious, social, and economic backgrounds (Gemechu J. Geda 2009: 88).

Possession symptoms

Some of the symptoms of possession by a *zar* spirit include psychological and physical problems such as somnolence, lightheadedness, chronic headache, loss of appetite,

²⁶² Jilo H., 20 February 2011 in Abbomsa.

²⁶³ Kebede A., 18 February 2011 at Faraqqasaa.

agitation, abrupt shouting, use of indecent terms, and singing and crying simultaneously (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 50). Lambek (1996: 239) states possession may result in trauma, temporary detachment, physical pain, unpredictability, and at times self-infliction of pain. Messing (1958:1120) adds susceptibility to mishaps, infertility, and intense seizures, abrupt shouting and screaming as possible symptoms of possession by a spirit. Most of these possessions symptoms are easily observable at Faraqqaasa. The actions and behavior of the possessed are mainly attributed to the possessing spirit that communicates via the possessed.²⁶⁴ Every word uttered by the possessed is considered to be the wish of the possessing spirit (Klass 2003: 37, Al-Adawi *et al.* 2001: 50). There are also occasions when a possessed individual talks in two or more differing tones. Under this circumstance it is believed that the individual is simultaneously possessed by two or more spirits (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 50).

Spirit possession healing methods

Families and relatives of a possessed individual usually start to suspect possession by a spirit when all treatments fail to heal a patient and families and relatives recommend visiting a professional healer. The possessed is then taken to the ritual house of a healer who interviews the possessed and thus indirectly interviews the possessing spirit. Then the possessed takes part in a number of rituals supervised by the ritual expert in an attempt to harmonize or exorcise the possessing spirit. The first action of the healer is to encourage or coerce the unknown spirit to possess the afflicted. This helps the healer to identify the type and nature of *zar* that has attacked an individual.²⁶⁵ The healer uses his knowledge of the *zar* language to plead or threaten the possessing spirit and ultimately harmonize or expel it.

There is a popular belief that a *zar* cannot be exorcized. The possessed individual promises to appease the spirit by fulfilling its demands. In return, the spirit grants temporary relief to the possessed. However, the *zar* spirit may possess the individual anytime during possession rituals to receive its annual material gifts from the possessed, who the spirit regards as his horse. Lewis (1984: 421) states that a *zar* is neither completely evil nor good. The above explanation is corroborated by information from my interviewees. Rather, the possessed has to take part in various annual ceremonies as well as other rituals led by ritual experts to appease the spirit and harmonize it with the possessed. Ritual experts themselves have suffered from various sicknesses caused by spirit possession, but they have managed to control the spirits and they use their skills to heal others suffering from possession. In

²⁶⁴ Mohammad T., 16 February 2011 at Faraqqaasa.

²⁶⁵ Mengistu W., 21 February 2011 in Abbomsa.

addition, the expertise to heal individuals who have been attacked by spirits can be inherited (Gemechu J. Geda 2009: 91).

At Faraqqasaa the ability to heal those attacked by spirits is inherited. According to El Guindy and Schmais (1994: 111) women inherit the ability to harmonize or exorcise *zar* and male ritual experts state that the spirits themselves have chosen them to heal the sick. As practiced at Faraqqasaa, the ability to heal possession is inherited without gender preference, but since the death of Momina, all ritual experts endowed with the power to heal are men.

At Faraqqasaa and in Ethiopia in general, the possessed and the possession healer are both known as *bale-zar* (someone with a *zar*). The spirit possessing the healer is believed to be much stronger than any other spirit possessing ordinary people. As a result, the healer employs his powerful spirit to exorcise or harmonize the lesser spirits.²⁶⁶ In addition to the powerful spirits they have domesticated, healers are believed to possess other powers. Messing (1959: 1122) states that healers are endowed with such unique gifts as a special way of staring at patients. They are also believed to be masters of certain linguistic abilities, such as the ability to communicate with spirits. For instance, Momina was said to have had the most powerful of all spirits that she controlled and used to heal the possessed. After her death, the spirit possessed her subsequent descendants and ritual leaders. Throughout its history, the leaders of the Faraqqasaa pilgrimage center are credited with powerful staring and verbal abilities. Every time they interview individuals attacked by spirits, the leaders stare unswervingly into the eyes of the possessed to communicate with the spirits, at times pleading and, when necessary, threatening the spirits.²⁶⁷

Interviewing the possessed, hence the possessing spirit, is the first action on the way to healing. This enables the ritual leader to identify the type of possessing spirit that is causing the sickness. By looking at the nature (speed and difficulty) of the trance dance performed by the possessed, healers can also determine the type of the possessing spirit (Messing 1959: 1120). Once the type of the spirit is known through the trance dance and the spirit starts to communicate with the healer via the possessed, it becomes clear why the spirit attacked an individual. Then the healer tries to harmonize/exorcise it by making various promises or threats (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 49- 51). It is impossible to exorcise a *zar* spirit permanently. The possessed must attend rituals annually and s/he should fulfill what s/he promised the spirit. If s/he fails to do so s/he has an increased risk of becoming sick again before the annual period of pilgrimage (Al-Adawi *et al.*, 2001: 52). At Faraqqasaa the possessed take part in

²⁶⁶ Wondimu K., 21 February in Abbomsa.

²⁶⁷ Shiferaw J., 23 February 2011 in Nazareth.

group healing rituals. The healer appeases the spirit and commands it not to attack its human “horse” until the next pilgrimage.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁸ Wondimu K., 21 February 2011 in Abbomsa.

CHAPTER SIX: *IRREECHA* (THANKSGIVING TO *WAAQA*)

Followers of the *Waaqeffannaa* religion perform various rituals and one of the most important of these is thanksgiving: *Irreecha/Irreenssa*. *Waaqeffannaa* practitioners have been celebrating *Irreecha* since time immemorial. One informant told me that the Oromo claim to have started celebrating *Irreecha* and believing in *Waaqa* long before the arrival of Christianity in Ethiopia in the fourth century.²⁶⁹ In *Oromiffaa*, *Irreecha* refers to the whole process of thanking *Waaqa* in different places, mainly by bodies of water. However, *Irreecha* is not always celebrated by bodies of water such as rivers, lakes, and springs. *Irreecha* can also be celebrated in front of one's house, in a compound, in the *diinqaa* (sleeping room), as well as on hilltops, mountains and other elevated grounds. *Irreecha* involves thanking *Waaqa* while carrying things which cannot be eaten or drunk. Participants always carry green grass and flowers.²⁷⁰ Since *Waaqa* is physically inaccessible to the Oromo, who wish they could offer him money, meat, cattle and other gifts for all his deeds, they simply carry green grass and flowers and thank Him by saying, "praise *Waaqa* the creator of bodies of water, praise *Waaqa* the creator of mountains, praise *Waaqa* the creator of shade, praise *Waaqa* the creator of dry and rainy seasons, praise *Waaqa* the creator of life and death, praise *Waaqa* the creator of water and fire". *Irreecha* celebrates the all-powerful *Waaqa*. The Oromo thank *Waaqa* for helping them survive the winter [rainy] season peacefully, for helping them grow crops for people and grass for cattle, for creating the *birraa* (spring) season, which is a harvesting season, for creating the autumn and winter seasons, and for creating the wind. The Oromo accept the greatness of *Waaqa*, and because they cannot reach him and pay him in kind and because he does not require any help or favor for his deeds, the Oromo simply offer him their thanks, mostly by bodies of water and very rarely on higher grounds, such as hills and mountains. *Waaqa*, who cannot be revealed and cannot be seen by humans, helps his creatures in secret. He does not discriminate between people of different colours.²⁷¹

6.1 Types of *Irreecha*

There are two types of *Irreecha*: *Irreecha Malka* (*Irreecha* at a river), also called *Irreecha Birraa* (*Irreecha* in spring); and *Irreecha Tuulluu* (*Irreecha* on a mountain), also called *Irreecha bonaa* (*Irreecha* in autumn, which is a dry season in Ethiopia). *Irreecha* is not celebrated in *Ganna* (summer, which is a rainy season in Ethiopia).

²⁶⁹ Legesse N., 04 October 2010 in Bishoftu.

²⁷⁰ In Oromo tradition, green grass indicates fertility, productivity, and freshness, while flowers indicate life and love (Legese N., 04 October 2010 in Bishoftu).

²⁷¹ Personal interview with Legesse N., 04 October 2010 in Bishoftu.

6.1.1 *Irreecha Malkaa (river)/ Irreecha Birraa (spring)*

Irreecha Birraa is celebrated during the season when people can meet and cross rivers because the volume of water in many rivers, which are usually full during the summer, has declined. It is a time when people cross rivers, visit and bless each other and celebrate to thank *Waaqa* for surviving the summer. People meet and eat together, reconcile their differences and show love and kindness towards each other. During the *Irreecha*, the Oromo carry green grass and flowers. Frese (2005: 3135-3137) writes that in many religious ceremonies, flowers are representations of life cycles and crucial elements of various rituals and ceremonies. *Irreecha birraa* is mainly celebrated in the month of September (in the Ethiopian calendar it is celebrated on 23 September, which is 03 October in the Gregorian calendar). It is towards the end of September in order to wait for the crops that are sown to grow. Then they celebrate *Irreecha* to thank *Waaqa* for growing crops and satisfying humans, animals and birds. This thanksgiving ritual starts at the beginning of the Ethiopian year (September) and can continue all the way to June.²⁷²

6.1.2 *Irreecha Tuulluu (Irreecha on a mountain)/ Irreecha Bonaa (Irreecha in summer)*

Irreecha Tuulluu takes place during the *bonaa* (autumn) season, which is one of the driest seasons in Ethiopia. If there is a delay or no rain at all, the Oromo *Irreecha* participants climb mountains, hills and other elevated grounds. In Oromo tradition these are respected landscapes because they believe that these landscapes are closer to *Waaqa*. After participants have reached specific sites at the top of mountains and hills, they pray as follows: “Oh *Waaqa*! We are closer to you now. Do not turn your face away from us. Please give us rain”. After the prayers, they slaughter a bull in his name and eat it. Many informants have claimed that it does not take long for *Waaqa* to respond to their prayers. They pray for *Waaqa* to give them rain, and in June when it starts to rain, they till their land, take the cattle to the field, look after the cattle, thank *Waaqa* for listening to their prayers and giving them rain and continue with their daily routine.

Irreecha is not celebrated in *ganna*, a rainy season in Ethiopia because the water in most rivers is not clear. The Oromo believe that *Waaqa* has created everything, be it human beings, rivers, mountains, and trees with their own *ayyaana* (guardian spirits). When water is not clear, when a tree is dry, or a certain thing or animal is dead, the Oromo believe that the *ayyaana* is not there. For instance, unclear river in the summer carries things like dead animals, dried tree branches and logs, and a lot of dirty elements. In situations like this, it is

²⁷² Personal interview with Dirribi D., 09 October 2010 in Addis Ababa.

not recommended to gather and thank *Waaqa*. It is only at clear bodies of water that the Oromo celebrate *Irreecha*. As of mid-June, the Oromo say a river is closed, which means the river is dirty and unclear and that the celebration of *Irreecha* is not recommended. During the rainy season, although *Irreecha* cannot be celebrated near bodies of water, it can be celebrated in other locations: at home, on the field, and in the mountains.²⁷³

Even if *Irreecha* can be celebrated in various places, such as by water bodies (*Irreecha malkaa*) and on elevated grounds (*Irreecha tuulluu*), the former is the most prominent and the latter is very rare. Hence this paper focuses on *Irreecha malkaa*, which takes place at water bodies. These findings are based on an ethnographic study of the ceremony from 3-10 October 2010 at *Hooraa* (lake) Arsadi in Debre Zeit, also called Bishoftu town, 45 km south of Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia. However, it should be noted that *Irreecha* is not always celebrated on 3 October. It does not have its own fixed calendar and can be celebrated three or four days before or after 03 October. It is usually celebrated on Sundays because people do not work on Sundays so they can meet and celebrate together. Although the day can vary slightly, the month must be at the end of the rainy season when the river is clear and visible. These are the main criteria for celebrating *Irreecha*.

6.2 Ethnographic observations of an *Irreecha* ceremony

Though I knew that the ceremony would take place on 3 October 2010, I traveled to Debre Zeit and to *Hooraa* Arsadi a week earlier to observe anything going on beforehand. Not much was taking place in the city of Debre Zeit or at the lake. But two days before the ceremony, I observed a tremendous increase in traffic and people in the city. The Oromia Ministry of Culture and Tourism estimated that the number of people who descended on the city for the ceremony was about 1.5-2 million. A day before the event, I went to the lake again and I saw the caretaker cleaning and preparing the area for the ceremony.

On the morning of 3 October, the city of Debre Zeit (Bishoftu) was covered with people who were mostly dressed in white traditional clothes decorated by the color of the flag of the regional state of Oromia: red at the top, white in the middle, and black at the bottom. There are many layers under this "traditional dress" that is actually a new form of "traditional dress" with the flag of the Oromia government and Ethiopia. But at the same time, this is a new tradition for many urban Oromo who never had or experienced the past Oromo "traditional" clothes. There are also large numbers of worshippers dressed in clothes decorated with the national color of Ethiopia: green at the top, yellow in the middle and red at

²⁷³ Legese N., 04 October 2010 in Bishoftu.

the bottom. Others were dressed with in casual clothes as well as plain white or decorated traditional clothes. The main road leading to the lake was closed for traffic. All people walked to the lake on foot as individuals, in small groups and/or in larger groups. Most people met at a roundabout in the city to walk together. Some walked slowly, while others walked in a relatively quick pace. Others still ran in groups singing songs praising *Waaqa*.

Almost all the worshippers carry green grass and flowers. The Oromo use green grass, not only during the celebration of *Irreecha*, but also on other social occasions such as weddings, public holidays, during child birth, on agricultural fields, and at home. During the *Irreecha* ceremony, the Oromo carry flowers because it is a time when the field is also covered with flowers. Indeed, September and October are months when flowers flourish in most parts of Ethiopia. Flowers mark the beginning of the spring season; they lead to seeds and thus productivity. The Oromo carry flowers, a creation of *Waaqa*, in *Irreecha* celebrations to thank *Waaqa*. In Oromo language they say, ‘We believe in *Waaqa* who created us, and we pray carrying what he created’ – ‘*Waaqa nu uumetti amannaa, uumamaan Waaqa kadhanna*’. However, carrying flowers is not compulsory and it depends on the month when the Oromo celebrate *Irreecha*. For instance, in May, worshippers are not expected to carry flowers because it is not the season of flowers. Worshippers can simply carry green grass.

Before the 1990s, worshippers started their walk together from an area close to the lake. Over time, the number of people traveling to Hora Arsadi to celebrate *Irreecha* increased tremendously and the streets became more and more crowded. This is the main reason why the pilgrims started walking from the city instead of going to the lake by car or bus. Now participants meet in the city for various practical reasons. First of all, the authorities close part of the road for traffic. A few years ago, the participants used to share the road with cars and horse carts, so it was difficult to walk to the lake in larger groups. However, according to Oromo tradition, worshippers should mainly walk hand in hand while traveling to celebrate *Irreecha*. The first row during the procession to the ceremony is composed of the *Abbaa Malkaa* (father of the river), which is followed by *Ayyaantuu* (female spiritual leader), *Abbaa Gadaa*, and elders. *Foollee* (the singer) accompanies the above mentioned group of people and sings songs praising *Waaqa*.²⁷⁴

On reaching the lake, worshippers immerse the green grass and the flowers they have carried in the lake and sprinkle themselves as well as others around them. Various worshippers give different explanations and justifications for this action. I will call the first

²⁷⁴ Legese N., 04 October 2010 in Bishoftu.

group of Oromo worshippers as ‘purists’ and the second as ‘moderates’. The ‘moderates,’ who were and still are mainly followers of Christianity, compared this practice with a baptism. They use it as holy water, *tsabal*, and they believe that it has a power to cure a variety of physical and mental sicknesses. But this is not what it means for the ‘purists’, who claim to be the practitioners of ‘pure’ *Waaqeffannaa* religious practice. A significant number of *Waaqeffannaa* participants I spoke to claimed that it has nothing to do with baptism, which they say is an ‘alien’ practice to the Oromo. *Waaqeffannaa* practitioners state that the action of sprinkling themselves with the water from the lake is simply to prove that they have gone to the lake and seen that the water is pure and clear, and therefore it is the appropriate time to celebrate *Irreecha*. They sprinkle themselves and touch it with their hand to indicate the purity and cleanliness of the water. In Oromo tradition, cleansing oneself with water created by *Waaqa* is also very important. They state that *Waaqa*’s creatures should be clean. It is also a symbolic prayer to *Waaqa* to calm them and make them peaceful like the lake.²⁷⁵

The other ritual that takes place is the *daddarbaa* ritual. In this ceremony, worshippers throw food items and drinks, including alcoholic drinks, they have brought as votive offerings in a place under an *odaa*²⁷⁶ tree and a big black stone referred to as *siidaa*²⁷⁷, which are located at the edge of the lake. Worshippers also throw a little of what they have brought towards the edge of the lake. This is just to thank *Waaqa* by giving a little bit of what they have brought to the celebration. These are symbolic offerings, as participants do not believe that *Waaqa* will eat the offerings or decorate himself with the flowers left at the edge of the lake. In addition to these offerings, worshippers paint the *odaa* and the *siidaa* with butter, sprinkle perfume on them and burn joss sticks and light candles on and around them. Similar to the sprinkling of water, opinion about this practice is also contentious and the worshippers could be divided into two categories.

Interpretations of the significance of the *odaa* tree, the *siidaa*, and the rituals performed around these two objects are diverse. For the purists, the *odaa* has no religious purpose. It is a continuation of what their ancestors started out of necessity. The Oromo respect the *odaa*. For these participants, the *odaa* is just like a conference or meeting hall. In the past, where there were no halls or houses, the Oromo conducted various social activities under *odaa* trees. In addition, the Oromo used to eat its fruit because they did not start to cultivate crops long time ago. For the Oromo, *odaa* is also a special tree. They believe that

²⁷⁵ Dirribi D., in Addis Ababa, 09 September 2010.

²⁷⁶ In his *Oromo- English Dictionary*, Tilahun Gamta (1989: 484) defines it as a tree that looks like a sycamore or fig (*cordia africana*).

²⁷⁷ It is a place of worship, usually a pile of pebbles or erected poles used as an altar (Tilahun Gamta 1989: 526).

lightening does not strike it; snakes, pythons, and other dangerous insects cannot be found under it; it is clean underneath; it is green throughout the year; and it provides a large area of shade. People bow down under the *odaa*, smear it with butter, place food items, incense, and joss sticks under it, and they smear the *siidaa* with butter just to thank *Waaqa* for creating *odaa* and *siidaa*.²⁷⁸

For the moderates who were/are Christians, the *odaa* has much religious significance. They tend to equate it with a cross and a church. They state that it is their equivalent of Christian churches. In Orthodox churches in Ethiopia, one is not allowed to enter a church with shoes and hats on. The moderate Oromo who have a background in Christianity replicate this activity during the *Irreecha* ceremony. Before they get close to the tree, they take off their shoes and hats, bow down under the tree and kiss the ground as well and the trunk. Some worshippers told me that they are doing this to honor and thank *Igziabher*²⁷⁹ for growing the tree.²⁸⁰

The *siidaa* is also interpreted in various ways by the ‘purists’ and the ‘moderates’. For the ‘purists’, the *siidaa* is something that should not be there at all. Even if it is currently located under the *odaa*, nobody seems to know when, how, and by whom the *siidaa* was brought there. For them, *siidaa* should be placed only in a *galma* (traditional Oromo religious house) of a *qaalluu* (traditional Oromo priest) and *qaallittii* (traditional Oromo priestess). According to their view, *siidaa* should not be placed in the open at all. They are also against the various rituals that take place on or around it, such as sprinkling of alcoholic drinks on it. From their point of view, it is not permitted to smear butter and sprinkle alcoholic drinks on the *odaa* and the *siidaa*. They strongly state that alcoholic drinks are not actually allowed in *Waaqeffannaa*. They attribute such practices to the fact that the place has no proper owner and supervisor and people do what they want there.²⁸¹ The moderates with Christian backgrounds, however, revere the *siidaa* and believe it to be the equivalent of a church altar. Orthodox Christians venerate church altars, demonstrating this by kissing the altar every time they get the chance. Similarly, the moderate Oromo with Christian backgrounds bow and kiss the *siidaa*, smear it with butter, light a candle on it, and burn joss sticks on it.²⁸²

²⁷⁸ Legese N., 04 October 2010 in Bishoftu; Dirribi D., 09 October 2010 in Addis Ababa.

²⁷⁹ It is a term used by the Orthodox Christians of Ethiopia to refer to God.

²⁸⁰ Eyasu D., 10 October 2010 in Bishoftu; Abera K., 10 October 2010 in Bishoftu.

²⁸¹ Legese N., 04 October 2010 in Bishoftu; Dirribi D., 09 October 2010 in Addis Ababa.

²⁸² Eyasu D., 10 October 2010 in Bishoftu; Abera K., 10 October 2010 in Bishoftu.

6.3 Lake (*hora*) Arsadi: the ritual space

Hora Arsadi is the most important and famous ritual space for the celebration of *Irreecha* in Ethiopia. However, *Irreecha* is not celebrated only at Hora Arsadi. It is celebrated in different places, such as at other lakes, springs and hills all over the Oromo areas of the country. Once the spring season begins, the Oromo with Christian background first celebrate *Irreecha* in their respective houses. Then they go out and celebrate with their relatives under *adbars* [big trees]. There, they resolve disputes, reconcile differences, eat porridge, cabbage, and bread together, and spend *Masqal*²⁸³ together. After *Masqal*, they go to a river where the children, the elderly, and cattle drink, and they play together and celebrate *Irreecha*. One week after *Masqal*, the Oromo travel from their respective regions to Hora Arsadi to celebrate *Irreecha* together.

The lake is chosen for *Irreecha* celebrations for various reasons. Many Oromo cultures and beliefs, including *Irreecha*, have been discriminated and even prohibited over the years by different government administrations and due to the influence of ‘foreign’ religions such as Christianity and Islam. Over the years, some of the Tulama and Galan Oromo, the dominant Oromo group living in and around the area, however, continued to practice *Irreecha*, despite former governmental pressures, which included imprisonment and beatings. Hora Arsadi is chosen because the Galan Oromo refused to give up the tradition of celebrating *Irreecha* at the lake. It is also relatively close to Addis Ababa, the capital city and the center of the country. The other reason is that the area is considered the center of Oromo country. As a result, different Oromo groups can converge there from their respective areas. The Oromo from Harar come from the southeastern direction; the Borana, Arsi, and Guji Oromo come from the southern direction, the Jimma, Wollega, Macha, and Salale Oromo come from the west and they all meet at Hora Arsadi.²⁸⁴

²⁸³ It can also be written as *Meskel*, *Meskal* or *Mesqel* and it means cross. In the Ethiopian Orthodox Churches, is an annual religious holiday commemorating the discovery of the True Cross in the fourth century. It is celebrated on 17 *Meskerem* in the Ethiopian calendar (September 27 in the Gregorian calendar).

²⁸⁴ Legese N., 04 October 2010 in Bishoftu.



Figure 28: devotees performing the *Irreecha* ritual at Lake Arsade.

Photo by Gemechu J. Geda, October 2010.

The name of the lake and the origin of the name of the lake is still contentious. For some its name is Horsadi.²⁸⁵ According to this tradition, the lake is the result of the combination of three other lakes, hence the named Horsadi. According to the second tradition, the name is Arsadi instead of Horsadi. This tradition states that Arsadi was the name of the owner of the land where the lake erupted. An informant who claims to have known the lake since 1940 states that the lake has been gradually increasing in volume.²⁸⁶

6.4 Participants

The *Irreecha* ceremony does not only attract Oromo worshippers who believe in *Waaqa*. It also attracts large numbers of mainly moderate Christian and Muslim Oromo from Ethiopia and abroad. Quite a large number of Oromo came from various European and North American countries to celebrate *Irreecha*. There are also foreign and local tourists who travel there out of curiosity. In addition, there are a few foreign and many local journalists, as well as some researchers observing the rituals and conducting interviews. As the large number of attendees creates a distinct opportunity for business, it also attracts a large number of retailers who sell food items, soft drinks and homemade alcoholic drinks, coffee, ornaments, traditional clothes, scarves and t-shirts advertising the ceremony. Other individuals who come

²⁸⁵ It is made up of two independent Oromic terms: *Hora* meaning lake and *sadi* meaning three. The two words together have therefore the meaning of ‘three lakes’.

²⁸⁶ Legese N., 04 October 2010 in Bishoftu.

to take advantage of the situation are petty criminals, mainly pickpockets, who travel there to make use of the large crowd to steal money and other valuables.

The ceremony on 3 October ended with speeches made by individuals from various administrative and cultural ministries and offices and blessings by elders representing almost all Oromo clans in Ethiopia. The speeches and the blessings also have strong political tones as they praise the current regime for their support and particularly for allowing the Oromo to celebrate *Irreecha* and other cultural and religious practices openly. Some of the blessings by Oromo elders are as follows:

<i>Ummata kana nagaa godhi</i>	May you (<i>Waaqa</i>) maintain the health of this society
<i>Biyya teenya nagaa godhi</i>	May you give peace to our country
<i>Naggaadeen nagadee haa argatu</i>	May traders prosper
<i>Kan qotate nagaan haa nyaatu</i>	May farmers gather [their] produce peacefully
<i>Tamaariin haa tamaaru</i>	May students learn
<i>Ijoolleen barnoota isaanii qubee isaaniin haa baratan</i>	May children learn with their alphabet (mother tongue)
<i>Manguddoo keenyaa nagaa nu haa godhu</i>	May he (<i>Waaqa</i>) give health for our elders
<i>Ijoolleef shamarran nagaa nu haa godhu</i>	Peace to children and young girls
<i>Dargaggoo nagaa nu haagodhu</i>	Peace to the youth
<i>Afaan keenya tokko nu haagodhu</i>	May our language be the same (understand each other)
<i>Sabaaf sablamoota nagaa nu haagodhu</i>	Peace for the nations and nationalities
<i>Waaqnii akkanumatti nagaan nu oolchee haabulch</i>	May <i>Waaqa</i> give us a peaceful night as he gave us a peaceful day

The main *Irreecha* ceremony is a one-day event, but there is another group of people who go to the lake exactly one week later to celebrate their own *Irreecha*. On 10 October, thousands of worshippers with *awliya*²⁸⁷ gather at the lake to celebrate their own version of *Irreecha*. They meet a week after the main *Irreecha* celebration because the large number of people gathered at the site makes it difficult for them to perform their rituals. Hundreds of people possessed with *zar* perform trance dances under the *odaa* to harmonize the possessing

²⁸⁷ Awn (2005: 8821) defines *awliya*[a](*wali*) as a Muslim saint even if there is no religious department in Islam with a power to canonize individuals as saints. Informants use the term in a different sense; they talk of being possessed by *awliya*, hence spirit or *zar*.

spirit with the possessed. During the trance dance, it is not the person, but the spirit who is in control and talking. At one point, for instance, I tried to talk to one woman while she was resting after a long trance dance. She asked me whom I wanted to talk to - her/him or her 'horse' - her/him being the spirit and the 'horse' being the possessed woman.

This practice, however, is sternly opposed by the 'purists'. They say that it is inappropriate for people to go to the lake and engage in different actions such as chewing *khat* and spirit possession. For them, these actions are not part of the ceremony and they are outside of *Waaqeffannaa*. They suggest those people who perform rituals related to *zar* stay at their own *galma* and do whatever they want in their homes. A few years ago, before the *Abbaa Malkaa*, "father of the river" would go to the river and celebrate *Irreecha*, no one was allowed to go to the river to celebrate.²⁸⁸ Today people go to a river and celebrate *Irreecha* whenever they like, even if the river is closed. It is, however, permitted to go to a lake or a river where *Irreecha* is celebrated to prepare coffee and burn incense under a tree. Even the 'purists' are not against this.²⁸⁹ People who are involved with *zar* are, however, oppose the rejection of their practices at the lake. They state that there are no rules or codes to follow and there is no one with the mandate to decide what is right and what is wrong. They are of the view that anybody can thank *Waaqa* in his/her own way.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁸ Legese N., 04 October 2010 in Bishoftu; Dirribi D., 09 October 2010 in Addis Ababa.

²⁸⁹ Legese N., 04 October 2010 in Bishoftu; Dirribi D., 09 October 2010 in Addis Ababa.

²⁹⁰ Eyasu D., 10 October 2010 in Bishoftu; Abera K., 10 October 2010 in Bishoftu.

PART III: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION

7.1 Pilgrimages and rituals

Pilgrimages to shrines, which the Arsi Oromo refer to as *muuda*, a general terminology referring to the journey, to the pilgrims, and to the rituals, are important aspects of the religious life of the Arsi Oromo of Ethiopia. The pilgrimages conducted to the shrines of Sheikh Hussein, Sof Umar and Faraqqasaa are among the most important and revered pilgrimage destinations. Places where individuals who were believed to have spiritual powers have lived and/or died (as in the case of Faraqqasaa, where Momina lived and was buried, and *Dirree* Sheikh Hussein where he is believed to have lived and been buried), or a place where a miracle is believed to have been performed (as in the case of Sof Umar Guutoo) serve as pilgrimage destinations among the Arsi Oromo.

All three pilgrimage destinations fulfil five important characteristics of pilgrimages as outlined by various scholars. According to Stoddard (1997: 43) one of the characteristics of pilgrimages is that they involve movement of people from one place to another. In effect, the pilgrimages to Sheikh Hussein, Sof Umar and Faraqqasaa refer to a journey that pilgrims undertook to reach the above destinations. It involves pilgrims leaving their actual place of residence over a certain period of time. According to Turner (1974: 34), pilgrimage involves a journey from a secular central place to a holy place located at a periphery. In the case of the Arsi Oromo, this proposition only applies in limited cases. Only the Sof Umar Guutoo pilgrimage center is located at a periphery, in an area detached from the nearest village by a dense forest and hilly topography. However, the shrines of Sheikh Hussein and Faraqqasaa are located within established villages with hundreds of residents. Hence, it is difficult to conclude in general terms that the sacred is situated at the periphery.

Second, a journey of pilgrimage does not simply involve abandoning one's domicile and traveling around without destination (Gesler 1998: 536). The journey always ends at a specific destination, which could be the residence of a spiritual leader or the birth and burial places of a local religious leader where a shrine is located, like in the case of Faraqqasaa and the shrine of Sheikh Hussein. The journey could also end in a specific place where a significant miracle is believed to have been performed, as in the case of Sof Umar Guutoo, which is situated in the middle of a forest close to a cave where a single woman is said to have survived while the entire inhabitants of the area died because of an attack by a *djinn* (spirit). The presence of the shrines of Momina and Sheikh Hussein and the cave at Sof Umar Guutoo give the sites what Bourdieu (1986: 246-247) calls the objectified form of cultural

capital, which includes material objects such as monuments. It is the presence of these material objects in the form of shrines that attract large numbers of pilgrims.

Third, Gesler (1998: 536) and Bhardwaj and Rinschede (1988: 11-12) state that pilgrimages also take place at a specific date or time that mostly coincides with the birth and/or death of a founder but also corresponds with important festive dates of the dominant religion within a specific shrine. For instance, the first pilgrimage to Sheikh Hussein's shrine takes place during *Arafa* (simultaneous as the pilgrimage to the Hajj) and the second takes place on the anniversary of the birth of Sheikh Hussein. The timing of the pilgrimage to Sof Umar also shows a remarkable Islamic influence. The first pilgrimage to Sof Umar is named *Ashura* (because it takes places during *Ashura*, which is the tenth month of the Islamic calendar) and the second pilgrimage is called *Rajaba*, an Oromic corruption of the Arabic word *Rajab*, the seventh month of the Islamic calendar and a prelude to the holy month of Ramadan. Furthermore, pilgrims travel to Faraqqasaa en masse on 29 October of each year, which is the anniversary of the death of Momina. The other periods of pilgrimages to Faraqqasaa are two of the most important Islamic holidays: *mawlid* (the birth of Prophet Mohammed) and *Id al-fitr* (breaking of Muslim period of fasting).

Fourth, pilgrimages, as practiced among the Arsi Oromo, also conform to some extent to Gesler's (1998: 536) statement that most pilgrims undertake the journey to various shrines with the sole aim of attaining some sort of spiritual fulfilment instead of gaining material benefits. However, the practices at the shrines of Sheikh Hussein, Sof Umar, and Faraqqasaa indicate that almost all pilgrims travel there for various material and health related issues. During the pilgrimages, pilgrims recount personal stories, mostly miracles, which they claim to have happened to them, their relatives and/or their belongings. These narratives describe how pilgrims, with the intercession of the founders and/or leaders of the shrines, managed to obtain wealth, health and children. It is almost impossible to witness pilgrims asking for spiritual help, for instance in the afterlife.

Fifth, as it is pointed out by Gesler (1998: 536), pilgrimages and rituals are attended by groups of individuals instead of a single person, even if the journey to reach the shrines can be undertaken on individual bases and/or by groups of varying sizes. Pilgrims to Sheikh Hussein, Sof Umar and Faraqqasaa travel individually, in smaller groups (mostly a family), as well as in larger groups, such as pilgrims from similar vicinity and/or villages. Some walk on foot, while others on horseback. Still, a large numbers of pilgrims use public buses to reach their destination. On arrival, however, they mix and perform rituals together. Hence, pilgrimages create what Gesler (1998: 536) calls tie and common identity among pilgrims

who come from various regions, ethnic, religious, and political backgrounds. At Sheikh Hussein, Sof Umar, and Faraqqasaa, this fact is demonstrated by the participation in the same ritual of pilgrims who claim to be followers of Islam, Christianity, and *Waaqeffannaa*, as well as pilgrims who belong to the various ethnic groups. Despite the diversified religious, ethnic, and other backgrounds of pilgrims, the common identity and belongingness is also reflected through a common name they use to refer to themselves. For instance, pilgrims to the shrine of Sheikh Hussein, Sof Umar, and Faraqqasaa refer to themselves as *muuda* Sheikh Hussein (Sheikh Hussein's pilgrims), *muuda* Sof Umar (Sof Umar's pilgrims) and *muuda* Momina (Momina's pilgrims).

However, some rituals during the pilgrimages may encourage segregation and at the same time create or reinforce a common identity of a specific group. A good example of this type of rituals is the *Waarida* (praise of Sof Umar) ritual at Sof Umar Guutoo that takes place during the nights. During this ritual, pilgrims from the same locality or village occupy a single *dagale* (temporary huts) and they do not normally mix with pilgrims that come from other areas. The explanation given by participants for this exclusion is related to the nature of hymns sung praising Sof Umar. Pilgrims coming from each village tend to have different hymns in praise of Sof Umar and pilgrims coming from one village do not appear to know the contents of the hymns of the other villagers, so joining them would make them passive observers than active participants. Even if this ritual excludes pilgrims from another village, it tends to strengthen the group identity of pilgrims from the same village since they sing similar hymns praising Sof Umar in unison.

Turner (1974: 53) and Turner and Turner (1978: 38) state that pilgrimages create a feeling of *communitas*, which, according to Turner and Turner (201-203) creates equality among pilgrims, sharing of their belongings and sleeping places. However, this is not fully applicable in the case of Arsi Oromo pilgrimages. As it is observed at the pilgrimage centres of Sheikh Hussein, Sof Umar Guutoo, and Faraqqasaa, pilgrims do not really have equal statuses. For instance, pilgrims who are frequent visitors of the centres and who are known to the ritual leaders, are provided with better sleeping places, such as in the guest houses (the case at Faraqqasaa) and in the houses of the permanent residents of the village where the shrine of Sheikh Hussein is located. However, newly arriving pilgrims must erect temporary tents outside. Furthermore, Arsi Oromo pilgrims do not share their supplies, such as food items, with any pilgrim they come across. The sharing of food items, for instance, mostly takes place among pilgrims who come from the same village, among pilgrims who belong to the same family, and among pilgrims who are relatives and/or friends. Hence, the concept of

communitas is not applicable for Arsi Oromo pilgrimages, as the idea of sharing is determined by pre-existing acquaintances and relations rather than the feeling of communitas. However, I believe that Communitas is much more than just sharing belongings and sleeping places. It is about sharing a common experience, such as a ritual. That is applicable in the context of these pilgrimages.

The theory that pilgrimages strip pilgrims of their previous role within their society (Turner and Turner 1978: 201-203) does not help as a tool of analysis in the case of the Arsi Oromo. For instance, Arsi Oromo women bear the responsibility of household and looking after children. This remains unchanged during pilgrimages as well as at the pilgrimage centres. During the journeys and stays at the pilgrimage centres of Sheikh Hussein, Sof Umar Guutoo, and Faraqqaasaa, it is possible to observe women looking after children, cooking for the entire family or group, collecting firewood, and fetching water.

Pilgrimage centres and ritual leadership

The birth and/or death of the founders of shrines tend to be associated with miracles. The birth of Sheikh Hussein was already foretold long before he was born, that there was a bright light in the sky during his birth on a Tuesday at midnight, and that his birth was attended by Abelqassim, a famous local saint living in the area at the time and to whom God had foretold the birth of Sheikh Hussein. Jeylan W. Hussein (2005: 33) likens this to the birth of Jesus Christ, which is also said to have been foretold long before he was born, and to the attendance of Jesus's birth by Gabriel. Momina's death was also associated with a miracle. On one hand it is said that a fireball was seen in the sky during her burial and on the other hand there are stories of a mysterious disappearance of her body before her burial. One can easily make a comparison with the later statement and the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the disappearance of his body from his grave.

Founders of pilgrimage centres tend to somehow trace their genealogies to prominent political and/or religious personalities as well as areas of significant importance. Momina's genealogy, for instance, is traced back to a certain brother of Emperor Fasil, a seventeenth century Ethiopian emperor on her father's side and to the line of Ahmad *Gragh* (the left-handed) who led numerous military campaigns against the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia from 1527 until his defeat in 1543 (Bahru Zewde 2001: 9). Sheikh Hussein's descent is traced to Arabia, the birth place of Islam. This could be an attempt to strongly associate Sheikh Hussein with Islam. Sof Umar is also believed to be Sheikh Hussein's disciple. Furthermore, successive leaders of pilgrimage centres associate themselves with the founders of the shrines

and individuals' significant contributions to the shrines in the past. Past and current leaders of the Faraqqasaa pilgrimage center claim direct descent from Momina. The caretakers of the Shrine of Sheikh Hussein also claim direct descent from the assistants of Mohammed Tilma Tilmo, who initiated and supervised the construction of the shrine in its current form about 300 years ago. The patrons and ritual leaders of Sof Umar Guutoo are also descendants of the original owners of the land where the site is located.

Pilgrims believe that leaders of pilgrimage centres and rituals during the pilgrimages are endowed with various powers as well as talents. With regard to this, Pankhurst (1994: 948-949) states that they are believed to possess the power to perform miracles such as enabling the blind to see, the deaf to hear and the lame to walk. This is also true for the pilgrimage centres frequented by the Arsi Oromo. Momina, the founder of the Faraqqasaa pilgrimage center is widely believed to have had super natural powers, which she used to help pilgrims who asked for her help. She is said to have bestowed children to the barren, health to the sick, wealth to the destitute and even raised the dead. Even now, long after she passed away, pilgrims claim to have their prayers answered with the use of her name. Sheikh Hussein and Sof Umar are also believed to have performed miracles during their time and even today pilgrims invoke their names for the fulfilment of their prayers.

Pilgrimage and ritual leaders are believed to possess some unique abilities. At Faraqqasaa, for instance, the leader is believed to have a special staring ability, which he can use on pilgrims possessed by spirits to identify the type of possessing spirit. Then he is able to subscribe and apply the proper healing method. He is also believed to understand a *zar* language, which he uses to: communicate with the spirits and, command a possessing *zar* to harmonize itself with the possessed, or exorcise the *zar* from the possessed. The leaders at the Shrine of Sheikh Hussein are also believed to have: extensive knowledge of tradition concerning Sheikh Hussein and the inhabitants of the area; good listening abilities towards the wishes and personal statements of pilgrims; good memories in order to repeat statements and miracles they hear from individual pilgrims to the congregation of pilgrims; good blessing abilities; wisdom; leadership qualities; and abilities to resolve conflicts. As it is indicated by the above examples and explanations, pilgrimage and ritual leaders possess one of the three dominant forms of capital as distinguished by Bourdieu (1986: 241). He writes that:

Capital can present itself in three fundamental guises: as *economic capital*, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; as *cultural capital*, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational

qualifications; and *social capital*, made up of social obligations (“connections”), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility.

As it is indicated above, pilgrimage and ritual leaders have the following traits: they associate themselves with famous religious and political figures; they are believed to have spiritual powers enabling them to perform various miracles; they tend to possess some unique abilities like communicating with possessing spirits; and they own the land on which the pilgrimage centre is situated. I discussed these traits in relation to the previously mentioned forms of capitals distinguished by Bourdieu. Successive spiritual leaders at Faraqqasaa are descendants of Momina who founded the shrine and who is believed to have supernatural powers. Their association to Momina gives them the social capital, which, according to Bourdieu (1986: 248), refers to membership in a group. In this case, being a member of Momina’s genealogy is needed to obtain acceptance from the followers of her cult. The guardians of Sheikh Hussein’s shrine also possess the social capital of being descendants of the assistants of Sheikh Mohammed Tilma Tilmo. Leadership at Sof Umar Guutoo tends to be shared between four groups of people and they have different forms of capital. The two *Abbaa-wanbbaraa* (chairmen) have social capital: they obtain their position because of their membership to one of the most respected and honourable clans of the Arsi Oromo living in the area; and they are believed to have the ability and responsibility to maintain the social cohesion of pilgrims. The second group of leaders, the *saddeettaa* (a group of eight individuals), acquire their positions because of their ownership of the land where the centre is situated, hence economic capital which they turned into cultural capital over a long period of time. The practices at Faraqqasaa and Sof Umar are good examples of the convertibility of capital. The leaders at Faraqqasaa and Sof Umaar, they, by inheritance (social capital) have residence at the centres and are able to live off the food and money generated from the offerings there (economic capital). And social capital, as you mentioned is present in all three.

Pilgrimage and ritual leaders’ unique abilities (such as: staring abilities, understanding a *zar* language to communicate with a spirit, wisdom, knowledge of tradition of their community, and possession of conflict resolution strategies) could be termed, using Bourdieu’s concept, the embodied state of cultural capital. Bourdieu (1986: 244) further explains that:

The accumulation of cultural capital in the embodied state, i.e., in the form of what is called culture, cultivation, *Bildung*, presupposes a process of em-bodiment,

incorporation, which, insofar as it implies a labor of inculcation and assimilation, costs time, time which must be invested personally by the investor.

The practices at the shrines of Momina, Sheikh Hussein, and Sof Umar Guutoo conform to Bourdieu's explanation of the embodied state of cultural capital. For instance, the spiritual leaders at Faraqqasaa acquire the ability to stare at a possessed individual and communicate with a spirit. Their predecessors directly teach this practice to them. The guardians of the Shrine of Sheikh Hussein also acquired their blessing abilities, knowledge about the tradition of their community and conflict resolution abilities from their parents. It is part of the Arsi Oromo tradition and a practice of the elders, mostly parents and grandparents, to pass on their knowledge to their children and grandchildren. The hereditary nature of the transmission of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986: 245) is also clearly evident at Faraqqasaa, Sheikh Hussein and Sof Umar Guutoo. At Faraqqasaa, it is only those who are possessed by Momina's *karaamaa* (spirit) who can assume leadership. At the same time, it is said that her spirit only possesses her descendants, usually passed from father to a child. Therefore, this limits leadership succession to the genealogy of Momina, hence hereditary. At the shrine of Sheikh Hussein, guardianship has always been awarded to the *darga*, descendants of the assistants of Sheikh Mohammed Tilma Tilmo, who initiated the construction of the shrine three centuries ago. The leaders at Sof Umar Guutoo, the two *Abbaa-wanbbaraa* (chairmen) and the *saddeettaa* (eight individuals), have their positions for life. They are not to be deposed or replaced. When they pass away, their eldest male children assume the role of leadership.

At the shrines of Momina, Sheikh Hussein, and Sof Umar, there is an active tendency on the part of pilgrims to (re) produce and strengthen the cultural capital of spiritual leaders. This is done in the form of personal statements of miracles, which pilgrims attribute to the power of the leaders. They state the miraculous deeds of the leaders in public to the rest of the pilgrims. This further cements the position of leaders.

Nature of religious pilgrimages and rituals

Pankhurst (1994: 937) has astutely written that some pilgrimages are almost exclusively restricted to a single ethnic group. A good example of this is the *Irreecha* ceremony attended by the Oromo of Ethiopia regardless of their religious, political, and geographical backgrounds. Even if there are many individuals from other ethnic groups in attendance, they often do so out of curiosity, but without actively taking part in the rituals. In recent years, the *Irreecha* ritual has even exceeded its religious nature; it has been used as an expression of Oromo group identity. There are, however, some pilgrimages and rituals that

cross political, religious, ethnic and linguistic boundaries. Levine (1974: 50) writes that pilgrimages bring members of diverse ethnic backgrounds together. There are two factors that facilitate this phenomenon. The first one is when there is a lucid religious feature in common that surpasses ethnic differences (Pankhurst 1994: 939). The shrine of Sheikh Hussein, for instance, is visited by the different Oromo groups from various parts of the Ethiopia. Large numbers of pilgrims from other ethnic groups such as the Gurage, Sidama, Somali, and the Amhara, also travel on pilgrimages to the shrine. The second precondition for pilgrimages and rituals that cross ethnic boundaries is when the pilgrimage is characterized in terms of loyalty to a syncretistic cult (Pankhurst 1994: 939). Faraqqasaa and the shrine of Sheikh Hussein are very good examples of this. They cater to and accommodate members of various ethnic backgrounds who are more loyal to Momina's cult (at Faraqqasaa) and Sheikh Hussein (at the Shrine of Sheikh Hussein) than their ethnicity. Pilgrims to Sof Umar Guutoo, however, are almost exclusively members of the Arsi Oromo group. This, however, is not the result of some kind of prohibition against other ethnic groups, but rather of the demographic nature of the area which is inhabited by the Arsi Oromo.

Levine (1974: 50) also asserts that pilgrimages can be melting points for people of different religious backgrounds. Levine (1974: 44) correctly comments that Christianity and Islam are not so rigid in practice in Ethiopia and this has provided an opportunity for followers of one religion to attend the rituals of the followers of the other religion. The above assertions are easily observable at Faraqqasaa and the shrine of Sheikh Hussein. Even if the above pilgrimage centres tend to be more Islamic, Christians, Muslims, and followers of indigenous religions attend most of the rituals together thereby making the sites interreligious. The only ceremonies that are not attended by followers of different religious traditions are the Islamic communal prayers that are attended exclusively by Muslim pilgrims. At Faraqqasaa, despite its inclination to Islamic traditions, there is veneration of Christian saints, mainly St. Gabriel. December 28 and May 27 are dedicated to St. Gabriel and thousands of Muslim, Christian, and followers of indigenous religions congregate at Faraqqasaa. The majority of the followers of Momina and her cult are Christians and they might have left their own imprint on the beliefs and practices at the center.

Pilgrimages and rituals also cross political boundaries (Pankhurst 1994: 938). These political boundaries could be national (where pilgrims cross the demarcations of regional boundaries) and/or international (whereby pilgrims from neighbouring countries travel to the shrines in Ethiopia). The shrine of Sheikh Hussein is a very good example of this because pilgrims cross both national and international boundaries. In addition to thousands of pilgrims

from various regions of Ethiopia, pilgrims come from countries, like Somalia, Kenya, and even from Iraq (Eshetu Setegn 1973: 25). Momina's shrine also attracts large numbers of pilgrims from all corners of the country as well as Ethiopian pilgrims residing in Europe and America. It is reported that pilgrims even come from the neighbouring countries of Ethiopia, such as Sudan, Somalia, and even Yemen during the major pilgrimages.

Pilgrimages and rituals among the Arsi Oromo also cross linguistic boundaries. The Shrines of Momina, Sheikh Hussein, and Sof Umar Guutoo are located in an area where the majority speaks the Oromo language. Pilgrims to these shrines, however, also come from non-Oromo speaking parts of the country. However, most pilgrims and the ritual leaders at the shrines understand Amharic, the official language in Ethiopia. Pilgrims from other linguistic localities make their wishes and tell miracles in their own languages. The leaders then translate and share the story with the rest of the pilgrims in the Oromo language.

Pilgrimages among the Arsi Oromo to the shrines of Momina, Sheikh Hussein, and Sof Umar are to a large extent about the earthly than the heavenly (the afterlife). This is easily observable from pilgrims' prayers as well as the public miraculous statements they make. Pilgrims travel to the shrines either to pray for wealth and/or health; and/or tell in public of the things they get with the intercession of Momina, Sheikh Hussein, and Sof Umar. With regard to wealth, they often ask for the success of a small business they have started (mostly pilgrims coming from urban establishments), and to give them wealth in the form of a cattle (pilgrims coming from rural areas). Pilgrims' prayers with regard to health are related to healing to humans and/or animals. Healing is achieved through: the spiritual power of the leaders and the zar ritual, especially with issues related to spirit possession; taking part in *hadraa* (communal prayers); and the use of traditional medicines such as *tabal* (holy water), *emet* (holy ash), and *jawaara* (holy soil).

Reciprocity and symbolic exchange are also major elements of pilgrimages (Pankhurst 1994: 934-936). Pilgrims to Faraqqasaa, Sheikh Hussein, and Sof Umar make a vow to bring material gifts and votive offerings in the form of butter, jewellery, umbrellas, coffee beans, animals and the likes, to the following pilgrimage if their prayers are answered and their wishes are fulfilled. In return they get the blessings of the shrines and/or the ritual leaders and sometimes get materials with healing powers, such as holy water, holy ash, and holy soil. Closely related to this idea of reciprocity, is that pilgrimages and rituals provide the platform for showing comradeship among pilgrims, which is indicated through the practice of sharing money and materials collected during the major periods of pilgrimages. A part of the money and grain gathered as votive gifts at Faraqqasaa, Sheikh Hussein, and Sof Umar is distributed

among needy pilgrims. Animals such as bulls and sheep brought as offerings are slaughtered on site and the meat is distributed among pilgrims.

7.2 Instances of syncretism in Arsi Oromo religion

Based upon the observation at the shrines of Momina, Sheikh Hussein, and Sof Umar Guutoo, an attempt will be made to show the syncretistic nature of Arsi Oromo religion. According to Stewart (2004: 282) it is possible to establish this based upon what the people involved say and/or on our observation and analysis. I have endeavoured to analyze syncretistic elements of the various rituals by looking at four different aspects: clothing and ornaments of participants, ritual ceremonies, religious objects and analysis of hymns, prayers, and blessings.

Clothing and ornaments

The syncretistic nature of Arsi Oromo religion is evident in the *Irreecha* ritual. Although most of the participants in the *Irreecha* ceremony wear traditional clothes adorned with the national colours of Ethiopia (green, yellow, red) and the regional state of Oromiya (black, white, red), large numbers of participants display ornaments and clothing specific to followers of a certain religion. Muslim participants, for instance, are dressed in their Islamic clothes and head scarves. And worshippers with Christian backgrounds displayed cross-shaped Ornaments such as necklaces, ear rings, as well as scarves decorated with cross motives.

Rituals

One of the important rituals performed during the *Irreecha* ceremony is the immersing of green grass and flowers in the lake and sprinkling oneself and/or others around with the water. This practice has different interpretations by the 'purists' and the 'moderates'. For the 'purists', it is a justification that the water is pure and therefore time to celebrate *Irreecha* and it has no further religious purpose and meaning. For the moderates with Christian background, however, this action is equated with baptisms. They also consider that the water of the lake is a tabal (Holy water) with healing power for sick people and cattle. No matter how opposed some are to this action, nobody tries to stop the practice; people do it and interpret it in their own ways.

Islamic, Christian, and indigenous religious practices and elements are also evident at the Faraqqasaa pilgrimage center. Here, elements of Christianity are reflected with the veneration of St. Gabriel on 28 December and 27 May. October 29, a day that attracts

thousands of pilgrims to Faraqqasaa to celebrate the anniversary of Momina, is also St. Gabriel's day, even if there is no genuine link between the death of Momina and St. Gabriel's day. In this centre, however, Islamic practices dominate those of Christian and indigenous practices. Two of the four major pilgrimage periods at Faraqqasaa are *Id al-fitr* (the breaking of the fasting of the month of Ramadan) and *Mawlid* (the anniversary of the birth of Prophet Mohammad). The leader of the center has also travelled to Mecca and assumed the title of *haji*. Most of the leaders of other rituals at Faraqqasaa, such as those who bless pilgrims, pray for the fulfilment of pilgrims' prayers and collect votive offerings, are also Muslim sheikhs. The *wadaajaa* ceremony, however, is an ancient indigenous practice of the Oromo. Trimmingham (2008: 262) states that it is the main religious activity of the Oromo and it is a family or communal prayer gathering accompanied with a feast, coffee and sometimes sacrifices of sheep. At Faraqqasaa, *wadaajaa* refers to praying, chewing *khat*, drinking coffee, singing of hymns and narrating *qissaa* (miraculous deeds) of Momina and Tayye. It is believed that taking part in this ritual and reciting the names of Momina and Tayye helps to alleviate various earthly problems of pilgrims.

At the shrine of Sheikh Hussein, the interplay between Islamic and indigenous Oromo religious elements is also visible. For instance, the two pilgrimage periods to the shrine coincide with Arafa and the hajj pilgrimage to Mecca. Islamic verses are often recited and Arabic is frequently used. However, some practices indicate a strong influence of indigenous religious practices of the Oromo and are opposed by some Muslims. When pilgrims leave the burial site of Sheikh Hussein, they walk backwards to avoid turning their backs to him. This is an ancient practice of the Oromo. For example, followers of *waaqeffannaa* smear the head of the Abbaa-Muuda (father of anointment) with butter and walk backwards for some distance. This is done because turning one's back to a holy man and/or an elder is considered disrespectful. Pilgrims also smear the fence as well as various buildings at the shrine with butter. This is a continuation of the indigenous Oromo practice of *fala/muuda*, or anointing the head of an Oromo holy man with butter.

The syncretistic nature of Arsi Oromo religion is also evident at the Sof Umar Guutoo pilgrimage centre. Islamic elements are represented through several acts. First Arabic language is used during prayers, especially the *xiliitee* ritual, which involves roasting coffee beans in melting butter as an offer for *Waaqa* and as a means of appeasing spirits so that they do not attack pilgrims. Second, the naming of the two pilgrimage periods, *ashuura* in December and *rajaba* in June, are based on the Islamic calendar. Third, the leaders at the various rituals are also Muslim sheikhs. Indigenous Oromo religious practices are also

represented by a number of elements, including: the use of trees for rituals that the Oromo have been using for their socio-religious activities since ancient times, such as *odaa* (figus), *harooressa* (*Grewia bicolor*) *waddeessa* (*Cordia abyssinia*) and *garambbaa* (*Hypericum revolutum*); the *dhibaayyuu* (libation), *killa dibachuu* (anointment by the contents of *killa*); *wasiisa* (burning of ritual fire) rituals; and the use of the name *Waaqayyoo* (an indigenous God of the Oromo) in their prayers and blessings.

Religious objects

By religious objects, this refers to objects used as ritual objects, objects used as focal points for various rituals and religious objects carried by worshippers. The first religious object in this category is the *siidaa*, which is located under the *odaa* tree by Hora Arsadi. For the ‘purists’ it is something that should not be there at all, let alone be at the center of rituals. For worshippers with Christian backgrounds, however, it is as important as an altar in a church. Most of them even refer to it as an altar. They bow down under it and kiss the ground as well as the *siidaa* itself, and they make offerings, such as food items, perfumes, and alcoholic drinks. Some of these people state that they are not doing something they do not do in a church. They also refer to the *odaa* as their church, venerating it as much as they revere the church. They even take off their shoes upon arriving under the *odaa*.

Analysis of hymns and blessings

An attempt has also been made to show examples of syncretism through analysis of hymns sung in praise of Waaqa and blessings made by elders and other participants. Most rituals come to an end with blessings. Some of the blessings are as follows:

May Allah help us return home safely

May Allah make us all happy

May Allah grants our wishes

May the God of the *Malkaa* (river) help us

May Allah brings us here next year safely

May Allah give peace to our country

May Allah heal the sick

From the above blessing, one can see that worshippers say the name of Allah at the *Irreecha* ceremony, which shows that these individuals or groups have been exposed to Islam at a certain time in their life, be it past or present. Another example that demonstrates the

syncretism of Islamic elements is indicated in the following Amharic hymn sung at the ceremony.

<i>Nebiw na ere nebiw na</i>	May the <i>nebi</i> (Prophet) come
<i>Hageru meka medina</i>	his country is Mecca Medina

The other hymn sung by worshippers goes like this:

<i>Ya Jamoolee koorinaa, jamoolee koorinaa</i>	be proud the jam'aa (congregation)
<i>Abbaan keenyaa Sheek Huseen haati teenya</i>	For our father is Sheikh Hussein and our
<i>Moominaa</i>	mother is Momina

7.3 Religious transformation among the Arsi Oromo

Østebø (2009: 464) states that all religions are dynamic and religion among the Arsi Oromo is no different. Many of the Arsi Oromo had been followers of *Waaqeffannaa* religion since ancient times. However, as of the mid-nineteenth century, the religion of the Arsi Oromo was tremendously transformed. The majority of them abandoned the *waaqeffannaa* religion and embraced Islam in its purest or syncretised form, and Christianity to a lesser extent. There are historical and contemporary religious and political developments that changed the religious landscape of the Arsi Oromo throughout their history.

The first and perhaps most important historical religious phenomenon that altered the religious situation of the Arsi Oromo was the introduction of Islam to Ethiopia in the seventh century (Erlich 2010: 1-2) with the arrival of the followers of Prophet Mohammed because of opposition to his teachings from pagan Arabs (Østebø 2012: 46). These groups of early Muslims in Ethiopia, however, did not play a significant role in the spread of Islam, as they did not attempt to proselytize the local population. It is rather Muslim traders and their commercial centres on the coast of East Africa that served as a factor for the expansion of Islam among the nomads living in the mainland of that part of the continent (Trimingham 2008: 138-139). This early contact with Muslims, however, as correctly posited by Østebø (2012: 45) did not contribute to the expansion of Islam in Southern Ethiopia.

Bartels (1989: 14) states that the introduction and expansion of Islam among the Arsi was influenced by their commercial engagement with the Harari and Somali people who have a long history of Islam. There is a direct correlation between the expansion of Islam and commercial activity with the Muslims of the coastal areas. As a result, Islam has become the dominant religion in some areas of eastern Arsi (Braukämper 2002: 157). This could easily be

attributed to the geographical proximity of the eastern parts of Arsi to Harar where Islam has had a strong foothold since earlier periods. The western part of Arsi, reports Braukämper (2002: 158) remained loyal to their indigenous beliefs well into the 1930's. However, Braukämper (2002: 160) also postulated that the Arsi Oromo have been fully Islamized since the beginning of the 1970s. In addition, when mentioning the existence of followers of an indigenous religion, he further stipulates and assumes as follows:

In 1973, I met one of the last pockets of *Awama*, partisans of the traditional folk religion, in the area of Kokossaa, near the Wabi Shaballe headwaters. But it seemed to be only a matter of a few years until they would turn Muslim (Braukämper 2002: 160).

His statement that the Arsi have been fully Islamized since the 1970s and his stipulation that the remaining followers of the indigenous religion in western Arsi would embrace Islam in a short period of time seem incorrect. Even today, forty years after his assumption, there are significant followers of indigenous Oromo religion in western Arsi, especially in and around areas such as Kokossaa, Nansabo, Adaba, and Kofele.

There are two contemporary religious factors transforming the religious landscape of the Arsi Oromo. These are the introduction and expansion of Salafism, also called Wahhabism, and Christianity, especially Protestantism. Wahhabism as an ideology was first taught in the Najd province of Saudi Arabia by Muhammed ibn Abd al-Wahab, who lived between 1703-1792 (Østebø 2009: 466). Abbas Haji Gnamo (2002: 109) states that:

Wahhabism is generally known for its calls for orthodox interpretation of Islam, its restoration in its original purity, or as it was, and practiced during the life and times of the prophet and his immediate successors, the Caliphs....One of the main objectives of this Islamic school of thought is to combat against suspect innovations and popular superstitions, mysticism and *Sufism* which are perceived to be contradictory to the *Shari'a* enshrined in the *Qur'an* and the *Hadith*.

However, despite its early establishment, Wahhabism did not influence Muslims in other parts of the world and its influence was restricted to Saudi Arabia until the 20th century. The main reason for this was their decision for religious isolation due to their suspicion that establishing contact with other non-Salafi Muslims might contaminate their religious purity (Østebø 2009: 466). However, the circumstance under which Wahhabism was introduced among the Oromo is controversial. Abbas Haji Gnamo (2002: 109) attributes it to the activity of Oromo pilgrims, who travelled to Saudi Arabia on pilgrimage, were indoctrinated with the Wahhabi tradition and returned home to spread the teachings of Wahhabism. On the other hand, (Østebø 2009: 467) states that the role played by pilgrims who had been to Mecca is

insignificant because their number at that time was very few. Instead, he attributes the spread of Wahhabism among the peoples of south eastern Ethiopia to the actions of Oromo pilgrims who had travelled to Harar for religious training, where Wahhabism has had a presence since the establishment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932 and the Italian Occupation (1935-1941), both which encouraged Islam and sponsored pilgrims to Mecca. The expansion of infrastructure and the further expansion of roads to remote areas in the 1950s and the 1960s increased the number of pilgrims travelling to Saudi Arabia and their return under Wahhabi influence. This contributed to further spread of Wahhabism to the southeastern part of Ethiopia (Østebø 2009: 466).

As a result of its central location in southeastern Ethiopia, where Wahhabism has gained a foothold since the 1970s (Østebø 2009: 475), the shrine of Sheikh Hussein is at the center of opposition by members of the movement. The main reason for this is the veneration of Sheikh Hussein, which followers of Wahhabism consider a sin. Wahhabism also considers the very fact that *mawlid* is celebrated at the shrine and in relation to Sheikh Hussein as un-Islamic. However, the Arsi Oromo followers of Sheikh Hussein's cult are opposed to these ideas and for them the celebration of *mawlid* does not always necessarily refer to Islamic practices. In this regard, Østebø (2009: 472) correctly notes that:

Although the opponents called themselves Muslims, rendered the pilgrimage and the celebration of *mawlid* as Islamic practices, they were making references to the practice of their forefathers and established customs.

In the case of the shrine of Sheikh Hussein, it is not only proponents of Wahhabism that oppose the practices at the shrine that are centered on the veneration of Sheikh Hussein. The *darga*, the hereditary guardians of the shrine, are also sternly opposed to Wahhabism. They demonstrate their opposition openly through prayers, some of which ask Sheikh Hussein's *karaamaa* (holy virtue) to protect them from the fire of Wahhabism. During a pilgrimage period, I observed an incident that demonstrates ways in which the guardians of the shrine oppose Wahhabism. A certain sheikh was walking in the direction of a fenced tree where some of the leading figures of the shrine were sitting with pilgrims and singing hymns praising Sheikh Hussein and occasionally chatting. One of them suddenly saw the sheikh coming in their direction. He told him to stop right where he was and that he was not welcome because he had become a Wahhabi. He was asked to swear that he was not a Wahhabi. It was only after swearing in the name of Sheikh Hussein that he was allowed to join them.

The introduction of Orthodox Christianity and Protestantism are the other factors that are changing the religious picture of the Arsi Oromo. The introduction of Christianity among

the Arsi coincides with the conquest of their homeland by the Christian empire, which according to Darkwah (1975: 103), took place from January 1882 to 1887. Despite its earlier contact with the Arsi Oromo, Christianity does not have a strong presence among the Arsi Oromo. The few followers it has are mostly in urban centers. Even if the reason for this development is not clearly known, Braukämper (1980: 323) equates it to the reaction of Christian conquerors who refrained themselves from missionary activities to convert the Arsi Oromo to Christianity in an attempt to monopolize the religious field, thereby denying the Arsi Oromo from improving their status through conversion. The bloody nature of the conquest by the Christian empire still lives in the memories of the Arsi Oromo and it has been passed down from generation to generation through poems, hymns and stories. The violent campaigns of conquests drove many of the Arsi Oromo to Islam (Braukämper 2002: 163; Temam Haji -Adem 2002: 32). It was only in the 1940s that the church engaged in missionary activities in Arsi, and as Braukämper (1980: 323) correctly asserts, it was a failure.

Instead of Orthodox Christianity, which is still hated among most Arsi Oromo, it is Protestantism that is gaining momentum. This phenomenon is happening particularly in Western Arsi because of the presence of people who are not attached to Islam at all and/or who are less committed to Islam and still practicing their indigenous beliefs. Protestant missionaries have infiltrated even smaller villages in remote parts of western Arsi and built religious houses. They are believed to have used financial incentives, such as covering expenses related to schooling, and providing cash in their attempt to convert the local people, especially young people who have lost their parents and who are from poor family backgrounds. The young convertees are used as a means of converting their respective parents and relatives. The elder generations, who are more attached to their indigenous beliefs and/or Islam, are suspicious of Protestantism and opposed to it, at least verbally.

In addition to the previously discussed religious factors, current political developments have also had positive consequences on Arsi Oromo religion. The Faraqqasaa pilgrimage center and its adherents, who were persecuted under different regimes, are now enjoying freedom. In addition to leaving the shrine administrators free to decide on their actions and activities, the local government is providing support, particularly security, during the major pilgrimages in order to protect pilgrims from petty criminals. There is also a similar development at the shrine of Sheikh Hussein. Since the Derg governments have left the shrine relatively undisturbed because they did not want to antagonize the local population by going against their long held tradition. There is also a political element to this. The more the government knows about and regulates what is going on in ceremonies, rituals, etc., the more

they can have some forms of control over populations. And, for local politicians, some of these events make for good publicity. The current central and local governments are further supporting the shrine in different ways, such as opening a road leading to the shrine and providing security and health care services. The Sof Umar Guutoo pilgrimage center has also been obtaining similar services during the pilgrimages.

In addition to providing support, the current central and regional governments have allowed religious freedom under control and the Arsi Oromo are practicing any religion they want. Since the 1990s there are many Arsi Oromo who had previously been Christians and Muslims and have now returned to *Waaqeffannaa*. They refer to this return to the belief system of their ancestors as a renaissance of their culture and religion. Every time the Arsi Oromo change their religious allegiance, it appears that they take elements of their former religion into the new one, thereby transforming the dynamism of the new religion. This is best illustrated in the continued use of *Waaqa* for God by a lot of Christian and Muslim Oromo who had been followers of *Waaqeffannaa* before their conversion. In a similar fashion, Muslim and Christian Oromo who have returned to *Waaqeffannaa*, brought such concepts like the devil and the afterlife, which do not seem to exist among longstanding followers of *Waaqeffannaa* who stress that nobody knows what *Waaqa* does when somebody dies.

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REMARK ON TRANSLITERATION

Although there is a standard Encyclopaedia Aethiopica transcription system for Ethiopic script, I decided against employing this system in the study. This decision is influenced by practical experiences in the field. Most local terminologies used are Arabic and *Afaan Oromoo*. During my fieldwork, I also came to observe that the Arsi Oromo have ‘Oromized’ many Arabic terminologies and these cannot be covered by the standard transliteration system. In addition, the Encyclopaedia Aethiopica general rule of transliteration is based on the one sound-one sign principle and it mostly applies to vocabulary that comes from the Ethio-Semitic language family. It does not sufficiently cover the Oromo language. As a result, I have simply transcribed the local terminologies just the way they are pronounced by the native speaker.

GLOSSARY

- Aayyoo* (Oromic) – mother
- Abbaa* (Oromic) – father
- Abbaa-muuda* (Oromic) - father of anointment
- Abbaa-wanbbaraa* (Oromic) – chairman
- Aduu* (Oromic) – sun
- Arfaasa* (Oromic) – December
- Arjooma* (Oromic) – generosity
- Awwaala* (Oromic) – burial
- Ayyaana* (Oromic) – spirit like beings
- Bahro* (Oromic) – a hymn sung in praise of Sheikh Hussein
- Balabbat* (Amharic) -hereditary land owner
- Bala-karama* (Amharic) - a person with spiritual power
- Beekaa* (Oromic) – wise, knowledgeable
- Beela* (Oromic) – hunger
- Birraa* (Oromic) – spring
- Biyya* (Oromic) – country
- Bona* (Oromic) – autumn
- Bona* (Oromic) – dry season
- Budaa* (Amharic) – evil eye
- Bulchaa* (Oromic) – administrator
- Bullukkoo* (Oromic) – home-made cotton blanket
- Buna* (Oromic) – coffee
- Cubbuu* (Oromic) – sin
- Daadhii* (Oromic) – mead
- Dagalee* (Oromic) – small temporary hut
- Dejjazmach* (Amharic) – commander of the gate
- Dhanqee* (Oromic) - Y- shaped stick carried by followers of Sheikh Hussein’s cult
- Dhibaayyuu* (Oromic) – libation
- Dhugaa* (Oromic) – truth
- Dhukkuba* (Oromic) - sickness
- Dibbee* (Oromic) – drum
- Diina* (Oromic) – enemy
- Dirree* (Oromic) – plateau, village

Du'a (Oromic) – death
Duaayii (Oromic) – prayer, blessing
Eeboo (Oromic) – spear
Emat (Amharic) – holy ash
Faannoo (Oromic) – hoof
Faarruu (Oromic) – praise
Fala /muuda (Oromic) – anointment
Fardda (Oromic) – horse
Foonaa (Oromic) – enclosure for cattle
Funyaan (Oromic) – nose
Gaadii - skin/rope strap for tying the back legs of a cow during milking
Gaafa (Oromic) – horn
Gaangee (Oromic) – mule
Gabbar (Amharic) – tribute payer
Galaana (Oromic) - river
Galatu (Oromic) – gratitude/ offering
Galma (Oromic) – traditional Oromo religious house
Gamoo (Oromic) – shrine
Ganna (Oromic) – summer
Garaa (Oromic) – belly
Garbba (Oromic) – sea
Girazmach (Amharic) – commander of the left
Gosa (Oromic) – clan
Gragn (Amharic) – left handed
Guddifachaa (Oromic) - adoption by a foster parent
Gurraacha (Oromic) – black
Guutuu (Oromic) – full
Haadha (Oromic) – mother
Haash (Oromic) – limestone
Hadraa (Oromic) – religious assembly for communal prayers
Halaal (Arabic) – permissible
Halanggee (Oromic) – whip
Hanggafa (Oromic) – elder/senior
Haraam (Arabic) – forbidden

Harmma (Oromic) – breast
Haroo (Oromic) – pond
Hatse (Amharic) - his majesty
Holqqa (Oromic) – cave
Hooraa (Oromic) – lake
Irreecha (Oromic) - thanksgiving
Jaalalloo (Oromic) – fervent followers of Sheikh Hussein’s cult
Jaarraa (Oromic) – century
Jawaara /johaaraa (Oromic) – holy soil
Jihad (Arabic) – holy war
Jimaa (Oromic) – *khat* (*Catha edulis*)
Kaddaamii (Amharic) – servant
Karaa (Oromic) – road
Karaamaa (Oromic) – charisma, spiritual power
Karra (Oromic) – gate, door
Killa (Oromic) – a wooden bowl for keeping ritual coffee
Korma (Oromic) – bull
Kotoora (Oromic) – soil
Lafa (Oromic) – earth
Leenca (Oromic) – lion
Lukkuu (Oromic) – chicken
Malkaa (Oromic) – river
Mandhaa (Oromic) – young/junior
Maanguddoo (Oromic) – elder
Margga (Oromic) – grass
Maseena (Oromic) – barren, sterile
Masgiida (Oromic corruption of the Arabic word *masjid*) – mosque
Mataa (Oromic) – head
Mijuu (Oromic) - milk container
Moggaasa (Oromic) - adoption into a clan.
Mootii (Oromic) – chief
Murtii (Oromic) – decision
Muuda (Oromic) – pilgrimage, pilgrim,
Naft (Amharic) – rifle

Nagaa (Oromic) – peace
Naggadi (Amharic) – merchant/ trader
Odaa (Oromic) – sycamore tree
Qaalluu- Oromo holy man, Oromo religious leader
Qaluu (Oromic) – slaughtering
Qannazmach (Amharic) – commander of the right
Qollee (Oromic) – djinn
Raagaa (Oromic) – fortune-teller
Safuu (Oromic) - tradition, moral code
Salaamoo (Oromic corruption of the Arabic term, *Salam*) – greetings
Salat (Arabic) – prayer
Seera (Oromic) – law
Shaytaana (Oromic) – devil, satan
Siinqee (Oromic) – Oromo women ritual stick
Sodduu (Oromic) – stele
Tabal (Amharic) – holy water
Tahara (Arabic) – ablution
Tasafaarii (Amharic) – passenger
Tuulluu (Oromic) – mountain
Ulee (Oromic) – stick
Uumaa (Oromic) – creator
Waaqa (Oromic) – indigenous God of the Oromo, sky
Waaqeffannaa (Oromic) – indigenous religion of the Oromo
Waaree (Oromic) – noon, evening
Wadaajaa (Oromic) – religious assembly
Wahy (Arabic) – revelation
Waliyyii (Oromic corruption of the Arabic word *wali*) – saint
Wallaalaa (Oromic) – ignorant
Wareega (Oromic) – votive offerings
Warraana (Oromic) – war, fighting
Woizero (Ahmaric) – Mrs
Zaaraa (Oromic corruption of the Arabic word *ziyara*) – pilgrimage

LIST OF ORAL INFORMANTS

Name	Date of Interview	Place of interview
Abba Banti	05 and 06 October 2010	Bishoftu
Abba M.*	08 and 09 March 2011	Dikii
Abdulnasir Ahmad	03, 04, and 05 November 2011	Anajiina
Abera K.	10 October 2010	Bishoftu
Alemitu B.	19 and 22 February 2011	Faraqgasaa
Bariisoo Duubee	23 December 2010	Tememo
Dirribi Damuse	08 and 09 October 2010	Addis Ababa
Eyasu D.	10 October 2011	Bishoftu
Guyyee Kadir	06, 07 and 08 March 2011	Dikii
Hussien F.	18 and 21 February	Faraqgasaa
Jilo K.	19 and 20 February 2011	Abbomsa
Kebede A.	18, 21 and 22 February 2011	Faraqgasaa
Leggese Negewo	03 and 04 October 2010	Bishoftu
Mengistu W.	21 and 22 February 2011	Abbomsa
Mohammed T.	16, 18, and 19 February 2011	Faraqgasaa
Sheikh Ahmad Sheikh Mohammed Safi	05 and 06 November 2011	Anajiina
Sheikh Faannoo	21 and 22 December 2010	Tememo
Sheikh Garaad	22 and 23 December 2010	Tememo
Sheikh Mohammed	15 February 2011	Gado
Sheikh Idris Haji Mahmoud	04 and 05 November 2011	Anajiina
Sheikh Tahir Godana	22 and 23 December 2010	Tememo
Shiferaw J.	23 February 2011	Nazareth
Shito N.	20 and 22 February 2011	Abbomsa
Wondimu K.	19 and 20 February 2011	Abbomsa

* The names of informants who explicitly asked for anonymity have been abbreviated.

Statutory declaration

I hereby affirm that I have produced the thesis at hand without any inadmissible help from a third party or the use of resources other than those cited; ideas incorporated directly or indirectly from other sources are clearly marked as such. In addition, I affirm that I have neither used the services of commercial consultants or intermediaries in the past nor will I use such services in the future. The thesis in the same or similar form has hitherto not been presented to another examining authority in Germany or abroad, nor has it been published.

Bayreuth, den _____

Signature _____