



Indigenous religion and being human: The case of 'Waaqeffannaa' religion of the Oromo people

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Abstract

Religion is a philosophy that the people accepts, believe in and governed by. Every society has their own philosophy of understanding the world, creator and creatures which they accept and believe and pass over to generations. Waaqeffannaa religion of the Oromo people of East Africa is one of the oldest indigenous and monotheistic religions exercised by African peoples since time immemorial. 'Waaqeffannaa' literary means believe in one Waaqa - the supreme being. The followers of 'Waaqeffannaa' do believe in only one Supreme Being called Waaqa (literary translated as God). Moreover, the philosophy and religion of the people depicts the identity of that people. Thus, Waaqeffannaa religion depicts Oromummaa (Oromoness) and Afrikummaa (Africaness).

Keywords: ayyaana, indigenous religion, oromo, safuu, waaqa, waaqeffannaa

1. Introduction

This article primarily deals with Indigenous/ traditional religion. The words indigenous and traditional may be used interchangeably in this article. For the purpose of this article the words "indigenous/ tradition" are used to mean indigenous knowledge that can be handed down from generation to generation mainly based on oral transmissions with no written papers. It is the heritage from the past, but treated not as a thing of the past but as that which connects the past with the present and the present with eternity. So, when we say traditional religion is the heritage from the past, it does not mean it is a thing of the past or dead religion^[1]. Like any other traditional knowledge and religions, African traditional religions, beliefs and practices are oral than scriptural. Many traditional African religions have elaborate stories that explain how the world and humans was created, how culture and civilization come about or what happen when a person dies. However, they have faced prosecution from the proponents of different ideologies to the extent that the adherents of these religions are demonized and marginalized, and have been forcefully converted to one of the modern religions (such as Islam and Christianity).

Some Oromo nationals prefer the name amantii Oromoo (Oromo religion) or amantii Afrikaa (African religion) to Waaqeffannaa^[2] which is the sign of its existence before all other religions presently dominating the region and that all Oromo were waaqeffataa before they are converted to either Christianity or Islam.

The article would like to discuss the Oromo indigenous religion called Waaqeffannaa and Oromo world views.

Moreover, before discussing Waaqeffannaa religion we would like to discuss important concepts associated with Waaqeffannaa such as Waaqa, ayyaana, cubbuu and safuu for clear understanding of the topic. Therefore, the article tried to address religious epistemological questions about Waaqeffannaa as a unifying and all-encompassing factor for the Oromo political and social life.

2. Religion and indigenous religion

Religion and traditional religion are defined by different scholars. Bokku, for instance, defined religion as "anything through which people understand the creator and His creatures. It is how they perceive their lives and the system through which they realize their dream and live up on it^[3]." Religion is a means where by an individual or the people understand their creator and believe in Him. It is the attitude and the faith the people have for the creator and the creatures. It is what the people wholeheartedly accepts and believes as true. It also reflects the civilization and understanding of specific people in their life. The culture, history, politics and philosophy of a given society indicates the level of civilization of that specific people which is closely related to the religion of that specific people^[4].

Religion is the way through which one can see and understand the creator and creatures and live his/her hope^[5]. Religion is a means through which we can observe our environment. The practice of religion has significant effect on happiness and overall sense of personal well-being. Happiness is greater and psychological stress is lower for those who attend religious

¹ Awolalu, J. O. 1976. What is African Traditional Religion? Studies in Comparative Religion, Vol. 10, No. 2, World Wisdom, Inc.

² Fayyis, 2011

³ Bokku, D. D. Oromo wisdom in black civilization, 2011: 383-384

⁴ Unguree, T. Waaqeffannaa: Amantii Duudhaa Ganamaa, 2015:14-15

⁵ Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau. History of the Oromo to the Sixteenth Century. Third Edition (Second Impression), Finfinne, 2006/2014.

services regularly^[6].

Religion is a theological philosophy that deals with a code of worship and lifestyle of humanity. It has often cleverly manipulated to be rooted in ideas, symbols, myth, and secrecy to satisfy the initiated people and generate its power through scare tactics within the psychic of man^[7].

Religion is a natural aspect of human race which grows out of human's desire for meaning and belonging. Even if we try to get rid of one religion, we create another religion. Best or worst, humans seem to be motivated by religion. It represents a cultural and national identity. The core moral value of all religions is that they are universal and humanitarian. Religion also strives to promote morality and mediate reconciliation^[8]. "It seeks to call us out of our self-centeredness to more noble, meaningful, and compassionate life."^[9]

Religion is broad and the base or foundation of many things. Religion, according to Unguree, is the source of kindness and shapes the behaviors of individuals. It is accepting and believing in the supremacy of one God, acting according to God's law and loving his creatures. It limits the needs and wants, and selfishness of human being. This helps humans as per the law of God thereby leading humans to the right pass^[10].

Traditional religion, on the other hand, is an indigenous religion originated within a certain people/community and exercised by themselves. It is not the religion that comes from outside and adopted by (sometimes imposed on) the communities; rather it is born within the community.

Most indigenous people have strong bond to their traditional lands and culture. Traditional religion is therefore among the cultural markers that could dub a certain community as an indigenous. Indigenous peoples are also minorities in terms of ethnic, religion, national or linguistic in their state^[11]

Unlike modern scriptural religions, traditional religions are written in people's heart, mind, oral history, rituals, shrines and religious functions. Traditional religion also has neither founder/ reformer like Gautama the Buddha, Asoka, Christ or Muhammad nor missionaries and the desire to propagate the religion^[12]. However, the adherents are loyal worshippers. Now days, there are several religions in the world. Evidences show that the numbers of religions are growing because, through time, one religion is segmented in to another more religions for different reasons. Hence, there is one religion which is original from which the other religions emerged. According to scholarly works and Oral traditions of the

Oromo elders, the Oromo people believe that the original religion from which all other religions are derived is the religion of the Cush who were used to belief in one Supreme Being. This Cushitic religion is maintained by the Oromo till today which is known as 'Waaqeffannaa' – believe in one Waaqa (God). One of the evidences is that the Oromo were worshipping one God (Waaqa) long before the introduction of Christianity and Islam. Therefore, Waaqeffannaa is believed to be as old as the age of the first created Oromo.

Cush is believed to be the source of human race, religion and civilization of the world. The place where Cush inhabits is also believed to be the source of human race. Accordingly, the Cush was the first people who start to believe in one Waaqa (God). This implies that the original religion of the world was the religion which was practiced by the Cush – i.e. Waaqeffannaa religion^[13]. Dirribi supports the above point and further elaborates it as follows.

History is telling us that the horn of Africa is the birth place of mankind. At the same time history is telling us that the Horn of Africa is the cradle land of civilization, and that all forms of knowledge, such as Science, Philosophy, Mathematics and engineering ... etc including sophisticated religions are originated from this cradle of Egyptian civilization^[14].

3. Oromo world-views

3.1 Waaqa

There are controversies on the equivalent English translation of the word 'Waaqa', which is usually approximately translated as God. Different authors suggest different meaning of the term, which they believe better explain the character and attribute of the meaning of the original term 'Waaqa'. There are two types of Waaqa: with the capital "W" (Waaqa) and the small "w" (waaqa). The former is used to mean "God", "Supreme being", "Divinity" or "Undifferentiated-Being" while the latter is used to mean the vault of the "sky". However, some scholars mistakenly understood Waaqa (with capital "W") as having two meanings – the sky and God. Gragg and Tilahun Gemta and Desta Alemayo Kenea, for example, stated that Waaqa (with capital "W") refers to "the sky as a physical object on the one hand and God on the other".^[15] Bartels also argued that Waaqa had double meanings. It means either the sky (the vault of the sky as we see it) or God. However, with regards to the later meaning of Waaqa he argued that Waaqa comprises more than God, Supreme Being, Creator and ruler of the universe in western sense. Waaqa comprises of "countless particular manifestations of Waaqa in this world, particularization of his creative work which are conceived as beings. Hence, the word 'divinity' will often be a better translation than 'God'.^[16] Moreover, Yosef Mulugeta Baba, on the other hand, prefers

⁶ Awolalu, J. O. 1976. What is African Traditional Religion? Studies in Comparative Religion, Vol. 10, No. 2, World Wisdom,

⁷ Jamoo, S.D. in Bokku, D.D. Oromo wisdom in black civilization, 2011: 21

⁸ Jima, S.K. Oromo Nationalism, 2016:140

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Unguree, T. Waaqeffannaa: Amantii Duudhaa Ganamaa, 2015:14

¹¹ Aga, B. G. Freedom of Religion in Ethiopia post 1991: 8

¹² Awolalu, J. O. 1976. What is African Traditional Religion? Studies in Comparative Religion, Vol. 10, No. 2, World Wisdom, Inc.

¹³ Unguree, T. Waaqeffannaa: Amantii Duudhaa Ganamaa, 2015:15

¹⁴ Bokku, D.D. Oromo wisdom in black civilization, 2011: 387

¹⁵ Gragg, 1982:394 and Gemta, T. 1989:586 cited in Geda, G. J., Pilgrimages and Syncritism: A religious Transformation among the Arsi Oromo of Ethiopia, 49; Kenea, D.A. Safuu: The Indigenous Oromo Moral System, 2015: 16

¹⁶ Bartels, 1983: 89 cited in Geda, G. J. Pilgrimages and Syncritism: A religious Transformation among the Arsi Oromo of Ethiopia, 49

the word undifferentiated-Being to God or Divinity.

The Oromo conception of Waaqa is quite distinct from the western conception of God. Workeneh argued that the definition of Waaqa as sky-God by some western and Ethiopian writers is not plausible as it does not represent the early Oromo conception of Waaqa. The Oromo believe that the black Waaqa lives above the blue sky and He is not a blue sky^[17].

Waaqa is a supernatural being, creator of all and source of all life, omnipotent, omnipresent, infinite, black and pure. He is sometimes viewed as black because of the cloud in the sky and black color is associated with purity, source of fertility and rain. The Oromo believe that Waaqa is black, the color which represents holiness, divinity and supremacy over all other things^[18].

In general Waaqa has the following attributes. He is invisible - we recognize him through His deeds; He is creator of the universe^[19] and everything in it; He is source of life, He cures and protects; He does not have beginnings and ends, He is pure, truth, love, peace and reconciliation; He is ever living; He was not born and gives birth as well, devoid of getting old and death^[20]. He is the Source and guardian of order, truth and justice^[21], omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent^[22]. Waaqa is the beginning and the end; nothing existed before Him and nothing comes after Him^[23].

“Waaqa does not have sex identification; the Oromo Waaqa does not give birth and/or does not have a male sex. He is not gender biased as human beings.”^[24] Waaqa is common in the mouth of every day Oromo life. They call the name Waaqa many times in their daily activity. They swear in Waaqa’s name, for example, by saying ‘dhugaa Waaqaa’ (in the name of Waaqa). They also show their hope in Waaqa by saying ‘Waaqatu beeka’ (Waaqa knows), ‘yoo Waaqni Jedhe ...’ (if Waaqa wills). Even they give the name ‘Waaqa’ to their children to show their love and respect. For example, the Oromo use such names as Waaqummaa, Waaqoo, Waaqjiraa, Waaqkennee, etc.^[25]

3.2 Ayyaana

Ayyaana is what systematize the Oromo religious and philosophical thought and oral tradition. It is a unique juxtaposition of the religious and philosophical tradition, ethnicity and identity which make up the essential dimension of Oromo culture^[26].

Ayyaana has different meanings in Afaan Oromo (the Oromo language) which are used in different senses under different contexts. Ayyaana, on the one hand, means holyday/festival, fortune/luck, and ayyaana, on the other hand, refers to sprit (sprit possession). The later meaning of ayyaana is intended for the purpose of this article. Moreover, Megersa stated that ayyaana has both core and peripheral meanings.

The core meaning of ayyaana refers to that by and through which God (Waaqa) creates anything and everything. Ayyaana is in fact both that which causes something to come into being and becomes that which it has caused. Ayyaana is, therefore, that which exists before and after, that which it causes to come into existence. There are also several peripheral meanings of ayyaana. Most of these peripheral attributes of ayyaana have been acquired through interaction with Christianity, Islam and other belief systems which the Oromo world has interacted^[27].

What we understand from the above quote is that ayyaana is the cause of everything and at the same time becomes what it has caused to come into being because Waaqa creates everything with its own unique ayyaana and it existed with everything that are created in the universe.

Ayyaana, on the other hand, is the power of Waaqa that He used to control, guide and protect His creatures^[28]. In Waaqeffannaa, it is a spirit that regulates circumstances and behaves in line with God’s law honoring safuu^[29]. When a person possesses ayyaana it means the person has a guardian that protects him from bad fate. Every living creatures including the mountains, streams, living trees and others have their own ayyaanas. However, it may flee from a sinner, a dead and dry wood^[30]. It flees away from a person who breaks safuu. The Ayyaana may turn its back on a person when he/she breaks the Safuu and Seera, when the person sins, when he tells a lie and when he did something unto the norm and custom of the society. The Ayyaana turns its back upon a person means that the person does not have a protector and as a result may easily be exposed to some problems and loose respect.

For Zetelmann ayyaana “can be personalized, feared and invoked as a manifestation of supreme Waaqa”^[31], through which Waaqa manifests His creative capacities. Waaqa use ayyaana to organize scattered things in to order^[32]. Ayyaana organizes the principle of Oromo cosmology. It is saint-like divinity which is seen as manifestation of Waaqa. In Waaqeffannaa religion, Ayyaana plays the role of St. Merry, Michael, etc. in Christianity and Mohammed in Islam plays.

¹⁷ Kalbessa, W. Traditional Oromo Religion and the natural environment: 22-24

¹⁸ Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau. History of the Oromo to the Sixteenth Century, 2006/2014: 30-31

¹⁹ Assefa, G. Description and documentation of ateetee ritual among the dirree Enchini community of West Shewa Oromo, 2015: 33-34; Daaniyaa, 35-45

²⁰ Daaniyaa, 35-45

²¹ Assefa, G. Description and documentation of ateetee ritual among the dirree Enchini community of West Shewa Oromo, 2015: 33-34; Kenea, D.A. Safuu: The Indigenous Oromo moral system, 2015: 17

²² Ibid, 33-34

²³ Daaniyaa, 92

²⁴ Assefa, G. Description and documentation of ateetee ritual among the dirree Enchini Community of West Shewa Oromo, 2015: 37

²⁵ Daaniyaa, 154-155

²⁶ Megersa, G. Oromummaa: Tradition, consciousness and identity, 1996: 93

²⁷ Megersa, G. The Oromo world-View. The Journal of Oromo Studies, Volume 12, Numbers 1 & 2, 2005:69

²⁸ Unguree, T. Waaqeffannaa: Amantii Duudhaa Ganamaa, 2015:43

²⁹ Safuu is an Oromo ethical principle that guides the behaviours and actions of individuals. For more detail read the next section.

³⁰ Bokku, D.D. Oromo wisdom in black civilization, 2011: 126

³¹ Zetelmann, T. Oromo Religion, Ayyaana and the Possibility of a Sufi Legacy, vol. 12, numbers 1 & 2, 2005: 87

³² Jalata, A. Gadaa (Oromo Democracy): An Example of Classical African Civilization, 2012:147, Asefa Jaleta and Harwood Schaffer, The Oromo, Gadaa/Siiquee Democracy and the Liberation of Ethiopian Colonial Subjects: 284

The Oromo designates the good spirit by Ayyaana which corresponds to the “guardian angel”. It expresses generosity and provides protection and guide ^[33]. Ayyaana is the bridge between the creator and creatures ^[34]. It is through ayyaana that the creatures and the creator communicate.

There is ayyaana called maaram ^[35], who is a guardian of fertility. She is responsible to guard or take care of what Waaqa created. The Waaqeffataa women pray by saying “O God give me a child, O maaram, care for me when I am pregnant, help me in delivery and protect me with my child after delivery”. ^[36] Unlike Christianity’s conception of Mary as virgin and giving birth to Jesus without losing her virginity, Maaram’s conception is not associated with sex matters and discussing about her virginity is safuu ^[37].

Both a country and nation has their own Ayyaana. It strengthens and weakens them depending on the way they behave. According to Unguree, if the people live together in peace and love, tell the truth, then their Ayyaana will become strong and accordingly, the nation becomes strong and united, which will enable them successful in every respect. On the other hand, if the nation hates each other, lie to each other, do not agree and do not respect each other, and not proud of themselves, their Ayyaana will be weakened which results in failure of that nation since they do not agree and work together. Their Waaqa do not even listen to their prayer. ^[38] Therefore, the love and peaceful relationship between individuals, family and clan strengthen their ayyaana while the absence of one or all of these weakens their ayyaana.

The above claim is true of the Oromo people. When the Oromo as a whole has been practicing Waaqeffannaa and governed by the Gadaa system, they were strong, united and respected nation. They were proud of their culture and language; they tell the truth, respect each other, pray to their Waaqa with pure and clean heart. However, because of different reason when they start to become negligent to their culture, history and tradition, they lost their strength, unity and respect.

Different religions are formed not because there are different Gods, but because there are different ayyaanas ^[39]. Different religions have their own ayyaana and being oneself means to respect one’s own ayyaana. Daadhii, in his book ‘Duudhaa’, described how individuals and all other creatures have their own ayyaana using football team as an example. Football teams train well by their coach before the match. But we see the teams praying before the game starts. The question here is how the two teams pray to one God, who is equal for both teams, for a victory? To which team should God listen? If He listens to one team and enables the team to win, then he is biased. This is what we call ayyaana. The individuals are not praying to God for God does not favor one and disfavor the

other. Rather they are praying to their ayyaana. They are asking their ayyaana for a victory. That is why the Oromo says ‘while God is for all and ayyaana is personal’. The ayyaana of individuals vary from person to person. The ayyaana of one team may be stronger than the ayyaana of the other team depending on the truthfulness and love of the team for each other. Therefore the team which is strong physically and plays well and also has a strong ayyaana wins ^[40].

Christianity and Islam have influenced the Oromo world view and religious terminologies which did not originate from Oromo language. There are some words like fal {a} (Omen) which is introduced to Oromo world view from either Amharic ^[41] or Arabic ^[42]. Moreover, the notion of setana/sheytaana (an Oromo word for devil) is also believed to have been borrowed from other religions, mainly Islam and Christian. Setana/sheytaana is the superhuman evil powers ^[43]. Bartels believed that the Oromo consider setana/Shaytana as sovereign entities that are believed to be enemies of both man and Waaqa.

3.3 Safuu and Cubbuu

In some traditional African religions, morality is associated with obedience and disobedience to God regarding the way a person or a community lives. According to Feyyisa, for example, there is the concept of virtue and vice in Waaqeffannaa which is termed as safuu and cubbuu respectively. Safuu is the “to do list” to serve waaqa achieve his kaayyoo (goal) and in our personal and earthly life while Laguu is “not to do list” or the taboo ^[44]. So we can refrain from doing such activities diverting us from kaayyoo waaqaa. Cubbuu (sin) is both not doing the safuu and doing the laguu. Therefore, Waaqeffannaa religion helps in shaping the life of its followers in such a way that they refrain from doing what is not worth doing and doing what is good and desirable.

In Waaqeffannaa though there is the concept of Cubbuu (sin) in their consciousness, there is no concept for hell or condemnation after death. We all experience the consequence of our trespasses regarding the safuu (virtue) and laguu (vices) expected from us during our life time. There is no suffering from the consequences of cubbuu after death. We will live further after death as ekeraa (in the form of soul or spirit) with our father, Waaqa, without any possibility of punishment in the hell. This implies that the consequence of our cubbuu is not losing eternal life, but suffering in the earthly life ^[45].

Therefore, the concepts of safuu and cubbuu are the two important moral concepts in the Oromo religion and philosophy through which Oromo worldview can be expressed. They are the concepts that mark individual’s behavior towards the creator and the creation. They are the ethical principles of how individuals need to act and behave towards others. They are the ethical principles that dictate

³³ Salviac, M. D. The Oromo: An Ancient People, Great African Nation, 1909: 155

³⁴ Duudhaa, 158

³⁵ Maaram of Waaqeffannaa is different from St. Mary (also known as Mariyam in Amharic) of Christian and Fatima of Muslims except the resemblance of name and deeds.

³⁶ Bokku, D.D. Oromo wisdom in black civilization, 2011: 126

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Unguree, T. Waaqeffannaa: Amantii duudhaa ganamaa, 2015:48-49

³⁹ Daadhii, M.G. Duudhaa. 3rd edition, Finfinnee, Oromiyaa, 2009 (2016): 73 (own translation)

⁴⁰ Daadhii, M.G. Duudhaa. 3rd edition, Finfinnee, Oromiyaa, 2009 (2016): 56-57 (own translation)

⁴¹ The working language of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

⁴² Haberland (1963:561) cited in Geda, G. J. Pilgrimages and Syncretism: A religious Transformation among the Arsi Oromo of Ethiopia, 56

⁴³ Geda, G. J. Pilgrimages and Syncretism: A religious Transformation among the Arsi Oromo of Ethiopia, 56

⁴⁴ Feyyis, 2011

⁴⁵ Fayyis, 2011

individual's rights, responsibilities and obligations. They teach individuals the right way of acting and doing things. We cannot view the Oromo society outside of Safuu. It has a special place and part of their daily activities. It is the law that creates smooth relationship between creator and creatures, man and man, and man and other creatures. If Safuu is broken, the relationships will be disturbed.

Safuu is at the heart of everyday lives of the Oromo. They speak of Safuu when they eat and drink, when they attend a wedding, when they celebrate any kind of ritual, when they praise their Waaqa (God), during farming and harvest, during war and peace... their socio-political system, namely Gadaa system, has its heart the principle of Safuu. The laws of Gadaa system are derived from the basic principle of Safuu. Taking Safuu out of the scene one cannot speak of Oromo religion, political system, and social structure. Simply safuu is at the center of whatever Oromo people do at anytime and anywhere. ^[46]

Safuu is a moral principle of the Oromo through which their actions are regulated. It is the principle of what one ought to do and not to do. What ought to do and ought not to do is based on the principles of safuu. Children grow up learning and practicing safuu. Respecting elders, giving priority for the elders everywhere, not insulting elder, not inflicting harm to others, respecting one's family are some of the ethical principles of Oromo (safuu) that children exercise since their early childhood. The elders have a special place and respect in Oromo world view. In the same fashion, elders and families respect children. There is safuu between husband and wife, children and family, younger and elder, etc. Megersa described safuu as follows:

Saffuu is a nominal category, based on Oromo notions of distance and respect for all things. The concept of saffuu is not merely an abstract category: it constitutes the ethical basis upon which all human action should be founded; it is that which directs one in the right path; it shows the way in which life can be best lived within the context of Oromo world. ^[47]

The Oromo regards one who understands and exhibits safuu as wise. When one understands safuu and practices it, keeps the distance between oneself and all other creatures and pay due respect to all things, he/she is living morally wise life. ^[48] Therefore, one is regarded as morally wise when he/she has the good knowledge of safuu and practices it and respects all that Waaqa created. A wise person is not the one who has the knowledge, rather who use the knowledge.

Waaqa, the creator of safuu, Himself is not beyond safuu. Humans have expectations and assumptions about Waaqa. It is, therefore, safuu for Waaqa not to live up his expectations and assumptions. He "has to live like Waaqa, not like man" so

that the balance between creator and creature be maintained. ^[49]

Safuu exists in every relationship. It is based on the principle of respecting every living and non-living being and keeping the distance between human beings and all other creatures so that the balance of the cosmic and social order is maintained. It "is based on paying respect to nature and keeping the distance between everything rather than the pleasure one gets from an act". ^[50]

Waaqa withdraw, rather than directly punishing, those who violate safuu and rewards those who respect and live according to safuu with blessings. Those who act against safuu will be punished indirectly by what happen to them as a result of the withdrawal of Waaqa. When he withdraws from those who violate safuu, "life diminishes in all its forms. There will no longer be fertility, peace, good, health, material well-being and so on". ^[51]

The Oromo moral consideration is different from the western conception of ethics in that the latter is "confined to human life, interactions and relations among human beings while the Oromo concept of Safuu is morally broader than western notion of ethics". ^[52] In Oromo moral philosophy, "everything has an intrinsic value and there is safuu for everything". ^[53] The Oromo has moral concern for animals and plants regardless of the benefit they drive from them. For example, they equally care for chimps though they do not benefit from them ^[54]. They equally care for those whom they benefit from and not, because they all have their own intrinsic value; they are valuable in themselves.

Hunting and killing of domestic animals for food is discriminatory in Oromo culture that can be indicated through safuu adamoo (ethics of hunting). According to safuu adamoo, it is safuu ^[55] (unethical/immoral) to kill an animal while it is eating, drinking or mating. It is also safuu to kill female and young animals that is likely to reproduce offspring; rather one can kill an animal that would be of less importance, old and non-productive ^[56].

The Oromo are against any act of cruelty. It is safuu to inflict any act of cruelty against fellow human beings or any other creatures in the cosmos. The Oromo believe that everything in the universe is created by Waaqa (God) and as such His creatures, without discrimination, should be respected. Whether useful to humans or not, we should be friendly to all the creatures. Oromo life depends on the philosophy of interconnectedness and interdependence.

4. Waaqeffannaa Religion

*"Waaqeffannaan waan haraas, waan har'aas miti!
Waaqeffata ta'uun ofta'uudha; ofta'uun heera*

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Ibid, 34

⁵¹ Ibid, 17-18

⁵² Deressa, J. A. Questioning the role of ethics in Oromo Gadaa system: The case of Borana Oromo ritual events at arda jila, 2011:

⁵³ Kenea, D. A. Safuu: The indigenous Oromo moral system, 2015: 36

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ It is safuu, it is against safuu, it is not safuu is used in this research to mean it is unethical or immoral since there is no Afaan Oromo word for immoral or unethical.

⁵⁶ Kenea, D.A. Safuu: The indigenous Oromo moral system, 2015: 40

⁴⁶ Kenea, D.A. Safuu: The indigenous Oromo moral system, 2015: 15

⁴⁷ Megersa, G. The Oromo world-view. The journal of Oromo studies, Volume 12, Numbers 1 & 2, 2005:70

⁴⁸ Kenea, D.A. Safuu: The indigenous Oromo moral system, 2015: 21

uumaati!" [57]

Waaqeffannaa is neither a new thing nor a thing of recent phenomenon! To be Waaqeffataa [58] is to be oneself; to be oneself is of natural. (My translation)

Etymologically Waaqeffanna is derived from Afaan Oromo (Oromo language) word 'Waaqa', which literary means God, the creator of the universe. Hence, Waaqeffannaa means believe in one Waaqa [59]. It is the way of Waaqa [60]. It is a traditional belief of the Oromo people which pass down from generation to generation through their forefathers along with its various rituals related to it. The source of Waaqeffannaa religion is, therefore, one Waaqa. It is surrendering oneself to Waaqa and respecting the law of Waaqa.

Waaqeffannaa is believing in, worshipping and thanking only one Waaqa and being governed by the laws of God. It means peace, aseptic and gracious [61]. God is the beginning and the end. Nothing exists before God and nothing comes after Him. There is no truth without God. Nothing is greater than God and even competes with Him. He cannot be seen or touched. The Oromo belief the existence of Waaqa through observing of 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". [62]

Waaqeffannaa is the religion of Cush (Kush) families. The source of Waaqeffannaa religion is Waaqa Tokkicha (one God). Haroo contends that Waaqeffannaa is the eldest and sources for other religions. In Waaqeffannaa God is symbolized by the black color. The black color signifies power, purity and beauty. This can be indicated in Oromo saying 'Waaqni Gurraacha Garaa Garbaati' which can literally be translated as "black God with an ocean-belly". Geda summed it up as follows:

This is mainly because the Oromo associate black with fertility because they believe that the fertile soil and rain clouds are black in color. 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 see-belly. This belly also provides rain, which brings enough grass for animals and cereals for his people. [63]

Geda also depicts the close association of Waaqa with lafa (earth). Lafa is often considered as mother while Waaqa is considered as father and accordingly they are inseparable. The Oromo indicate the inseparable nature and equal significance of Waaqa and lafa through their prayers and blessings. The

Oromo also believes, Geda explains, that "Waaqa assigns a sprit-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". [64]

The source of Waaqeffannaa religion is the culture, philosophy, knowledge and civilization of the Cush people. It is not imported from other's culture, philosophy and civilization just like other modern religions which were introduced to the Oromo people in different times (Orthodox Christianity in the 4th century and Islam in the 7th century). Orthodox Christianity is originated from Israeli culture and civilization whereas Islam from Arab culture and civilization. The very simple evidence here is to look at the name of the followers of these respective religions.

The Axumite kingdom accepts Christianity in the 4th century through the commercial relationship it developed with the Greco-Romans. On the other hand, the Muslim Arabs who arrived after the rise of Islam in the 7th century spread this new religion in Africa coastal towns and subsequently challenged the Axumites. [65]

Knowing and believing in one Waaqa is the basic teachings of Waaqeffannaa. A waaqeffataa has to know Waaqa. To know Waaqa means to be acquainted with the knowledge of Waaqa, which is not simple. To know Waaqa requires deep research and critic, to think, speak and hear about Him [66]. Moreover, Waaqeffannaa is a religion where one prays to Waaqa with purity and cleanness [67].

The Oromo religion encompasses both real world and the world of ideas. And that everything that exists in material world as well as in the form of abstract values has its correspondence in the form of immaterial principle ayyaana which is decisive for the character and fate of that entity. A social group can exemplify this. A lineage is thought to have its own Ayyaana, which defines its demographic and material success. A day in the calendar is believed to have its own particular character due to the influence of particular Ayyaana. All this essence or principle can be seen as a fractional part of the divinity [68].

Waaqeffannaa is the religion of peace. As such, it does not intervene in the religions of others. The Waaqeffataa respects the religions of others as equally as he wants his religion to be respected by others so as to live harmoniously and peacefully with the followers of other religions. They never try to hassle or preach others to attract them to their religions. One can be Waaqeffataa by his own will and live in it with freedom. They believe everyone has the right to follow the religion of his

⁵⁷ Unguree, T. Waaqeffannaa: Amantii duudhaa ganamaa, 2015:19

⁵⁸ Whereas Waaqeffataa is a religion, Waaqeffataa is the follower of Waaqeffannaa religion

⁵⁹ Daaniyaa, 45-46

⁶⁰ Zitelmann, T. Oromo religion, ayyaana and the possibility of a sufi legacy, vol. 12, numbers 1 & 2, 2005: 81

⁶¹ Horoo, R. Waaqeffannaa

⁶² Geda, G. J., Pilgrimages and syncretism: A religious transformation among the Arsi Oromo of Ethiopia, ii

⁶³ Ibid, i

⁶⁴ Geda, G. J. Pilgrimages and syncretism: A religious transformation among the Arsi Oromo of Ethiopia, ii.

⁶⁵ Jima, S.K. Oromo Nationalism, 2016:36

⁶⁶ Daaniyaa, 31

⁶⁷ Ibid, 32

⁶⁸ Assefa, G. Description and documentation of ateetee ritual among the dirree Enchini community of West Shewa Oromo, 2015: 36-37

choice by his own will ^[69].

In Waaqeffannaa there are different thanks giving ceremonies. Among these are Ifaanoo, Irreecha and Birboo. Ifaanoo is a thanksgiving ceremony which is celebrated once every year in the month of September by lighting the torch (gubaa gubuu). It is celebrated thanking their God for letting them through the dark summer (rainy season) to sunny spring season (booqa birraa). This thanks giving ceremony has different names in different places such as ayyaana Ifaa, ayyaana Gubaa and ayyaana mucucuu. Birboo is celebrated on January 1st as a new year marking the ups and downs that the followers of Waaqeffannaa have been through ^[70].

Irreechaa (Oromo Thanksgiving ceremony), on the other hand, is celebrated twice a year (in the month of September and April) on the lake and river shores, and around mountains. It is Waaqeffannaa's religious holiday and a major national celebration, which is part and parcel of the Oromo public life. It is both thanksgiving and a prayer ^[71] - thanking God for all his great deeds for human beings, and praying and asking for what they wanted God to accomplish for them. Irreecha has undergone some transformations in accommodating non-religious aspects of Oromo culture. Therefore, traditional religion also plays the role of accommodating culture. It brings the Oromo's together from different walks of life regardless of religion, political outlooks and geographical boundaries.

Unlike Christianity and Islam, Waaqeffannaa does not require the construction of religious houses for the veneration of Waaqa or for His thanksgiving. Rather the Oromo travel to "natural Physical bodies such as rivers, lakes, forests, and mountains, which they believe are created by Waaqa himself" to thank their Waaqa and for prayer ^[72].

Another important concept in Waaqeffannaa is the concept of life after death. There is no concept of afterlife in Waaqeffannaa. No one, except Waaqa, knows what will happen to a person after death. If a person sins, he and his generations that comes after him suffers during earthly life; not after earthly life.

In Oromo tradition, in general and Waaqeffannaa religion in particular, to know Waaqa is a natural phenomenon just like the desire for food and drink. One does not need a missionary to know Waaqa. "It can be seen as the instinctive force that urges a new born calf to suck the udder of its mother." ^[73] Dirribi elaborates the Waaqeffannaa worldview as follows:

We believe in God who created us. We believe in Him in a natural way. We believe in God without being preached. We do not need ministry of someone just because we can see what God has done and what he does: he makes rains and the rains grow greenery and crops that we consume. He lets the sun shine. So believing in Him is instinctive and inbuilt. It is as natural as the desire we have for food and drink and as natural as reproduction of living things. We go to the

nature, the nature that he created: mountains and rivers to praise and appreciate Him impressed by His works ^[74].

The Waaqa of Oromo has attributes like the creator, black, Omnipotent, Omniscient, and Omnipresent. In Waaqeffannaa religion, unlike the Semitic religions which associates the black colour with Satan (devil) and believes that the Satan wrongs people and competes with God, Waaqa has no competitor. Moreover, "Waaqeffannaa does not preach fear and anxiety. There is no such thing called Satan and the Waaqeffataa does not pray to God to safeguard him/her from the unknown evil". ^[75]

According to the teachings of Waaqeffannaa, Waaqa creates Ayyaantuu ^[76] (Holy person) who is responsible to teach to do what Waaqa likes to be done such as to do good things and to be kind to the people everywhere. But they are not the messengers of God and as such they do not force others to obey their teachings and orders ^[77]. It is a free will and that is why Waaqeffannaa is termed as a free will religion.

Eventually Waaqeffannaa became less important as a result of the majority of the Oromo people are converted to either Muslim or Christianity of different kind. There are several factors that attribute to religious conversions of the Oromo people. One of the factors is that the introduction and spread of Christianity and Islam to Ethiopia respectively and the activity of protestant missionaries as well. The conquest of most parts of Oromia by the Christian Shewa Empire is also another important factor. However, although the majority of the Oromo People are converted to Islam or Christianity of different kind, they still practice Waaqeffannaa. The main reason, I believe, is that Waaqeffannaa is not only the traditional religion of the Oromo people, but also it is part of cultural practice of the Oromo people, specially to the current Oromo generations who are contributing immensely for the revival of the Oromo culture and religion.

Another factor which results in religious diversification and conversion is the 16th century Oromo movement. Jones and Monroe, and Pankhurst argue that:

Until the very beginning of the 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 In terms of religion, the Oromo movement, which brought them in contact with the Christians of highland Ethiopia, resulted in the conversion of some group of the Oromo to Christianity while others converted to Islam ^[78]

⁷⁴ Ibid, 54

⁷⁵ Ibid, 66

⁷⁶ According to Dirribi, 2011, "Ayyaantuu is a person whom God enlightened his/her mind, a person who refrain him/herself from unworthy affairs and dedicates him/herself to what God would like to be done."

⁷⁷ Bokku, D.D. Oromo wisdom in black civilization, 2011: 71

⁷⁸ Jones and Monroe, 1978:9 and Pankhurst, 1997:307 cited in Geda, G. J. Pilgrimages and Syncretism: A religious transformation among the Arsi Oromo of Ethiopia, 20.

⁶⁹ Bokku, D.D. Oromo wisdom in black civilization, 2011: 111

⁷⁰ Horoo, R. Waaqeffannaa.

⁷¹ Ibid

⁷² Geda, G. J. Pilgrimages and Syncretism: A religious Transformation among the Arsi Oromo of Ethiopia, i.

⁷³ Bokku, D. D. Oromo wisdom in black civilization, 2011: 33

On the other hand, the expansion and consolidation of Islam also affected Oromo tradition, Oromo traditional religion and religious practices. Particularly the expansion of Islam in Arsi^[79], who were practicing the Oromo traditional religion and religious practices and traditions, were greatly influenced. Temam Haji-Adem explained the influence of the Arsi Oromo by Islam expansion as “some factions of Arsi Oromo even started to claim that they are Muslims instead of Oromo, especially until the collapse of the Ethiopian empire in the 1970s”. He further contends that “many Arsi Oromo who embraced Islam also dropped their Oromo names and started to pick Islamic and Arabic names”.^[80]

4. Conclusion

Traditional religion in general and Waaqeffannaa in Particular also plays the role of accommodating culture in such a way that during Waaqeffannaa holiday celebration (called Irreecha), for example, the Oromos get together from different walks of life regardless of religion, political outlooks and geographical boundaries. Even when the Oromo pragmatically adopt another religion and became Christians or Muslims, they remained true to their own conception of Waaqaa, God.

Waaqeffannaa is not only a religion, but also a culture. It is the symbol of Oromummaa. Irreecha celebration is concrete evidence where millions of Oromo are gathered at Hora Arsadi, Bishoftu regardless of political and religious backgrounds. Unfortunately, religious wise, most of the attendees are the followers of Christianity and Islam. They sing and chant proudly for attending the Irreechaa festivity. That is why when the Oromo pragmatically adopt another religion and became Christians or Muslims, they remained true to their own conception of Waaqaa, God.

The basic difference between different religions including Waaqeffannaa is not with regards to the God (Waaqa) they believe, rather the difference lies with the Ayyaana^[81] that they believe in and pray for. All religions believe in one Supreme Being (i.e. God). There is no religion which has two or more Supreme Beings. However, the religions compete with regards to their Ayyaana stating that their Ayyaana is superior and right. The Oromo does not have many Ayyaanas as that of Christianity and Islam. There is no such thing as messengers and angels as in Christianity and Mohammed as in Islam. They do not believe in St. Merry as a mother of Jesus. Although the Oromo people have been practicing Waaqeffannaa for so long time and it has a special place among them, it did not expand due to a pressure from social, political and modernization problems. The Oromo culture and language were continuously under subjugation from different rulers of the country which negatively affects the development and expansion of Waaqeffannaa religion.

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⁷⁹ Probably one of the largest groups of the Oromo inhabiting mainly the regions of Arsi-Bale, southern Shoa and western Hararge – Gnamo, A. H. 1982: 585, cited in Geda, G. J. Pilgrimages and Syncretism: A religious transformation among the Arsi Oromo of Ethiopia, 20

⁸⁰ Haji-Adem, T.2002:84 cited in Geda G. J. Pilgrimages and Syncretism: A religious Transformation among the Arsi Oromo of Ethiopia, 31

⁸¹ Ibid, 47

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