

# **Religious Beliefs among the Oromo: Waaqeffannaa, Christianity and Islam in the Context of Ethnic Identity, Citizenship and Integration**

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*The Oromo are the largest single ethnic group speaking Cushitic language and inhabiting the Oromia Region of Ethiopia. The annals of the Oromo reveal that the Oromo religion was neither Christianity nor Islam but was an indigenous religion known as Waaqeffanna. The Oromo Waaqa is similar to the God of the Christians and Allah of the Muslims. The Oromo never substitute other gods or curved statues for their Waaqa. Belief in one supernatural power is therefore a common denominator for the Oromo and other peoples which could be an important asset for democratization creating harmony, understanding and better integration among the population. The Waaqeffanna practice among the Oromo is closely linked with the Gadaa institution. Using the challenging paradigm established by Bartels in his work on Oromo Religion, this paper discusses continuity and change in the Oromo religious beliefs and the tolerance they have developed examining the impact of Christianity and Islam on Waaqeffanna in general and that of Islam in particular. Whether the Oromo have become Christians or Muslims, however, a true belief in one God (Waaqeffanna dhugaa) remains the basic tenet of Oromo identity. A remark will also be made on the extent to which religious freedom enshrined in the country's constitution is respected for all citizens. Conflicting identities among themselves and the state's intervention in religious affairs are very likely to hamper peaceful co-existence, democracy and integration. The paper attempts to show the historical symbiotic relationship between Waaqeffanna and the major religions reflecting a significant degree of tolerance on the part of the former. Based on the historical accounts at our disposal we will finally underscore the need for more religious tolerance among the Ethiopian peoples as one of the indispensable factors for effective population integration, genuine democracy and peaceful co-existence.*

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## Introduction

The Oromo belong to the Cushitic stock, one of the four major linguistic and cultural groups (Cushitic, Nilo-Saharan, Omotic and Semitic) in Northeast Africa in general and Ethiopia in particular. They are estimated at 40 million out of about 80 million people in Ethiopia alone. Contrary to the conventional views of a number of the national and expatriate scholars which hold that the Oromo were alien to Ethiopia until the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century of the disastrous jihadic war of Imam Ahmed (Tamrat 1972:301, W/Aregay 1974b) the Oromo were one of the indigenous and most ancient peoples of the region with a mutually intelligible language, as well as common history, culture and psychological make up (de Salviac 1901: 1-40, Ta'a 2006: 5-7, Hassen 1990). Historical, anthropological and linguistic evidences unequivocally testify that the Oromo constitute a major ethnic entity among the Cushitic peoples including the Afar, Agaw, Beja, Gedeo, Konso, Hadiya, Kambata, Saho, Somali, Sidama and others (D. Bates 1979: 7). This belongingness of the Oromo and many other peoples in Ethiopia to the same stock, if handled positively with a clear understanding of a common identity, equal citizenship rights and respect will promote democracy, integration and co-existence.

Based on their recent researches, social science scholars have concluded that the Oromo are one of the ancient inhabitants in Northeast Africa with their own socio-political, economic and religious systems which they also share with other populations of the country that this paper attempts to deal with in greater detail.

Today, the Oromo are numerically one of the most important ethnic groups in Ethiopia with a substantial number living in Northern Kenya. Paradoxically, however, though they represent the majority demographically and are legitimate citizens of the country, they do not have any genuine representation and have been treated as political minority by the Ethiopian successive regimes since the last quarter of the nineteenth century (Jalata 2009: 1-3). The Oromo situation, therefore, calls for a genuine democratic approach to effect a profound political and socio-economic transformation which will also benefit other peoples of Ethiopia in a similar situation and pave the way towards integration. Although the Oromo are stretched out in different and geographically distinct directions they have still maintained strong unitary links which would necessarily facilitate integration transcending local adoptions and adaptations (Triulzi 1987: 1). As P.T.W. Baxter has clearly stated:

There are considerable cultural diversities between different Oromo groups and Oromo are variously Muslims, Roman Catholics [Protestants] and

followers of traditional religion [*Waaqeffanna*]. But underlying these diversities there are two important shared attributes. First any Oromo speaker, whatever dialect he or she speaks, can be understood immediately by another Oromo. Secondly, Oromos all share common cultural values and modes of thought and feel culturally comfortable with each other (Baxter 1986: 53-54).

Concerning religious change, Bartels shows how the Oromo have a tendency to revert to their own conception of *Waaqa*, even when they adopt other religions, a propensity that M. I. Aguilar has termed the paradigm of the “God of the Oromo.” (Aguilar 2005: 53-54). Lambert Bartels who lived among the western Macca Oromo for several years and closely studied their religion and culture wrote a book on *Oromo Religion* in 1983. For the most part he listened to what the Oromo themselves had to say allowing them to speak freely. He avoided the Hellenistic description of *Waaqa*, the God of the Oromo as “omnipotent,” “omniscient” and “omnipresent” which is derived from Greek philosophy (P’Bitek 1971: 80, 86-88). Bartels was highly moved by the poetic resources and depth of *Afaan* Oromo, impressed by their democratic ethos and general way of life and more especially by their monotheistic religion (Bartels 1994: 1-13), which we will take up next.

### ***Waaqeffanna*: The Indigenous Oromo Religion**

Essentially, “Religion is a difficult subject of inquiry, elusive by its very substance” (Blakey et al., 1994: 1). There are various approaches and definitions in the scientific study of religion. Some of these approaches are sociological, phenomenological, philosophical, psychological, historical and others. No two scholars approach the same study from exactly the same view point even if they use the same approach. Therefore, the methodological approach in the study of any religion has remained a thorny issue. As Macquarrie commented, “...almost as many definitions and theories of religion exist as there are authors on the subject.” (1997:1). He then suggested only three approaches which many scholars have more or less employed in the study of religion. These include the historical, the phenomenological and the behavioral or social-scientific (*Ibid*). Another writer, N. Smart has come up with a seven part definition of religion and has advocated a seven-fold scheme of study namely, Doctrinal, Mythological, Ethical, Ritual, Experimental, Institutional and Material (1998: 1-11). He also said that “...the pattern of belief and practice through which men communicate with or hope to gain experience of that which lies behind the world of their ordinary experience” (*Ibid.*: 12).

According to A. R. Brown, one of the early social anthropologists religion refers to, "...an expression in one form or another sense of dependence on power outside of ourselves" (1952: 157). Nevertheless, these definitions do not take into account the various features and roles of religion.

But by looking at how people had practiced and are still practicing their religion one can argue that religion was and still is part and parcel of the lives of the Oromo people reflecting their identity for generations. As Waal Malefyt argues, for the rationalization of a certain belief and for its symbolic expression, religion is a unified system of belief which involves certain institutions, ritual practices and rules of conduct. Furthermore; the relationship it bears to the family patterns, social, cultural, political and economic organizations, refers to the functions and influences of religion (Malefyt 1969: 20). In his recent exposition Smart wrote that religions would increasingly borrow from each other and a global consensus on the value of religion in society would eventually evolve. In one of his interviews, he also said:

I ... believe we are moving toward a global ideology that has a place for all religions and recognizes the contribution of the different traditions. Hopefully, it will have an overarching view as to how we can work together for the promotion of human values and spirituality (Scott London, an Interview with Ninian Smart, April 1999).

It is in the context of the views and remarks of the scholars referred to above that we try to understand how the Oromo religion, *Waaqeffanna* has influenced other religions and how it was influenced by others.

The practices, functions and roles of religion vary depending on the social organizations and their relationship with sacred symbols as well as what they represent. However, whether it is across cultures or within a culture, across ethnic entities or within an ethnic group, organized or not, people practice their religion owing to either political, social, natural, cultural or economic factors (Smith 1950: 85). Consequently, in any event of population interaction and integration processes the religious beliefs of the people concerned must be understood, given due consideration and utmost attention. This is mainly important because true and successful integration could be effected when people are in a position to define themselves and are free to make choices.

The indigenous Oromo religion which had been practiced long before the introduction of the two major religions, Christianity and Islam into Northeast Africa was known as *Waaqeffanna*. It is the term derived from an Oromo word, *Waaqa* which literally means sky God (above all else) and a believer in *Waaqa* is called *Waaqeffata*. Based on his study of the Macca Oromo, Bartels explains that

*Waaqa* lives in the sky and the term for sky and God is the same (Bartels 1983: 89). He further commented, “*Waaqa* is like a father who goes away. Earth is like a mother: she is always with us.” (*Ibid.*: 110). Another scholar, Gemetchu Megerssa argues that the Oromo have two different words, *qoolloo* which literally means ‘covering’ for sky and *Waaqa* [*Waaqayyoo*] for God. He then goes on to say that we know very little about the God of the Oromo (Gemetchu 1993). According to I. M. Lewis, the Cushitic legacy was retained among the Oromo. A sky God is essential to the Cushitic religion as the Supreme Being and Father of the Universe. Among both the Oromo and the Somali the name *Waaqa*/*Waaq* is popular (Lewis 1984: 148). Tadesse Tamrat, a historian has also dealt with Cushitic religious legacy and saw the general features of “Kushitic pagan worship” as being a sky God (Tamrat 1972: 234). For W. Schmidt, one of the anthropologists in the mid-1930s, the Oromo belief in *Waaqa* was the example of “early monotheism” of the original unspoiled attitude of people to God (Schmidt 1937: 123-136).

Describing the features of traditional Oromo religion, Zitelmann wrote: “Like any religion, Oromo religion combines an institutional framework with an abstract belief system.” (2005: 81). But unlike those of the Christians and Muslims, the Oromo religion has no scriptures or holy books. In this connection de Salviac wrote that the whites, the Arabs and the Abyssinians, each one has a book given to them by God. In the beginning *Waaqa* also gave the Oromo a book but a cow swallowed it. *Waaqa* got angry and did not give them a second book. The Oromo are therefore forced to look for the lost book in the intestines of the cows to see the future (de Salviac 1901: 133). Probably, this may be the reason why among the Oromo peasants, whenever an animal is slaughtered experts are called upon to read the fat covering the stomach of the slaughtered animal. But in recent years the followers of *Waaqeffanna* have produced popular and scholarly articles and also stage religious events and rituals. Its adherents are therefore reconstructing the past and the present of Oromo religion as a belief system in its own right and for a better understanding of Oromo identity. For the Oromo, *Waaqa*’s creative act has ordered everything in heaven and on earth. The existence of *Waaqa* is in turn confirmed by the existence of Heaven and Earth as well as the orderly movement that takes place within them. All these are in the hearts, minds and experiences of the believers in *Waaqa* (Aguilar 2005: 58, Megerssa 2005: 74, Rikitu 2001: 125).

According to the Oromo belief *Waaqa Gurracha* (Black/ Dark God) is the root of Christianity, Islam and Jewish religions. For the Oromo *Waaqa*, the single almighty God is the creator of the universe. It is only *Waaqa* who gives life and creates human beings. “*Waaqa* is God of the Boorana [Oromo]. Allah is the God of the Muslims. There is only one God. He speaks different languages. He wants to communicate with people....The names of God have been given by the people...” in their own language. (Aguilar 2005: 63). The Oromo strongly believe

that relation between *Waaqa* and *Waaqeffata* is more direct. A follower of *Waaqa* does not need a prophet, saints, clergy, priests and bishops but depends on intermediary spirits known as *Ayyaana* to worship *Waaqa* which operate at different levels of reality and apply to different kinds of phenomena (Bartels 1983: 15-20, Megerssa 2005: 71-72, Knutsson 1967: 55-100, Legesse 1973: 9-44).

As an indigenous Oromo religion, *Waaqeffanna* evolved from the Oromo social experience in which the society had logically convinced itself and decided to follow its creator *Waaqa* 'who' in the words of Baxter 'was the prime mover of all social systems,' (Quoted in Aguilar, 2005:57) and in whom there is the *Summum Bonum* or the *Supreme Good*. It had emerged from the historical and cultural life as well as from the identity and the Oromo world view which constitutes three concepts of *Ayyaana*, *Uumaa* (*waaqa*'s creation) and *Safuu* (a moral category constituting ethical basis upon which all human action should be founded). These concepts are interconnected and intertwined (Megerssa 2005: 70-71). The Oromo, like other ancient peoples had developed the idea of a supernatural power or deity which is above everything else. It is this supernatural power as the doctrine of "the Unmoved Mover" of the Egyptian Mysteries (James 1988: 143) which transcends every phenomenon that the Oromo called *Waaqa* who they feared more than anything else in the universe. As followers of *Waaqeffanna*, the Oromo were free from any pressure and strictly speaking lived respecting *seera safuu*, the moral law. They therefore say, "We believe in our creator and with nature we pray to *Waaqa*" (Tolessa 2003: 2-5).

Although *Waaqeffanna* embodies an ancient Oromo world outlook it is never contradictory to modern science and contemporary developments in technology. It is therefore professed by many people consciously or unconsciously. It has therefore a positive quality for promoting social integration of peoples. It is a belief system which gives due respect to creation as well as nature and does not undermine any human beings and it is the basis of equality. Above all it is unlike many belief systems which advocate their own doctrines of evangelization, system of conversion as well as propagate their cultural and religious purity to dominate others. *Waaqeffanna* is rather independent which relies on itself and respects natural laws with a full trust in one God. It is therefore like many other African indigenous religions which provide inclusive values (Tolessa 2003: 5-8).

Martial de Salviac, a French Catholic priest who worked among the Oromo of Hararge at the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century gave the following testimony about the indigenous Oromo religion:

Particularly the Oromo people do not tolerate that one expresses the slightest doubt regarding the orthodoxy of their faith in the unity of God. They very highly protest in such cases, that there is and there will always be but only

one God: *Waaqa tokotu* [*Waaqa tokkicha*]. Their prayers, their worship, their chants, their maxims proclaim with it this fundamental dogma, which so many nations more civilized have pitifully allowed to be extinguished in the squall of unbridled passions (de Salviac 1901: 143, in Ayalew Kanno's translated work from the original French text).

During the holy days the followers of *Waaqeffanna*, keeping in mind the belief in *Waaqa* intact, giving due respect to the *Ayyanaa* (spirit) of their fathers and mothers and carrying *irreecha/irreessa* (green grass and leaves) climb up a mountain or go down to a river ascertaining *Waaqa's* relations and unity with nature and pray to the almighty almost always under the shade of a big *Odaa* (sycamore tree). They say, "We believe in our creator and with nature we pray to *Waaqa*." (Melba 1988: 1-4, Bartels 1994: 1-13). Nature is the graceful gift of *Waaqa* to human beings, therefore in accordance with natural laws maintaining *safuu* and giving a high regard to nature, the Oromo go to a life giving river or to a highly elevated place with *irreecha/irreessa* in their hands as a symbol of fertility or prosperity and warship *Waaqa*.

*Ayyana* is the manifestation of the almighty *Waaqa*. It acts as an intermediary between human beings and *Waaqa*. Bartels says, "We see *ayyaana* as an emanation to Supreme Being, *Waaqa*, and at the same time as a constitutive and essential element in creation at large and in every creature." (Bartels 1983: 330-341). All creatures are either negatively or positively affected by the relationship between *Waaqa* and mother earth. *Safuu* is a moral concept which serves as an ethical basis for regulating the practices of human beings in order to ensure a high standard of conduct appropriate to different situations. Essentially, the relationship between *Waaqa* and other things is governed by *safuu*. As Gemetchu commented, "...having *Saffuu* means that you know how to behave, according to the laws of our [Oromo] ancestors." He also underscored that it is impossible to understand *safuu* in isolation from the concepts of *ayyaana* and *uumaa* (Megerssa 2005: 74-75). Therefore, the concept is very useful to regulate the relationship between human beings, the natural environment and *Waaqa*.

### ***Waaqeffanna* and the *Qaalluu* Institution**

*Waaqeffanna* among the Oromo is officiated by high ranking "priest" known as the *Qaalluu* for male and *Qaalliitti* for female. The *Qaalluu* and *Qaalliitti* are sometimes referred to as the guardians of the laws of *Waaqa* on earth. During ceremonies *kallacha* is a sacred religious symbol held by Oromo men while *caaccu/callee* (beads) are the symbols used by women. The *Qaalluu* institution is

the preserver and protector of the Oromo culture. The traditional Oromo ritual hall of the *Qaalluu/Qaalliitti* is known as *Galma* and the ritual activity of the *Qaalluu/Qaalliitti* is called *dalaga*. The *Muudaa* and the *Jila* are also important concepts associated with the *Qaalluu* institution (Melba 1988: 12-24, Hassen 1990: 6).

The term *Muudaa* independently refers to the name of the ceremony that is celebrated once every eight years in honor of the *Qaalluu*. The *Qaalluu* itself is sometimes known as the *Abbaa Muudaa*, the spiritual father of the traditional Oromo religion since the ceremony is undertaken for his honor. The *Jila* refers to those who paid visits to the *Abbaa Muudaa* and received his blessings and anointment. As the Mecca pilgrims were called *Haji* among the Muslims, the *Muudaa* pilgrims were called *Jila*. The *Jila* functioned as the link between the spiritual father and the nation. Such religious and cultural practices of the Oromo must be clearly understood to bring them on board for integration and peaceful coexistence with other peoples.

Unfortunately, however, some of the Abyssinian Christian writers like Abba Bahrey (1593), Atsme Giorgis (n. d., 10 -11.), Alaqa Taye (1958 E.C.) and others apparently with a feeling of superiority complex, born of disorientation and disrespect were predisposed towards the Oromo. They claimed that the Oromo were faithless "pagan" before their conversion to Christianity and Islam. They were therefore highly biased against the *Qaalluu* institution. Especially, Atsme Giorgis completely misunderstood the institution. He tried to mention something related to the *Abbaa Muudaa* (father of the anointment) which he called 'Abbaa Mudana. Atsme did not understand the secrets behind the *Abbaa Muudaa*. He defined the *Abbaa Muudaa* as Messiah and anointed law maker (Atsme, n. d., 11). *Muudaa* had been one of the *Qaalluu* institutional ceremonies. Alaqa Taye was silent on the *Qaalluu* institution. Such conventional views and misunderstandings about the Oromo should be corrected to create a healthy environment for the envisaged social cohesion and the building of democracy in the country.

Among the Oromo, the concepts of *Maaram* and *Ateete* are also important. While *Maaram* refers to the divinity of women, the concept of *Ateete* refers to the ceremony for thanks giving by the women. In a similar fashion, both the *Gubaa* and *Irreecha/Irreessa* refer to the same concept of thanks giving but with different ceremonies, celebrations and blessings. *Gubaa* refers to the ceremony of fire works and is celebrated at night by burning olive wood bundles which symbolize the wish for God (*Waaqaa*) to burn all problems and evil spirits. *Irreecha/Irreessa* on the other hand refers to the thanks giving festival by presenting green grass or leaves which took place in the river meadows or on mountain tops. Besides being green, *Irreecha/Irreessa* symbolizes the unity of the society. It also involves various cultural practices like *guks* (horse race) tournaments, dancing and singing.



Such ceremonies involved large gathering of not only the Oromo but also other ethnic groups in the country which could be utilized to create more harmonious relations among the people.

Finally, it is significant to identify further the concepts of *Safuu* and *Ekeraa*. As we have already mentioned, among the Oromo *Safuu* refers to the ethical, moral, religious as well as political thoughts and rules. There is *Safuu* between father and son, mother and daughter, brothers and sisters, husband and wife, young and old, guests and hosts, God and earth and it regulates the activities of human beings. Understanding the concept of *Safuu* among the Oromo and making use of it as a point of reference may serve as an ideal tool in the process of integration. The concept of *Ekeraa* is, however, a belief of life after death in which the deceased ancestors exist in the form of spirits (Melba 1988: 12-24, Hassen 1990: 6, Bartels 1983: 170, Knutsson 1967: 55).

Owing to the strong relationship between the Oromo religious and political organizations, almost all the sources on the indigenous Oromo religion put emphasis on the *Qaalluu* institution in bringing and holding the Oromo religious, social, cultural and political lives together (Knutsson 1967: 94, Legesse 1973: 44, Hassen 1990: 6, Bartels 1983: 114).

It is quite significant to underscore that the *Muudaa* pilgrimage is the point of intersection for the *Qaalluu* and the *Gadaa* system. According to Legesse, "It [the *Qaalluu*] is one of the critical foci of the Oromo polity." (Legesse 1973: 43-45). It is also important to note here that there is a clear distinction between the *Qaalluu* of the Oromo and *Qaallicha* (Amharic). As Knutsson put it:

...a similar and overlapping term, *kallicca* which is in contrast to the word *kallu* is found all over Ethiopia. The term *kallu* is connected with possession only in shoa and Wollega;... In Borana... *kallu* always designates the few traditional 'high priests' while *kallicca* represents a mainly anti- social or at least anti-traditional, ritual role.... In Macha *kallicca* has a very different and much lower social status than a *kallu*.... Even culturally a *kallicca* is considered foreign or partly foreign to Macha tradition (Knutsson 1967: 66).

In fact there are Oromo songs which defy or undermine the *Qaallicha* (Amharic) as follows:

**Oromo**

Namni qaallicha nan jettee

**Gloss**

Someone (a man/ a woman) who calls me qaallicha.

Ofiiketii qaallomii	Be a qaallicha yourself.
Hintala qaallicha fuudhii	Mary a qaallicha daughter.
Ilma qallicha dhalshii	Give birth to a qaallicha son.
Qaallumma hinbitu mitii	One cannot become a qaalluu buying it.
Yoo dhufe hindidu mitii	If it comes one cannot say no!

Concerning the concepts of *Maaram* and *Ateetee* used by the followers of *Waaqeffanna*, different scholars gave varied interpretations. Variations are also reflected in the rituals among the different Oromo sub-groups in various parts of Oromia. But it is significant to note that the purpose is the same. According to Knutsson, the terms *Maaram* and *Ateetee* were used interchangeably for the same kind of being (*Ibid.* 55). For Daniel, *Ateetee* is a ceremony prepared for *Maaram* 'Ayyoolee' and *Waaqa* as thanks giving by women (Daniel 1984: 111). Bartels in his earlier research, however, questioned such assertions. He rather had stated that to the Oromo of western Macca, *Ateetee* is the name given to the ritual in which *Maaram* is invoked (Bartels 1983: 287). Baxter had also a similar observation concerning the belief of the Arsii Oromo (Baxter 1990: 127). Though the scholars have attempted to explain the different functions of the concepts of *Ateetee* and *Maaram*, in Oromo religion both are believed to be closely related rituals performed by the Oromo females. As gender specific both *Maaram* and *Ateetee* play an interactive and integrative role among the women.

From our brief discussions concerning *Waaqeffanna*, the indigenous Oromo religion has its peculiar ritual practices as well as its own cultural, social, historical and political dimensions experienced by the Oromo long before the influence of Christianity and Islam. *Waaqeffanna* embodies a sense of human dignity, equality and respect which are essential for societal interaction and integration with a strong belief in one supernatural power *Waaqa* (God) which cuts across several religions. In fact it created a positive environment for the accommodation of the two major religions among the Oromo. Consequently, its interactive and integrative role cannot be underestimated.

### **The Introduction and Spread of Christianity and Islam among the Oromo**

During the sixteenth century major population movements in Northeast Africa, the majority of the Oromo were neither Christians nor Muslims. They were followers of *Waaqeffanna*, their indigenous religion. It is not clearly known when the Oromo as individuals or groups were converted either to Christianity or Islam. But it is quite significant to note that those who were converted to Islam or

Christianity have clearly retained their pre-Islam or pre-Christian traditions, beliefs and customs even to this day. Interestingly enough Christian Oromo and the Holy Bible call their God *Waaqa* as in *Waaqeffanna* or *Rabbii* in Islam. This is why we tend to argue that the traditional Oromo religion is amazingly accommodative and integrative.

It is a common discourse in the centrist paradigm of Ethiopian historiography to describe that Christianity was introduced among the Oromo in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. For example according to S. Trimmingham, a larger part of the Oromo population in Shawa like the Abbichu, Gambbichuu, Galaan and others were Christianized in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Trimingham 1978: 23). It is also assumed that Islam and its expansion occurred among the Oromo during and after the wars of Ahmed ibn Ibrahim el Ghazi, popularly known as Ahmed Gagn in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In fact the wars of Ahmed Gagn greatly invigorated the expansion of Islam.

According to Bartels the process of the introduction and expansion of Islam among the Oromo was through trade. For him the role of trade in the introduction and spread of Islam among the Oromo can be observed from the increasing involvement of the Oromo in trade with the peoples of Harar and the Muslim Somali (Bartels 1983: 14). Hussein Ahmed acknowledges the role of the Oromo in the development of the religion. As he put it:

The Oromo played a crucial role in another aspect of the development of Islam: the influence of the Kushitic culture upon Islam which led to a symbiotic relationship between traditional belief and practices and Islam as reflected in the survival of such features as the *zar* cult (which the Oromo might have adopted from the Agaw) and the *wadaja* [communal prayers] (1990 : 63).

A reexamination and reinvestigation of some literary works (Ahmed 1985: 222-31, Hassen 1994: 50-54, Braukamper 1984 : 156-164), however, amply elucidate that some of the Oromo had already practiced Christianity and Islam as far back as the 13<sup>th</sup> century. This does not mean, however, that the Oromo did not embrace or were not influenced by the two dominant religions before the 13<sup>th</sup> century, it is only because of the paucity of sources on the pre- 13<sup>th</sup> century developments that we put, the 13<sup>th</sup> century as a point of departure for the introduction of the two major religions among the Oromo.

The premise for the existence of Christianity and Islam among the Oromo during the medieval period rests on the historical wisdom that ascertains the presence of some Oromo groups in Shawa long before the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This is a new historical knowledge established by Mohammed Hassen, P.T.W. Baxter, C.

Ehret D. Bates, D. Drusilla Houston and other scholars in recent years which refuted the conventional views about the Oromo and the incorrectly prevailing tradition of the Ethiopian historiography (Hassen 1994: 43, C.Ehret 2002, Haile et.al. 2004: 1-41).

The 16<sup>th</sup> century which the Ethiopian Historiography puts as a landmark that asserts the Oromo only joined the historical process taking place in the Abyssinian politics is not acceptable because it lacks authenticity and plausibility. Evidently, there were a number of Oromo settlements in Shawa long before the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The sixteenth century was rather a water shade in which the Oromo moved in mass breaking the check points or fortifications made by a powerful Christian kingdom in the 14<sup>th</sup> century most probably by king Amda Tsiyon r. 1314-1344 (Hassen 1994: 44, Alemayehu, et al. 2004: 42-149). There are more than eighteen sources written by non-Oromo indicating the Oromo presence in the northern and central regions of today's Ethiopia not only during the medieval period but also during ancient times. Nevertheless, a critical examination of these sources is not the subject of this paper and can be treated separately.

Apparently, long before the 14<sup>th</sup> century, some Oromo groups were already living along with the Christians in the north. Citing *Alaqa* Taye's work Mohammed argues that during the reign of Mara Teklahaymanot, the founder of the Zagwe Dynasty in the middle of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, there were already some Oromo groups living within the medieval Christian kingdom (*Ibid.*). In view of the cultural influences of Christianity and geographical proximity of the Oromo, it seems that these Oromo groups living amidst the Christian society might have accepted Christianity at least in its crude form. Strengthening this argument, Mohammed tries to throw some light on the names of peoples such as Liban, Galaan and others who were mentioned in Taye's work as they were living within the realm of the Zagwe Dyasty (*Ibid.*: 49). These names were and still are widely known Oromo clan names.

During the medieval period, there were numerous Muslim sultanates such as Dawaro, Yifat, Arbabni, Sarka, Bale and Dara (Braukamper 1998: 171). Islam was the dominant religion in these sultanates. However, as far as the ethnic composition of the peoples was concerned, it cannot be asserted with absolute certainty. Braukamper held the view that they were Cushitic (more commonly Sidama and Hadiya) as well as some Semitic groups (*Ibid.*).

Mohammed, however, argues that the ethnic composition of these regions was not purely of the Hadiya and Sidama clusters from among the Cushitic group. There were also some Oromo groups. The evidence he provided was the military expedition made by King Amda Siyon's generals against the children of Lalo, who were Oromo according to medieval sources (Hassen 1994: 47). Moreover, extensive evangelization by the disciple of Taklahaymanot, St. Qawistos was

made among the Galaan and Yaayaa, which the Christian writers claim as “pagan.” Both of these are important Oromo clan names and the people were not “pagan” as they were practicing their indigenous religion, *Waaqeffanna*. In addition to this, churches were said to have been established in those areas where Muslim principalities were found (*Ibid.*: 50). Tadesse Tamrat also mentions Galaan and Yaayaa who lived near mount Yaayaa in the thirteenth century (Tamrat 1972: 184). Mohammed’s argument about the Oromo presence in the Medieval Christian kingdom should be properly acknowledged because it is part of the efforts made by the concerned scholars to put the historical records of the Oromo right. Such re-examination of Oromo history with a proper perspective will clear the existing misunderstanding about the Oromo and will doubtlessly pave the ground for population integration.

This piece of information indirectly illuminates the fact that some Oromo groups were living with some Christian and Muslim communities. Although the religious identity of the Oromo groups cannot be precisely ascertained, it is more likely that it was the indigenous religion. But as far as the practices and the belief in *Waaqa* were not threatened by Islam, the Oromo might have also adhered to Islam with their own customary religion at least in its crude form. But the successive Christian leaders of Ethiopia including Tewodros II (r.1855-1868), Yohannes IV (r.1872-1889) and Menilek II (r.1889-1913) with their powerful army converted the Oromo to Christianity through coercion and persuasion.

During the reign of Zara Yaacob (1434-68) and later his son and successor Baidamariam (1468-78), Christian expeditions were made against the numerous Muslim principalities as well as further south against the pastoral Oromo groups. Later on the Oromo were made part of the Christian kingdom, and were invited to help Baidamariam when he quarreled with a certain religious man (Hassen 1994: citing Basset, 1888: 96,139).

During the 16<sup>th</sup> century wars of Ahmed Gagn, the Oromo were believed to have existed in the fiercely contested areas. On the basis of the work of Shihab al-Din (the Arab Faqih, known as *Futuh al Habasha* in the Ethiopian tradition), traditional Christian sources and Fra Mauro’s map, Mohammed argues that there were numerous Oromo groups in the hotly contested areas of the period. Moreover, the Oromo have taken part in the conflict on either side of the warring groups. The point that is not yet made clear is the basis for the Oromo to side with either the Christians or the Muslims. Perhaps, it could have been based on their respective location. But it could have also been on the basis of their religious identity, because some of the Oromo groups had already accepted Islam while some others had embraced Christianity (Hassen 1994: 50 -61). Nevertheless, this issue requires further investigation and examination for at the moment we lack conclusive evidence.

During the reign of Emperor Susenyos (1607-1632) his Chronicler by a Christian name Takla Selassie, more commonly known with his nickname Tino was an Oromo. The name Tino which means small in *Afaan* Oromo also entails the presence of other Oromo subjects along with him as officials of the establishment who were considered as Christianized Oromo (*Ibid.*: 98).

In the nineteenth century, during the period of what a Northern centered Ethiopian historiography infamously described as the “Zamana Mesafint” (the Era of the Princes), rather than giving recognition to the Yejju dynasty’s ascendancy to power, we find the Yejju Oromo of Wallo, who played a significant political role in Gondar. The Yejju Oromo were predominantly Muslims but were converted to Christianity most likely to gain legitimacy for their ascendancy to the political power in the country.

Therefore, on the basis of some extant secondary sources, a re-evaluation and re-investigation of the documents, it is possible to reconstruct that both Christianity and Islam were already practiced by some Oromo groups for several years. But Islam and Christianity created symbiotic relations for mutual benefits and did not endanger the very social fabric of the Oromo and their indigenous religion until the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This is in line with what A. Boahen had remarked about African traditional religions that they had strong power over the people. After they were converted to Christianity and Islam they did not stop their previous religious practices. The life of both Muslims and Christians after their conversion was highly influenced by traditional beliefs (Boahen 1992:181). Moreover, the traditional religion is basically communal and humanistic in nature. It pervades almost every department of life – no belief about the end of the world: eschatological religious ideas are absent in traditional religions of Africa (A. F. C. Ryder, 1980: 25). Rev. Gidada Solan, in his autobiography, recalls that a significant number of Gimira [Yam] people and some of the Oromo in Qellem whom he converted to Protestant Christianity, refused to stop drinking their traditional drinks which has been prohibited in the Bible (Solan 1972: 91-105). This is why we argue that the traditional Oromo religion (*Waaqeffanna*) should be given due consideration and attention in the process of population integration.

In some parts of Oromo land like Jimma and Wallo, Islam was introduced much earlier. For instance, in Jimma, Islam has penetrated in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century through long distance trade (M. Abir 1968: 76-77). Another point worth mentioning is the role played by the various social groups in the introduction and expansion of the two dominant religions. Most of the secondary sources discuss that merchants had played a great role in the expansion of Islam in such commercially important places like Jimma, Harar and Arsii. Although the role of merchants can not be underestimated particularly at the earlier stage it cannot be

considered the only way for the expansion of the religion. For instance, during the wars of Ahmed Gragn, Islam was forcefully imposed on the different peoples especially in the central and northern parts of the country.

On the other hand, Christianity was imposed on the peoples of the south, southeast and southwest by force, particularly during and after Menilek's conquest and the subsequent creation of the Ethiopian Empire state. As a state ideology its expansion was sponsored by the state and the men and women who supported this development were rewarded.

The methods, factors and means involved in the process of the introduction of the major religions among the Oromo varied depending on the relationships that existed between the Oromo and the Muslim traders on one hand and the Christians on the other. Whether it was through peaceful or coercive means, however, many Oromo accepted either Christianity or Islam owing to several factors. These included Islamization as a mechanism of resistance against Orthodox Christianity, due to the impact of trade, systematic propagation and ideas of modernization and forced conversion. Regarding this Abir, Tesfahun Bezabeh, Caulk, Daniel, Triulzi and Braukamper provide very impressive accounts (Abir 1968: 43, Tesefahun 1989: 39-40, Caulk 1972: 26-27, Daniel 1984: 111-122, Triulzi 1975: 55-70, Braukamper 1998: 760-780). Moreover, Abera Regassa, S. Trimmingham, Bartels, Gada Melba and Ketebo Abdiyo have given brief historical accounts on the introduction and spread of Islam (Abera 2005: 26-27, Trimmingham 1952: 103, Bartels 1983: 15, Gada 1988: 26-27, Ketebo, 1999: 15).

During Menilek's conquest, there had been a forceful introduction of Orthodox Christianity to the conquered peoples by the conquerors as a means of facilitating the full subjugation and submission of the newly conquered areas (Abera 2005: 26-27). In fact the policy of converting a very large section of the population into Orthodox Christianity has been consistent with a long standing national strategy of the country (Tefahun 1989: 32-33). Caulk had also clearly stated the political objective of the forceful introduction of Orthodox Christianity among the Shawan Oromo. Consequently, coercive mass conversion took place among the Oromo of Shawa which had played some roles in the incorporation process. For example, the Oromo of Shawa were compelled to apostate in order not to lose their land and other forms of property completely. Moreover, the act of conversion marked the beginning of the process of accommodation which in the long run has been an important feature of political assimilation (Caulk 1972: 275) without necessarily respecting the identity and citizenship right of the Oromo.

Tesfahun looked at the issue from another angle. He gave a brief description as to why the Oromo, believers in *Waaqeffanna*, their indigenous religion readily accepted Islam rather than Orthodox Christianity. According to him, Islam has

found no institutional expression at the national level. It has not provided an ideological framework for unity among the heterogeneous disciples, or even as a common tradition binding all the faithful. But because of its simplicity it attracted both Oromo pastoralists and sedentary agriculturalists. Orthodox Christianity and the church on the other hand, were used as instruments for serving the interest of the ruling class. Besides Orthodox Christianity was for long identified with the so-called "Solomonic" throne and was rigorously employed as a national ideology. According to Tesfahun therefore, the Oromo believers in *Waaqa* which he referred to as "pagan" espoused Islam in large numbers during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, both as a reaction to the Ethiopian government pretensions and as a means of resisting absorption (Tefahun 1989: 34-39).

Regarding the five Gibe Oromo states (Geeraa, Gumaa, Jimmaa, Limmuu-Enariya and Gommaa), scholars including Abir, Bartels and Trmingham put emphasis on the role played by trade and Muslim merchants in the Islamization process among the Oromo.

Despite the differences between Abir and Trimingham on the period of the introduction of Islam and its agents in the Gibe region, both scholars argue that trade was the major factor for the introduction and spread of Islam. According to Trimingham, Islam was introduced into the Gibe region in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Muslim traders coming from Shawa, Begemider and the Egyptian Sudan. This was quite similar with the discussions of N. Levtzion and M. Hiskett concerning the spread and expansion of Islam in West Africa and North Africa respectively. In these areas the Islamic merchants and the *ulama* were famed for their erudition and piety and became successful in converting the leaders of the kingdoms and states as well as the people (N. Levtzion 1963: 345-353, M. Hiskett 1967: 25-35). Moreover, Islamization in the Gibe region was encouraged owing to the fact that it had strengthened the authority of the rulers of the states by facilitating the growth of trade (Trimingham 1952: 199). On the other hand Abir maintains that all the Gibe states were Islamized in the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and Islam in most cases followed the trade route from Massawa through Begemider to Gojjam down to the southwestern parts of modern Ethiopia. Furthermore, he stated that the route from the Sudan had very little influence in the introduction and spread of Islam in southwestern Ethiopia until the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Abir 1968: 71). Concerning the period of the introduction of Islam into southwestern Ethiopia, it seems that Abir's assertion is realistic. Moreover, according to Abir, the rapid spread of Islam among the Oromo of the Gibe region was due to the unreserved support that many of the Oromo rulers extended to the Muslim merchants in their respective territories. Though some of the rulers were nominally Christians, they used to oppose secretly the spread of



Christianity in the region and in some cases even negated its practice for they considered Christianity as part of the heritage of their enemies (*Ibid*: 43).

Explaining the spread of Orthodox Christianity among the Oromo Oyvind M. Eide stated: “Not having a concerted mission strategy the EOC (Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity) resorted to the economic and political power of the state for its expansion.” (Eide 1996: 52). He also commented that conversion did not bring about any dramatic change in the life of the adherents’ belief system and did not disrupt their social customs. What happened was simply that Christian ideas were superimposed on the old beliefs and practices. Moreover, examining the coming of EOC Negaso Gidada and D. Crummey tell us how the traditional religion (*Waaqeffanna*) had continued in disguise (Negaso and Crummey 1972: 105).

As far as the region of Wallagga is concerned a combination of several factors were involved in the process of the introduction of the universal religions. A historical discourse and analysis made by Gustav Aren (1978), Eide (1996) and Daniel Ayana (1984) would help us to see the process from different angles. These scholars argued that in some areas of Wallagga, the Swedish trained Ethiopian protestants used various methods to spread their belief, ranging from the translation of the Holy Bible into the vernacular language (*Afaan Oromo*) by a renowned Oromo, Onesmos Nesib, popularly known as Abbaa Gammachiis, through providing medical facilities for the local people and by establishing schools for the purpose of propagating some elements of modernization and teaching the Bible. Eventually, the continuous and systematic introduction seems to have resulted in the attraction of large number of followers (G. Aren 1978: 180-184, Eide 1996: 56-57, Daniel 1984: 122). In other parts of Wallgga, the method of the introduction of Christianity was straight forward: force was used. Daniel indicated that some local leaders of Wallgga were ordered to ban *Waaqeffanna*, the traditional belief in favor of Orthodox Christianity and they were either persuaded or forced to be baptized. This was after the conquest and incorporation of the region into the Ethiopian Empire in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Following their local chiefs, most of the subject peoples had been compelled to accept Orthodox Christianity (*Ibid*. 118-119).

In the case of the penetration and spread of Islam in Wallagga and Illu Abbaa Boor in western Ethiopia in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, long- distance trade across the Abbay from the north and from the Sudan in the west had played a pivotal role. Therefore, in Wallagga there were significant number of Oromo Muslims but the people did not turn to Islam *en masse* in the way the Oromo of Arsi and Bale did (Eide 1996: 55). As we have tried to show in the above few paragraphs on the one hand, though the Oromo were converted to Christianity peacefully or otherwise they did not abandon their belief in *Waaqa* and their

traditional customs and practices. On the other hand, the spread of Christianity and Islam among the Oromo and the trade network that evolved between the various peoples in Ethiopia and beyond through the historical trade routes are some of the positive indicators towards population interaction and integration in Ethiopia.

### **The Consequences of the Major Religions on *Waaqeffanna***

The advent of the major religions at any level is considered in the light of the consequences they had produced. It is, however, a balanced assessment of the consequences that more or less makes such researches worthwhile. This requires going beyond the observable phenomena and analysis of the events in their proper context in time and space and look at it from different angles.

As we have already pointed out the introduction of Islam and Christianity among the Oromo was sought to bring about religious assimilation and in the long run as in the case of the Orthodox Christianity, aimed at political assimilation and integration. The evangelization process, however, has sometimes faced a negative reaction from the Oromo. As stated in several sources, though the manifestations of the opposition varied in time and space, generally they were aimed at maintaining the identity of the people. Nevertheless, after the Oromo were either converted to Christianity or Islam the religious relationship became the basis of the new Oromo community whose members were kin by faith rather than by blood. Conversion to either Christianity or Islam involved change of names in both cases. In the case of Christianity a boy who becomes a Christian upon baptism will be given a Christian Amhara-Tigrean name such as Gebre Mariam, Gebresillassie, Woldemariam, Gebre Kristos and so on. A girl who becomes a Christian will be named Waletemariam, Tsionmariam, Walateyesus, Walatemichael and others. Concerning Islam upon the acceptance of the religion the names of boys were changed to Ali, Mohammed, Abdella, Yusuf etc.; while the names of girls is changed to Marema, Sadia, Fatuma, Alima and so on. Particularly such practices of the Orthodox Christian church is part of the Amharanization process while it is Islamization on the part of Islam. These changes of the original Oromo names given to Oromo boys and girls at birth has overshadowed and seriously affected Oromo identity and eventually created a negative attitude towards integration.

According to the sources at our disposal, the general consequences of the major religions on the Oromo range from the marginalization of the role of the *Gadaa* as a political system which manifested itself through the continued religious and ritual practices were either unaffected or marginalized or submerged by the new religions to its revival in a new form. But for the sake of convenience

and to present them as they are related in the literature we will treat them separately.

Almost all the literature we have consulted examined or explored the consequences in the contexts of religion and politics. But an in-depth analysis in this regard is found in the works of Bartels, Ketebo, H. S. Lewis, Legesse, Knutsson, Mohammed, Abera and G.Schlee.

According to the analysis of Bartels, the traditional mode of experiencing the divine among the Oromo continued unaffected in spite of the external influences impinging upon it. In addition until the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution, it was particularly more or less preserved in its original form and content among the Borana, the Gujii and Arsii Oromo (Bartels 1983: 15).

Despite his focus only on the Arsii, Ketebo's attempt to assess the social, economic and political consequences of the introduction of the major religions as well as Menilek's conquest using both oral and written sources is invaluable (Ketebo 1999: 15-17).

H. S. Lewis' regional assessment on recent developments in the Oromo indigenous religious practices is quite helpful in reconstructing the transformation of the traditional religion of the Oromo. In his account, he discussed the role of *Qaalluu*, *Abbaa Dulaas* (war leaders) and *Abbaa Lafaas* (land owners) as well as the language. His work provides a comprehensive analysis on the impact of the introduction of the major religions on the indigenous belief and the survival of some of the elements of the old religion in a new form as the outcome of the introduction and spread of the two religions.

Moreover, Lewis also provided a short account on *Irreecha/Irreessa* celebration in western Shawa. According to him, *Irreecha/Irreessa* celebration is an annual festival. During the festival, the largest gathering of people up to 8,000 to 10,000 came together to hear important messages on *Waaqeffanna* and seasonal changes from the *Qaalluu* and *Gadaa* elders as well as to receive blessings and leave the *Irreecha/Irreessa* at the *Galma* (Lewis 1966: 99-113). He goes on to indicate that these rites of intensification bring together the people of large area and major descent groups in ceremonies which symbolize the unity of the people and the prominence of the *Qaalluu* in the society. He then rightly concludes that the particular combination of spirit possession, religious leadership, judicial institution and the socio-political prominence which the *Qaalluus* have today in western Shawa is a new and distinctive development (*Ibid.* 99-103). Lewis' explanation underscores the significance of *Waaqeffanna* for the purpose of population integration and the desired interdependence.

Asmarom who studied the *Gadaa* system among the Borana and the Gujii gave a brief description on the spread of Christianity and Islam among the Oromo and the consequences on the practices of the indigenous religion. Based on his

field work on the Borana and the Gujii he offers reliable information on the issue. He underscored that the Oromo traditional institutions have been preserved best among the southern pastoral population, the Borana and the Gujii owing to the fact that these groups did not leave their own territory, has in all probability, contributed to the conservation of these institutions. He has also revealed that the practice of the *Gadaa* rituals has continued in all parts of the Oromo speaking communities (Legesse 1973: 12).

Knutsson has presented a detailed discussion on the concepts of beliefs and practices in the Oromo indigenous religion including the important role exercised by the *Qaalluus*. The significance of his work for the study of the indigenous religion of the Oromo is immense (Knutsson 1967: 137-157). Although he put emphasis on the previous role of the *Gadaa* system rather than that of the war leaders and land owners, he gave quite similar conclusions with that of Lewis.

Baxter and Mohammed on their part have clearly shown the negative attitude that the imperial regime had developed towards the *Abbaa Muudaa* pilgrimage for it was considered as one of the manifestations of the Oromo identity and culture. For instance, the traditional religious practices had been banned with the order of Menilek II (Baxter 1987: 150, Mohammed 1990: 153). As Baxter has asserted, however, the *Abbaa Muudaa* pilgrimage which he referred to as the trans-Oromo pilgrimage was later on supplanted by the Muslim Pilgrimage to the Sheik Hussein and continued to be practiced and the two existed side by side, before the *Qaalluu* in *Dallo* disappeared. Hence, the Muslim Sheik Hussein pilgrims are referred to by the Oromo as *warra Muudaa*—literally, people of the *Muudaa* (Baxter 1987: 150-152).

Almost all scholars whose works we have consulted more or less concluded that the Oromo did not completely abandon their indigenous religion, *Waaqeffanna* and its practices in spite of the introduction and spread of the major religions. Understanding these historical realities about the Oromo, one of the major ethnic entities in Northeast Africa in general and in Ethiopia in particular is quite worthwhile for a grandiose scheme of regional integration.

The works of Schlee, Abera and S. Ninian, beyond assessing the consequences of the major religions among the Oromo have attempted to outline some of the basic factors that contributed to the survival of the indigenous religion. These factors included: self-consciousness to define an Oromo identity, indigenous cultural and social values, indigenous religious rituals and practices and respect for the ancestors cult (Abera 2005: 26-28, Schlee 1994: 986-987, Ninian, 1994: 542-543).

## Concluding Remarks

The Oromo indigenous religion, *Waaqeffanna* has been practiced as part and parcel of the *Gadaa* system and it involved different religious concepts, ceremonies, rituals, celebrations and above all it embodies the concept of *Oromummaa* (*being an Oromo*) — the Oromo national identity and citizenship. Consequently, since *Waaqeffanna* is enshrined in the traditional *Gadaa* institution it has religious, socio-economic and political functions.

With the introduction and spread of the two major religions among the Oromo, however, the function of the *Gadaa* system as a political institution seems to have declined while the religious practices and the identity of *Oromummaa* continued in spite of the pressures and influences of the external elements. Apparently there is a similar trend among many other societies in Africa. This is not only for the contemporary search for identity and cultural authenticity but because there is also an increasing hot debate going on as to whether or not there ever was religious conversion of any consequence (Kirby 1994). Although there has been long standing hostilities between the Orthodox Christians and the Muslims which sometimes manifest themselves in open clashes; there seems to be no serious hatred or vivid conflict between the followers of *Waaqeffanna* and those who profess the two major religions. For me this is a point of departure where one can effectively use *Waaqeffanna*, the Oromo traditional religion to advance population integration among the believers of other religions. Apparently, this shows that the Oromo Christians and Muslims in Ethiopia are not necessarily fundamentalists and can be considered as strong candidates to facilitate integration and peaceful co-existence in the Horn of Africa region.

Most of the available literature on the practices of the *Gadaa* system give due attention to the political aspect while giving little or no attention to its religious aspect. In addition, most of the research works have been produced by scholars who are not historians by profession. Besides, the approach employed by the scholars in analyzing the transformation of some of the elements of the indigenous religion is more of anthropological or sociological. Further more, except by a few of the scholars the use of oral sources is either marginalized or completely neglected which could have made the researches on the subject more informative and useful than they are now.

Moreover, the assessment made by some scholars on the role and functions of *Waaqeffanna*, the indigenous religion is highly influenced by the politico-ideological bias and speculations which calls for an extra caution in using such sources. For example, the efforts made by some conscious Oromo elites to revive *Waaqeffanna* officially has been obstructed by the current regime in power irrespective of the religious freedom enshrined in the Constitution of the Federal

Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the issue has not been treated by any scholar which needs to be studied in detail.

Finally, a historical study of the Oromo belief systems in general and the survival of *Waaqeffanna* in particular through a rigorous use of both oral and written sources is quite significant and pertinent to understand the subject in retrospect and prospect for its vital contribution to the process of integration and peaceful co-existence.

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