

The Oromo Doctrine of God¹

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Abstract

The Oromo of Ethiopia, the largest ethnic group, have their own indigenous religion known as Waaqeffanna. They believe in one *Waaqa guraacha* (black God) – the God who created the universe and the various forms of life. *Waaqa* has multiple attributes. *Waaqa* is He who is before everything else. *Waaqa* is Uumaa (a creator of everything in the world). *Waaqa* is hunda beekaa (omniscient). *Waaqni gonkumaa kan hin Duune* (God is immortal). *Waaqa is hundaa tolaa* (omnibenevolent). *Waaqa is hunda danda'aa* (omnipotent). Nothing is impossible with *Waaqa*. *Waaqa* is the source and lover of *dhugaa* (truth). *Waaqa is Qulqulluu* (pure). The Oromo people believe that in the olden days *Waaqa* was living on the Earth and only later that *Waaqa* left the Earth in anger because of personal sin and became invisible. *Waaqa* is one and at the same time manifests Himself in different ways. This paper teases out and highlights core Oromo views of God, his relationship with the world and the problem of evil.

Keywords: Ayyaana, Oromo, Saffuu, Waaqa, Waaqeffanna

Introduction

The Oromo constitute one of the largest ethnic groups in Africa, belonging to the Cushitic branch of the Afro-Asiatic family in eastern and north-eastern Africa. The Regional State of Oromia is located in the central part of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Today, the Oromo are found from Rayya in south-eastern Tigray in the north to Borana in the south and from Hararge in the east to Wallaga and Illuababora in the west and beyond. The Oromo also live in Kenya, particularly in Marsabit, Tana River, Garissa, Isiolo, and Moyale Districts, and in other localities. The major religions in Oromo include Islam, Christianity, and *Waaqeffannaa* (Oromo indigenous religion). There is no evidence that shows the exact date when certain individuals or groups began to embrace Christianity or Islam. According to Tesemma Ta'a: "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" (TA'A 2012, 96). In this paper, I will examine the doctrine of

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God in the Oromo worldview. I will look into how the Oromo people perceive *Waaqa* and the relationship between *Waaqa* and other creations.

The Oromo Doctrine of God

The Oromo of Ethiopia have their own indigenous religion known as *Waaqeffanna* (BOKKU 2011, 29; TA'A 2012, 90). According to Dirribi Demissie Bokku: “*Waaqeffanna* is the religion of the ancient black people. It is an ancient religion, which originated in the homeland of the early human race, which is believed to have lived in the Horn of Africa. It is the religion of the Cushitic people—the Oromo. That means, it emerged before any other alien religions” (BOKKU 2011, 29). The term “*Waaqeffanna*” comes from the Oromo word, *Waaqa* which meant God. A person who believes in *Waaqa* is called *Waaqeffata*. *Waaqeffanna* teaches that all human beings are equal and deserve respect. “*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” (TA'A 2012, 96). “*Waaqeffanna*” is “part and parcel of the *Gadaa* system” (TA'A 2012, 107). The *Gadaa* system is a democratic egalitarian system that has been practiced by the Oromo, the Konso, and Gedeo people in Ethiopia for centuries. It has secular leaders for a non-renewable eight-year term.

Belief in the Supreme Being

The Oromo believe in one *Waaqa guraacha* (black God) – the God who created the universe and the various forms of life. They do not hold the belief that God created the universe and the various forms of life out of nothing (ex nihilo), as *Waaqa* is part of the world. Various writers have confirmed this in their writings, although their accounts of the order of creation and the names of the first human beings are more different than alike. One Oromo creation myth reveals that *Waaqa* created the first human being from the soil around a river (KELBESSA 2014, 44). According to Bokku’s informant (2011, 58-59) and some of my informants (KELBESSA 2014, 44-45), Asdemii/Addeem and Hawwee were the first humans, and all humans have descended from them. According to Bokku’s informant, the first human being was sexless. When this person was walking towards a river, he met *Waaqa* by accident and the latter’s glance split the former into two equal parts: male and female. In the Oromo language, Hawwee means “I long for you/ I am interested in you” whereas Addeem means “come.” According to Gemechu Megerssa, the first Oromo man and the first Oromo woman were called Horo (MEGERSSA, 1995, 9-10) and Hortu respectively (MEGERSSA and KASSAM 2019, 101). Many Oromo informants share the view that Horo is the firstborn Oromo and that Tulu Nama Dur or *Madda (hora)* Wallabu is his birthplace. Some of my informants in Borana, however, regard Tabo as the first person and Horo as the second person (KELBESSA, 2011). Others said that the firstborn Oromo is unknown. In spite of their disagreements, various writers and informants recognize the relationship between water and the origin of the first living beings. Some of them maintain that *Walaabu/Wolabo* water is the source of everything in the world. The expression “*ummen wallabu baate*” (MEGERSSA, quoted in BARTELS, 1983, 62; MEGERSSA 1993, 11) means all creatures were created

from water. I will not engage these conflicting arguments, as I have done so elsewhere (2011).

Like the Oromo worldview, both ancient and contemporary African holism reveal the interdependence of the natural and supernatural world. According to Lebisa J. Teffo and Abraham P. J. Roux: “[t]ogether with the world, God constitutes the spatio-temporal ‘totality’ of existence ... the thinking is hierarchical, with God at the apex and extra-human beings and forces, humans, the lower animals, vegetation and the inanimate world, in this order, as integral parts of one single totality of existence” (2005, 167; see also OKOLO, 2003, 212; TEMPELS, 1945). For ancient Egyptians, Ra-Atum (the sun-god) came from *nun*, the primeval chaotic water, as a power of self-development and created other things (OBENGA, 2004).

Some writers wrongly defined *Waaqa guraacha* as a dark sky. For instance, consider the following definition given by Ton Leus and Cynthia Salvadori: “*Waaqa guraacha*: dark blue sky” (2006, 288). They further defined *Waaqa* as “sky, the heavens, atmospheric conditions, that which overpowers us, God” (2006, 640). Lambert Bartels also defines *Waaqa gurraacha* as “the dark coloured *Waaqa*” (1983, 107). He states that the word “*Waaqa*” has a double meaning: sky–i.e., the vault of the sky as we see it, and God. For Enrico Cerulli (1922), *Waaqa* has two meanings: heaven and God.

Contrary to the above claims, in my field study in Oromia, I found out that the original meaning of *Waaqa* was not “a sky God”, as the Oromo people believe that in the olden days *Waaqa* was living on the Earth and only later that *Waaqa* left “the Earth in anger and became invisible. Following this, the Oromo say that black *Waaqa* is living above the blue sky. Thus *Waaqa* is not the visible blue sky” (KELBESSA 2011, 71). “The Oromo believe that there are seven skies above and below the earth. It is generally believed that *Waaqa* is found beyond these seven skies” (MEGERSSA 1995, 51; 1993, 96-97).

As I stated elsewhere, *Waaqa* has multiple properties:

Waaqa is He who is before everything else. *Waaqa* is *Uumaa* (a creator of everything in the world). It should be noted that the word *Uumaa* also refers to the created physical world. *Waaqa* is *hunda beekaa* (omniscient). He has knowledge of everything; He is all-wise, all-knowing, all-seeing, and all-hearing. *Waaqa* is *hunda tolaa* (omnibenevolent). *Waaqa* is kind ... *Waaqa* is *hunda danda'aa* (omnipotent). Nothing is impossible with *Waaqa*. *Waaqa* is the source and lover of *dhugaa* (truth). *Waaqa* is *Qulqulluu* (pure). *Waaqa* is intolerant of injustice, crime, sin and all falsehood (KELBESSA, 2011, 69; see also AYANNA, 1984; DE SALVIAC, 2005, 204; HASSEN, 2005, 142; SUMNER 1995, 33, 313)

Bokku also identifies the following attributes of *Waaqa*:

Gurracha gara garbaa, leemmo garaa talilaa, tokkicha maqa dhibbaa, guddich[a] hiriya hinqabne, kan waan hunda beeku, kan waan hunda gochuu danda'u, kan bakka mara jiru, kan hinkufne, kan hinduuneefi kan hincabne. This is literally translated “O Black God who created the dark sky and the clean waters, who is one but called by [a] multitude of names, who has no competitor, the omniscient, the omnipotent, the omnipresent, who is eternal and ever powerful, whose power never declines (2011, 66)

According to Claude Sumner, a Canadian philosopher, for the Oromo, *Waaqa* is “all knowing” (1995, 313), “Almighty master, inexhaustible benefactor of men who, lacking nothing, need not refuse us anything” (SUMNER 1996, 106). The Oromo coined some proverbs to appreciate and honor *Waaqa*. To give but a few examples:

“*Waaqa malee, gaariin hin jiru*” – “There is no one who is kind except God”.

“*Waan Waaqni fide lafti ba'aa hin dadhabu*” – “Whatever God brings the Earth does not fail to carry it”.

“*Namn yaa Waaqi jedhe Waaqarraa hindhabu*” – “One who worships God will get everything”.

“*Ollaafi Waaqatti gadi bahu*” – “One faces God and neighbors when s/he goes out of his/her house”.

Neighbors and God are always near.

“*Harki Rabbi namaan qabe batti hinqabu*” – “A hand God touches you with has no harm” (TEGEGN1993, 32).

A house initiated by *Waaqa* will be completed.

Those who trust in *Waaqa* will never lack anything.

“*Namni hin awwaa Waaqni hin guuta*” / “*Namni niyaada Waaqayyom'moo hojiirra oolcha*” - “Man wishes, *Waaqa* fulfills”.

“*Waan Waaqnii namaa tolcheti, ta'a: what God does for a person, is possible / it will be.* (meaning: one cannot act against one's destiny)” (LEUS and SALVADORI 2006, 640).

“*Kan Waaqayyoo jedhe hinoolu*” – “What *Waaqa* said will never fail to happen”.

“*Waan chufa Waaqa tolcha*” – “God does everything”.

“*Waaqayyoo hinariifatu*” - “*Waaqa* is never in a hurry”.

When the Oromo elders pray to God, they use the following expressions:

<i>Gurraacha garaa garba</i>	Black God with heart like ocean.
<i>Leemmo garaa taliilaa</i>	A being with clear heart.
<i>Tokicha maqaa dhibbaa</i>	He is one but called by a multitude of names.
<i>Guddichaa hiriya hin qabne</i>	A big being who has no equal or competitor.
<i>Kan baka maraa jiru</i>	Who is everywhere (the omnipresent).
<i>Yaa guungumaa bidoo</i>	The grumbler, an old being, with a heart full of hair/

	The thunderous, and [source] of fire or fiery.
<i>Jaarsa garaan dabbasaa</i>	An old being with a hairy stomach.
<i>Guddicha hirreen jirmaa</i>	The big being with a strong arm.
<i>Gurraacha guunguma</i>	A black grumbler.
<i>Yaa Waaqa ofiin buluu</i>	God who lives by Himself.
<i>Kan hindhugne</i>	He who does not drink.
<i>Kan hin kufne</i>	He who does not fail [Who is eternal and ever powerful]
<i>Kan hin cabne fi kan hin duunee</i>	He who never breaks down and die [whose power can never decline]
<i>Kan hinmugne</i>	He who does not sleep.
<i>Iji chimmaa kan hinqabne</i>	Whose eyes do not have waxy secretion.
<i>Gurri guurii kan hinqabne</i>	Whose ears do not have earwax.
<i>Obsaa, kan hinjarjarre</i>	God is patient and not in a hurry.
<i>Kan waa hinballeesine gooftadha</i>	God is our Lord (Master) who does not make mistakes.

Various authors mentioned some of these expressions in their works (see BOKKU 2011, 66; TA'A, 2012).

For the Oromo people, *Waaqa* is patient with them. "God of the Oromo is patient. He doesn't say 'I your God am jealous', as stated in Exodus 20:5" (BOKKU 2011, 66). The New International Version of Exodus 20:5 reads as follows: "You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me." The verse is incompatible with the character of the God of the Oromo.

Paul T. W. Baxter and Aneesa Kassam praise Father Lambert Bartels, a practicing Catholic missionary in Dembi Dollo in Western Wallega, Western Ethiopia, from 1968 to 1980, for avoiding specific characteristics of God discussed in Western theology. They say, "he avoided '[H]ellenizing' *Waaqa*, the God of the Oromo, by attributing to Him descriptive terms like 'omnipotence', 'omniscience' and 'omnipresence' derived from Greek philosophy" (P'BITEK 1971, 80; 86-88, cited in BAXTER and KASSAM 2005, 5). They say that he relied on the Oromo perception of God. The two authors do not clearly state that for the Oromo, *Waaqa* is not omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. If they think so, their viewpoint is not shared by the authors earlier mentioned.

Although the Oromo believe that *Waaqa* is a Supreme Being, which is above everything else, unlike the Christian God, *Waaqa* cannot be called transcendent.² As stated earlier, in the past, *Waaqa* was not detached from the Earth. Human beings used to live with God on the Earth (for details, see KELBESSA, 2011).³ Gemecha Megerssa also writes:

The Oromo believe that there was a time when *Waaqa* drew away from man, corresponding to the origins of sin, which causes catastrophes such as drought, disease, and war. For the world to prosper and flourish in spite of these calamities, the Oromo believe that distance and respect must be kept between all things. The idea of distance is connected to a concept called *saffu*. *Saffu*, or ‘the sense of harmony,’ directs one on the right path. It shows the way in which life can be best lived, and gives a sense of order. It is an ideal toward which the Oromo always strive. (1995, 54)

Among the Oromo, “*Waaqa* is like a father who goes away. Earth is like a mother: she is always with us” (BARTELS 1983, 110). *Waaqa* is viewed as a loving father who gives the basic necessities of life whereas *Lafa* (the Earth) is viewed as a mother that nourishes and protects all life, as it is fertile and creative. There is no separation between *Waaqa* and *Lafa*. *Waaqa* makes *Lafa* habitable and sustains life. “*Waaqa*’s presence on earth is manifested through rain, fog, and water. Therefore, a father spits on his son, and elders spit on others as [a] sign of divine presence and blessing” (AGUILAR 2005, 59). As I argued elsewhere:

Waaqa is one and at the same time has different manifestations. *Ayyaana*⁴ (spirit) mediates the relationship between *Waaqa* and human beings. There is a positive relationship between God and the Earth, humans and the natural environment. All creatures are essentially effected and affected by the harmonious relationship between *Waaqa* and the Earth (KELBESSA 2011, 85)

Human beings, animals, and other created things in the world are believed to have their own *Ayyaana*. Each *Ayyaana* is a manifestation of the one *Waaqa*. The belief that “*Waaqa* is one and many at the same time” shows how “the Oromo *Waaqa* differs from the God of the peoples of the Book” (HASSEN 2015, 25). It should

²Kwasi Wiredu states that the Akan God is not transcendent. “In ontologies such as African ones, in which to exist is to be in space, nothing existent can transcend space and time” (2013, 34).

³ Similarly, “[i]n many African myths, man originally lived in paradise with God. But through man’s disobedience, usually attributed to a woman or some detestable creature (such as a vulture, hyena, etc.), there was separation. This was the beginning of evil in the world” (DANIEL 2009, 149).

⁴The term “*ayyaana*” has different meanings: fortune, luck, celebration, ceremony, festival; a day free of work; divinity, spirit; grace; angel (BITIMA 2000, 4).

also be noted that “the Oromo concept of *Waaqa* being one and many at the same time is reminiscent of Christian theology where God is said to be ‘three in one’ – the doctrine of the Trinity” (HASSEN 2015, 25). On the other hand, the absolute uniqueness and singularity of God is emphasized in Islam.

Saffuu or *ceeraa fokko* regulates human activities, the use of natural resources, and mediates between different things including the relationship between God and Earth (for details, see KELBESSA 2011, 212-213). In the Oromo worldview, *Ayyaana*, *Uumaa* and *saffuu* are interrelated and cannot be understood differently. These elements are based on 'words', 'things', and the relations between them which hold the created universe together. “*Ayyaana* is a refraction of *Waaqa*. *Uumaa* is the physical thing. *Saffuu* mediates between the *Ayyaana*, which is the ideal, and *Uumaa*, which is the physical that needs to be regulated” (KELBESSA 2011, 213; see also MEGERSSA 1993; 2005, 69-71). *Uumaa* also means creator (*Waaqa*).

Waaqa is a supreme being that holds all things together. For the Oromo human beings are part of nature. This contrasts with some Christian interpretations that “although man’s body is made of clay, he is not simply part of nature: he is made in God’s image” (WHITE, 1967, 1205). Human beings and all the creations of God are interconnected, as God is their source. In the Oromo worldview, all things are united and have different roles and places in the universe. They are required to care for other creatures and creations by acting in harmony with the cosmic whole:

Starting with water and rocks going through the vegetable and animal world to man, [Waaqa] has appointed to every being its own place in a cosmic order of which he is the guardian. Sin is a breaking of this cosmic order. [Waaqa’s] creative ordering activity manifests itself in all things. It manifests itself in the specific characteristics of man in general, of every species of plant and every species of animal. It is manifested also in the individual characteristics of every man, of each plant and each animal taken singly (SUMNER 1995, 33)

Belief in *Waaqa* requires belief in the intrinsic value of all creatures. “The key thing is that the source of basic Oromo value is *Waaqa*, although there are also secular values that are not directly related to *Waaqa*. The valuing of *Waaqa* underpins belief in the value of trees, animals and so on” (KELBESSA 2011, 213).

The Oromo people have their own secular *Gadaa* leaders and hereditary religious leaders known as *Qaalluu*. I discussed the nature of the *Qaalluu* institution elsewhere (2011), and I will not pursue it at length here. The name “*Qaalluu*” comes from the verb “*qalu*” which literally means “sacrifice.” “The concept ‘*Qaalluu*’ refers to both an institution and leaders who represent the institution” (KELBESSA 2011, 79). The spiritual head of the traditional Oromo religion is known as *Abba Muudaa* (the father of anointment). Before Emperor Menelik II (1889-1913) banned the pilgrimage to the *Abba Muudaa* or the Supreme *Qaalluu* in 1900 (HASSEN 2005, 149), a selected group of people from different parts of Oromo lands used to participate in the ceremonies held every eight years to honor *Abba Muudaa*, and receive his blessings and anointment in

the regions of Bale and Sidamo in southern Oromia. These sacred lands are “comparable to Mecca for Muslims and the Holy Land for Christians” (HASSEN 2005, 146). According to G. W. B. Huntingford, *Abba Muudaa* “is the centre of ... religious life and the rallying point of the nation, though he has no civil or executive authority. In him are personified and centralized the laws and traditions ... and [Waaqa] is said to speak through him” (1955, 83). The *Muudaa* ceremony is designed to link the spiritual father and the nation.

Although the Oromo believe in One Black *Waaqa*, they also recognize lesser deities called *Ateetee*, *Maraam*, *awuliya* (*ogliya*, *ugliya*) and *borantica*. There is a great deal of confusion about the meanings of *Ateetee* and *Maaram*. One of the reasons is that *Ateetee* and *Maaram* rituals have been practiced differently and given different interpretations at different places because of the influence of other religions, cultural contacts and other factors. Some authors have defined *Ateetee* as the goddess of fertility/ fecundity (CERULLI 1922, 128); the Oromo Great Goddess (DASHU, 2010, N.P); “the Earth Deity” (MEGERSSA and KASSAM 2019,145), “the Mother-Goddess (*Ayyoo Umtuu*), who is associated with procreation, fertility, childbirth and agricultural crops” (MEGERSSA and KASSAM 2019, 249), and “priestess” (MEGERSSA and KASSAM, 2019, 295). Most authors agree that *Ateetee* is a spirit of fertility. In Shewa, the *Ateetee* ritual is performed “to secure women’s fertility and bring well-being to their families” (NICOLAS 2018, 173). As Andrea Nicolas (2018) has shown, some informants consider *Ateetee* either as a ritual performance or a spiritual power, or both.

The Oromo people in Ambo, Western Ethiopia, consider *Ateetee* (female divinity) as the mother of cattle, *ayyoo Baar* (the Mother of Ocean), *Hadha Dambal* (the mother of overflow, full and the spirit of *baksaa* (melted or processed butter) (KELBESSA 2001, 29; KELBESSA, 2018). The link between *Ayyoo* and *Ateetee* shows the importance of motherhood, fertility, fulfillment, blessing, etc., as, among other meanings, *ayyo* is defined as a mother who parents a child. Oromo women rather than men perform the ritual of *Ateetee* in different parts of Oromia. Amhara women and women in other ethnic groups in Ethiopia have also adopted the *Ateetee* ritual (HASSEN 2015, 79; DASHU 2010, N.P).

For the Oromo in Ambo, *Maaram* and *Ateetee* have different but complementary roles (KELBESSA 2001, 29). Both are invoked in cases of fertility. *Ateetee* is associated with the fertility of cattle and is regarded as the mother of cattle. “During *Ateetee* ritual, an old healthy cow should be sacrificed for the cattle to breed well, for a bull to serve a cow, for a pregnancy to be successful and for a land to be leveled” (KELBESSA 2001, 29). So, *Ateetee* is not merely a ritual but is a religious practice that involves complex processes. In some places, the *Ateetee* spirit is believed to possess the woman of a house when an animal is sacrificed. The *Ateetee* ritual has symbolic significance in that the anointment of sticks with butter, the planting of green poles, the shedding of old cow’s blood, the splashing of the chest and the neck with butter convey the significance of fertility, procreation, and sustenance of life on Earth.

As discussed above, the term “*Ateetee*” has various meanings. Among other meanings, it has been used to refer to female divinity, a peaceful mobilization of women to pray to God, and the mobilization of women to protect the rights of women (for details, see KELBESSA 2018; HUSSEIN 2004). Regarding the latter, *Ateetee* is regarded as a female practice that promotes women’s empowerment (BAXTER 1979; HUSSEIN 2004, 103-47, ØSTEBØ 2010, 405-18).

The Oromo consider *Maaram* as the divinity of women. It is believed that *Maaram* can help a barren woman to bear healthy children (KELBESSA 2001, 28). This paper and the contribution of many a scholar (see KNUTSSON 1967, 55; DASHU, 2010, N.P) indicate that *Maaram* is a later cultural addition among the Oromo due to contact with Orthodox Christians. That means the word “*Maaram*” seemed to originate from the Christian Mary (*Maryam* in Amharic) through the Christian influence. Here one can mention a very similar case regarding the influence of ancient Egyptian belief in Isis, which was a goddess of fertility and belief. Certain people in ancient Rome and the British Isles adopted this belief. Following the spread of Early Christianity, its followers began to replace the image of Isis with the symbol and veneration of Mary. The case of *Ateetee/Maaram* indicates that Isis was replaced by Mary

For some authors, *Ateetee* and *Maaram* are the same (KNUTSSON 1967, 55; DASHU 2010, N.P). Lambert Bartels for his part states that the Oromo of Western Matcha employ the term “*Ateetee*” to refer to “the name of the ritual in which *Ma[a]ram* is invoked” (1983, 129). In summary, in the Oromo religion, *Waaqa* is above all lesser deities and the creator of everything. Lesser deities are subservient to and mere refractions of *Waaqa*. So, there is one supreme *Waaqa*, which is the guardian of the whole world.

The Problem of Evil

Regarding the problem of evil one can raise the following questions: If *Waaqa* is all-good, why does He allow evil at all in the present world? Why does He not make the universe uniformly good? My informants in Ambo said that *Waaqa* created evil things because of the errors of human beings. “If *Waaqa* had not tolerated both good and evil things, he would have been ungrateful; His omnipotence and omniscience would not have been known. The Oromo believe that the coexistence of good and bad, beauty and ugly is necessary” (KELBESSA 2001, 24). As Kwasi Wiredu notes: “[o]ne can detect no doctrine of original sin in traditional African theology, but this portrayal of the cosmos suggests the notion that the interplay of good and evil forces is intrinsic to the world order” (2013, 36). But for the Oromo, *Waaqa* does not commit evil against His creation. He withdraws from human beings when they breach *saffuu* and disturb the cosmic and social order. Failure to act in accordance with *Waaqa*’s order will lead to punishment. Various types of misfortunes ranging from illness, mishaps, and other bad things can happen to the guilty person and his/her relatives. Some people believe that there are spiritual causes for natural disasters, serious illness, conflict, and so on. When human beings sin, *Waaqa* would deny them rain and other important requirements for life. Human beings, animals, and plants cannot survive without water.

In this connection, it may be argued that *Waaqa* does not care for his creations, as he leaves them to suffer when they violate His laws. In this way, *Waaqa* is only responsible for the protection of people and their suffering is their own. So, one can conclude that indifference would count as wickedness or some kind of weakness. However, this conclusion is not compatible with the nature of *Waaqa*. It has been stated that *Waaqa* is patient with his creations. If they correct their mistakes through rituals and acceptable practices, He will forgive them. When *Waaqa* withdraws from them, the concerned people ought to pray to *Waaqa* and try to correct and learn from their mistakes. So, when individuals failed to observe the laws of *Waaqa* and were punished as a result, they would ask *Waaqa* for forgiveness. Human beings are required to respect the laws of God and maintain the social order through rituals. “Oromo rituals recreate, enact, and maintain the social order. This social order symbolically expresses the cosmological order. Prayers link the earthly part of the cosmological order with the divine one” (AGUILAR 2005, 58). As stated above, certain sages of the Oromo people do not believe in *Waaqa*. They employ reason and reject non-evidence-based views and beliefs. They have doubts about the soundness of certain religious beliefs and practices in Oromia.

The Afterlife

The Oromo value earthly life rather than life after death. They do not consider this world as a preparation for the next world. Neither punishment nor special rewards await a person in the hereafter. For the Oromo, “[t]here is neither paradise to be hoped nor hell to be feared in the hereafter” (BOKKU 2011, 83-84). There is no such thing as salvific eschatology in Oromo and African thought about the postmortem destiny of humankind. As stated earlier, *Waaqa* punishes in this life. Oromo religion does not envisage the end of the world. In the Oromo worldview, the ancestors cannot cause illness and suffering. There has been no ancestor cult in the Oromo religion. The Oromo do not venerate the souls of deceased ancestors.

In the Oromo religion, it is generally believed that when a person dies, he or she will go to a place called *Iddo-Dhuggaa*, the “place of truth.” Different authors have interpreted this belief in different ways. According to Gemetchu Megerssa:

[t]he Oromo concept of the after-life describes death as a transitional stage after which human beings rejoin all their dead forefathers and mothers in a place called *Iddo-Dhuggaa*, the “Place of Truth.” Here, he or she lives in a community very similar to the one on Earth. We are yet to discover the physical description of this Place of Truth (2005, 78)

Although Megerssa seemed to endorse the Christian conception of life after death, he could not explain the nature and location of *Iddo-Dhuggaa*. Bedassa Gebissa Aga states that for the *Waaqeffataa*, human beings are incapable of knowing the nature of the afterlife and what would happen after death:

Waaqeffataa believe that life after death is a secret of *Waaqa*. Accordingly, only *Waaqa* knows what would happen after the earthly life. They don't believe that *Waaqa* would come in the future to judge people and send the righteous to heaven and the sinful to hell. Unlike Abrahamic God, *Waaqaa* wouldn't come at [a] certain time and leave this world at another moment. (AGA 2016, 5)

As I said earlier, the view that there is life after death for the Oromo indigenous believers is not defensible. The original version of the term *Iddo-Dhuggaa* does not seem to imply that *Waaqa* determines the future destination of a human being on the basis of his or her actions and conduct during life, and he or she would continue to live after the death of his or her physical body. Rather it seems to refer to equality both for the rich, poor, young, old, etc. Death is understood as complete cessation of life although those who have been influenced by Abrahamic religions believe that death is simply a temporary interruption to life. I suspect that the notion of life after death is a later accretion.

Some authors consider the concept *ekeraa* as the basis of belief in life after death in the Oromo religion (see KNUTSSON 1967, 55; MELBA 1988, 12-24; TA'A 2012, 95). The spirit of a dead person is called *ekeraa*. Some informants have reported that it would be possible to invoke and speak with a deceased person by performing special rituals. As I stated elsewhere, certain individuals claim to have some power "to make the *ekeraa* (the spirit of a dead person) speak with relatives of the former. They are known as *eker dubbiftuu*. According to tradition, individuals exist in the form of a spirit called the *ekeraa*. A person is required to pray to and to give an offering by slaughtering an animal every so often to one's parents' *ekeraa*" (KELBESSA 2001, 71). However, others categorically denied the view that an *eker dubbiftuu* has the spiritual power to communicate with the spirit of the dead person. One informant reported that a certain *eker dubbiftuu* deceived him (KELBESSA 2001, 71). Further research should be conducted to understand the nature of *ekeraa* and the role of *eker dubbiftuu*. As the currently available evidence appears to indicate, equating *ekeraa* with life after death does not justify the notion of life after death. Appealing to the spirit of ancestors is a kind of universal notion, and does not really go that far to justify the notion of life after death.

Furthermore, the Oromo do not believe in the reincarnation of an ancestor's soul in a descendant's personality. "Unlike some ethnic groups in Africa, the Oromo do not believe that the souls of departed ancestors retake bodily form in new babies in their families and clans. Instead, they believe that at the moment of death the soul will be separated from the body and go to *Waaqa*" (KELBESSA 2011, 73; see also BOKKU 2011, 79).

Conclusion

For the Oromo of Ethiopia, *Waaqa* is the creator of everything in the world. *Waaqa* is one Supreme Being, the guardian of the social and natural order, and is manifested in different ways. Each creature has its own *Ayyaana* and special place

in the universe. Different spirits are the manifestations of one Waaqa. *Waaqa*, Mother Earth, and its inhabitants are interrelated. *Saffuu* governs the relationship between different entities. Humans are interdependent with the natural environment and its inhabitants and should not disturb the social and cosmic order though they can use those resources that have been designated and blessed by *Waaqa* for humans to fulfill their diverse needs and desires. They are part of a much larger environment from which they cannot detach themselves, and they are under obligation to recognize and respect the rights of other living beings to live and flourish on mother Earth.

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