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**Syncretism of *Waaqeffannaa* and Islam among the Arsi Oromoo of Ethiopia**

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**Abstract**

*The Arsi are one of the largest subgroups of the Oromoo, the largest single ethnic group inhabiting parts of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. The Arsi Oromoo originally were believed to be the followers of traditional indigenous religion known as Waaqeffanna but gradually at least since the eleventh-century some clans of Arsi Oromoo were in touch with Islam. In due course of time what social scientists called a syncretistic religious and cultural feature exhibiting both Oromoo and Islamic religions and cultures have start to emerge. This phenomenon was not discussed by many Ethiopian and foreign scholars. Based on the syncretic cultural approach established by U. Braukamper, this article discusses some of the major features of Islam and Waaqeffannaa and the syncretic features evolved between Oromoo and Islamic religions later among the Arsi Oromoo. However, after the Islamization of Arsi Oromoo the basic Oromoo cultural remains relatively intact. This phenomenon makes Oromumma, Oromoo-ness rather than Islam the inspiring ideology for common good with the other Oromoo groups. Based on the historical accounts and the fieldwork the writer finally underscores that the syncretized nature of religions and cultures evolved between Waaqeffanna, the traditional Oromoo religion and Islam enabled the Arsi Oromoo to unite as a collective cultural group to withstand Menelik invasion for about a decade and also contributed to the survival of Oromoo culture and identity among Arsi Oromoo. This paper also forwarded the idea that the common value shared between Waaqeffanna and Islam among the Arsi Oromoo of Ethiopia called for more investigations about a common source of their origin and later on about their diffusions throughout the Horn of Africa since the immemorial period.*

**Keywords:** *Waaqeffanna, Islam, Arsi Oromoo, Qallu, syncretic features*

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## Axareeraa

*Oromoonni Arsii damee guddaa saba Oromoo yoo ta'an, Oromoon immoo saba guddaa biyya Itoophiyaa jedhamtuufi Gaanfa Afrikaa keessatti argamuudha. Dur Oromoonni Arsii amantaa Waaqeffannaatti amanu jedhamee yaadama. Booda garuu suutuma suutaan yoo xiqqaate jaarraa 11<sup>ffaa</sup> irraa kaasee gosoonni Arsii tokko tokko amantii Islaamaatiin wal arguu jalqaban. Tura keessa Oromoonni Arsii amaantaa Waaqeffannaa, Islaamummaafi Aadaa Oromoo walitti makuuniifi waantotta tokko tokko walirraa fudhachuun akka hayyoonni saayinsii hawaasaa jedhanitti "syncretic" godhuun haala adda ta'een amaantiwwan lachuufi aadaa Oromoo hordofuu itti fufan. Seenaan kunis hayyoota Itoophiyaafi alaatiin baayyee hinqoratamne. Adeemsa qorannoo "syncretic culture approach" jedhamu kan hayyuu U. Braukamper fayyadamu irratti hundaa'uudhaan barreeffamni kun dhimmoota barbaachisoo ta'an kan amantaa Islaamaa, Waaqeffannaafi Aadaa Oromoo haala adda ta'een biyya Arsii keessattii Uumamaan waliin qoddotan (syncretic features) kana baldhinaan kan ibsuudha. Haa tahuu malee, erga Oromoonni Arsii amantaa Islaamaa hordofuu jalqabaniin , Aadaa Oromoo isa ganamaa san gadi hindhiifne. Haalli kun ilaalcha (ideology) Oromummaa akka sabboonummaafi maalummaa Oromoota hundaa waliin akka qooddatan isaan godheera. Ragaa seenaafi qorannoo uummata Arsii keessatti godhame irratti hundaa'uudhaan barreessaan kun dhuma irratti jala sararee kan ibsu barbaadu, walitti makamuufi walirraa waa fudhachuun amantii Islaamaa, Waaqeffannaafi Aadaa Oromoota Arsii birattii mul'atee akka Arsiin garee aadaa cimaa tokko akka qabaatan isaan godheera. Kunis bara Minilik biyya Arsii weeraretti gara waggaa kudhanii akka of irraa ittisan isaan dandeessisee jira. Dabalataanis barreessaan kun akka aadaan Oromoo isa ganamaafi maalummaan Oromummaa Oromoota Arsii bira yeroo dheeraaf turuu isaa irra gaheera. Waraqaan kunis yaadaafi duudhaa gara garaa waliin qooddachuun (syncretic features) amanti Waaqeffannaafi Islaamaa Oromoota Arsii Itoophiyaa keessa jiru irraa ka'uun tarii dur amantoonni lamaanuu bakka tokkorraa burquun (madduun) yeroo booda garuu bakka san irraa gara Gaanfa Afrikaatti tamsa'uu dhufuun isaan akka hinoolle shakkameera. Yaad-rimee kana irraa ka'uun qorattootni biraatis akka qorataniin irra gahan dhaamsa dabarsaaf.*

**Jechoota Ijoo:** *Waaqeffanna Islaamaa, Oromoo Arsii, Qaalluu, amaloota sinkiraatikii*

### 1. Introduction

Belief in God is deep-rooted in the nature of human-being. As long as human-being existed in the world, the knowledge of supernatural force or God also largely existed. At one time professor Max Fuller in his Hibbert Lecture said, "Religion is not a new invention. It is, if not as old as the world, at least as old as the world we know"(Ahmed, 1994, 1; Smart, 1973a, 45). Since our discussion revolves around *Waaqeffanna*, a traditional Oromoo religion and Islam, a universal religion; the writer found it necessary to discuss first about what a religion is? Hand-in-hand with this, the concept of ritual and monotheism will be discussed in order to gain a full picture of the meaning of religion and its features. There are

many definitions of religion but for the sake of simplicity we take the following definitions. One of the famous sociologist by name Taylor define religion simply as the belief in supernatural being while Geertz defined 'religion as a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic" (cited in Eriksen, 2010, 227).

Furthermore, others define religion as a theological philosophy that deals with a code of worship and lifestyle of humanity. Religion is also the set of beliefs, feelings, dogmas and practices that define the relationships between human being and sacred or divinity (Dirribi, 2011). Any religion has the following three common features. These are human-beings who believe and practice it, faith (religious feelings) and a brotherhood of community of believers. On the other hand, ritual is defined as a social aspect of a religion. According to Eriksen (2010, 227) rituals are the social processes which give a concrete expression to religious notions. Rituals are also rule-bound public events which in some way or other relate to the relationship between the earthly and the spiritual realms.

Religions are divided into two by some scholars. These are Oral and Written religions. Redemptive religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam which believes in life after death are written religions. Morality religions like Shinto and Confucius are written religions but they did not care much about life after death. The Oral religion on the other hand is traditional religions which are the earliest religions appeared on the earth. These include *Waaqeffanna*, the indigenous Oromoo religion and those African religions that believed in their ancestral tradition. Oral religions tend to be embedded in the social practices of a society that is locally defined (Eriksen, 2010). Most African religions before the introduction of Islam and Christianity were considered as a traditional religion/oral religion. The main characteristics of these religions are its religious concepts transmitted through words of mouth. Some people call them traditional religion, however, they played the same role as that of written religions and most of them like the universal religions believe in one God. Rev. John Mbiti (1975) who stayed for many years in Africa as a Christian missionary finally arrived at conclusion that most African religions like Christianity and Islam believe in one God.

The concept of believe in one God known as monotheism originated in the Horn of Africa where the first human species lived. Mbiti also demonstrated that African people had developed their own faith and outlook about God before other people in the world did. He continued his discussion by saying that Africans have never lived without a religion (Mbiti, 1975). Other writers also affirmed the monotheism of African traditional religion including the Oromoo traditional religion, *Waaqeffanna*. For instance, Father Wilhelm Schmidt, the Viennese anthropologist who studied all the materials known on traditional religion among the Oromoo in 1930s and finally arrived at the conclusion that the Oromoo traditional religion, *Waaqeffanna* is the best example of the earliest monotheistic religion appeared in the world (Schmidt, 1937). E. Haberland a German scholar, who was also written on Oromoo, also arrived at the same conclusion by saying that Oromoo religious practice of

monotheism was unquestionable (Haberland, 1963). Therefore, it is necessary to conclude this section by saying that the traditional Oromoo religion (*Waaqeffanna*) is one of the monotheistic religions the Oromoo nation contributed to the world.

Islam also had a long history in Arsiland at least from the eleventh-century according to the sources at our disposal contrary to many scholars who took Islamic history to the nineteenth-century (Mohammed, 1994, 2015; Aman, 2016). Based on the historical accounts and oral traditions, there has been a syncretic religious and cultural features among the Arsi Oromoo, a unique phenomenon which led to the existence of culturally a cohesive and united society. This phenomenon enabled the Arsi Oromoo to withstand against invasion as well as contributed to survival of Oromoo culture and identity for many years. The syncretism feature of religions of Ethiopia was not discussed by many scholars. Hence, this paper mainly intended to discuss some of the syncretic features of Oromoo and Islamic traditions and religions in Arsiland. It also explores how these concepts emerged and influenced each other.

## 2. Methodology

The paper is a result of a qualitative exploratory research with analytic and comparative approach. It involves as an insider investigation with elements of ethnographic techniques including interviews and narrations, discussions and observation. The secondary sources were also consulted particularly the one that focus on *Waaqeffanna* and Islam in relation to the Arsi Oromoo. The subject of the study is based on the Arsi Oromoo. For the purpose of the study, resourceful individuals with knowledge on both Islamic and traditional Oromoo religion (*Waaqeffanna*) were interviewed in-depth, along with giving them the opportunity to narrate other details.

A comprehensive field work was done in April- June 2014 during my Ph.D. thesis field work in Arsiland among Arsi Oromoo of Seru, Amigna and G. Hasasa districts and Asalla town. The study explores some of the major issues affecting Arsi Oromoo from the period of Islamic introduction in Arsiland to the 1990s, when a new Islamic ideology named *Wahhabiya* or *Ahlal-as-Sunnah wal Jamma* appeared in the region. The author selected some participants using purposeful sampling technique based on their religious, cultural knowledge and experiences. The author also carefully cross-checked the validity and reliability of the interviews, narrations, and observation data from the field with written materials collected. Then, the data was sorted out into various themes. Later on, the processes of analyzing and interpreting the data carefully carried out to arrive at objective presentation. This paper focused on five main objectives:

1. To postulate what issues paved the way for Islamic introduction and the emergence of syncretic religious and cultural features among Arsi Oromoo in Arsiland.
2. To elaborate why the Arsi Oromoo conversion to Islam never completely led to the abandonment of Oromoo culture and traditional practices.

3. To relate Sufi Islam toleration and adapt-ness towards some indigenous traditions of Oromoo and vice-a-versa.
4. To highlight how the syncretized nature of Arsi Oromoo religions and cultures helped them to develop a strong cohesive cultural bond.
5. To re-examine the possibility of both religions having a common source of origin in immemorial period.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3. 1. The syncretic features of *Waaqeffanna* & Islam among the Arsi Oromoo in Arsiland

Originally, the Oromoo to which the Arsi belong followed *Waaqeffanna*, the indigenous belief system. Ethiopia's first contact with a mission of prophet Muhammad took place with the coming of small number of prosecuted Muslims by Qurayshite aristocracy in 615 AD to Aksum. This had not directly affected the Arsi Oromoo due to distance and the presence of Christian kingdom in the north. The first Muslim sultanate known as Makhuzumi was founded according to tradition in 283 A.H. (896/7 AD) in north-eastern Shewa. Aman Guddata (2016) citing Hasan Maki the author of *Dirasatu Ifriqiyya* has come up with an idea that Islam was established in Bale, one of the major region of Arsiland before the eleven-century as we had a mosque named Dobbi dated back to 460AH/ 1067 AD existed in Gasara area. The construction of two mosques at Balla in 1067 and Zuqum in 1075 also attested the presence of Muslim sultanate known as Bali even before the eleventh-century. In the twelve- century in southeastern parts of the present-Ethiopia other Muslim sultanates emerged including Dawaro, Sharkah, Arababni, Dara, and Hadya which had a direct influence on the Arsi Oromoo religious conditions. Some of these Muslim Sultanates were founded either on the whole or parts of the present territories of Arsi Oromoo. At least from the eleventh-century onwards there were Arsi Oromoo settlement in Arsiland who then lived as followers of both traditional Oromoo religion and Islam.

Mohammed Hassen in 2015 work also came across an ancient document which mentioned Arsi Oromoo in name as a separate major Oromoo group for the first time before other Oromoo groups in the twelfth-century. He also mentioned the role played by Sheikh Ishaq Ahmed of Alawi in the Islamization of Arsi Oromoo. This also indicates that Islamic propagation among Arsi Oromoo begun during or even before that period. According to Asa J. Davis (1963) some of the Arsi Oromoo who penetrated Arsiland from south during the sixteenth-century population movement met the Muslim population who settled in the above mentioned Muslim sultanates was soon Islamized. They also intermingled and assimilated with the Muslim population through the Oromoo *moggassa* and *guddifacha* processes which gradually gave rise to a syncretic cultural phenomenon exhibiting both the traditional Oromoo cultural values and Islamic traditions. It was due to these combined factors that from almost more than four hundred Arsi clans' more than eighty clans have either Islamic or Arabic appellations.

Be that as it may, at least from the eleven-century onwards two religious belief systems and cultures coexist either in ones clan or subgroup that led gradually to the development of what social scientists call the syncretic nature of cultures & religious beliefs. Syncretic is a process of mixing of culture over long period of time due its juxtaposition of two different ways of lives and belief systems around the same area. It denotes the coalescence of cultural traits in its broadest sense, but is normally employed with reference to the realm of religion. Braukämper (1992, 19) furthermore states that “syncretism is to be understood as a dynamic process occurring between two or more religions.” When two or more religious cultures and beliefs co-existed in one place for many years it is natural that there is a diffusion of one aspect of culture to another and vice-a-versa. The following scholars who studied Islamic and Oromoo traditions and cultures discussed briefly how both religious traditions and cultures influenced each other in their long processes of interactions. Spencer Trimingham who widely did a lot of research work on the Islamic expansion in Africa and Ethiopia remarked that Islam had some qualities that appealed to northeastern African Cushitic cultures (Trimingham, 1965). Cecchi also further elaborated that Islam even better than Christianity easily adapted itself to the way of life of Oromoo people of the Ghibe region (cited in Trimingham, 1965). It was not only Islam which influenced the Oromoo religious beliefs and practices but it also borrowed some concepts from Oromoo culture as established by Hussein Ahmed (2001) and Tesema Ta’a (2012). Hence, syncretism is a two way process in which both religious traditions and cultures influence each other. To make this point more clear let us discuss some major aspects of Oromoo institutions and how these institutions make Islam easily adopt itself to Oromoo cultural setting in general and the Arsi Oromoo in particular in the long processes of interactions.

### 3.1.1. The *Gadaa* system

The Arsi Oromoo were initially governed by the *Gadaa* system. *Gadaa* is the set of institutions around which the Oromoo organized their political, social and cultural lives. It was also a system of rituals of worship and a judicial system with legal provisions for the prevention of crimes. It had provisions against adultery, theft, insult, murder, slander, corruption, etc. It had also elaborate series of provisions by which the victims would be compensated for damages inflicted upon them. It had a body of rules governing conduct in society, of men towards women, juniors towards seniors and children toward adults. Asmarom Legesse, an Eritrean anthropologist had said that *Gadaa* has three interrelated meanings: it is the grade during which a class of people assumes politico-ritual leadership, a period of eight years during which elected officials take power from the previous ones, and the institution of Oromoo society (Asmarom, 1973 & 2000).

The complex nature of the *Gadaa* system is also noticeable in its philosophy of checks and balances through every eight years peaceful transfer of power and separation of authority. Moreover, like modern democracy it has opposition groups in the form of five parties called *miseensa* (*daballe*, junior *gamme*, senior *gamme*, *raba* and *dori*; however, these names could be varied from region to region in Oromoo land) and sharing of power in order to prevent power from falling into the hands of tyrants. All *Gadaa* officials were elected for

eight years by universal adult male suffrage. The system organized male Oromoo according to age sets (*hiriyya*) based on chronological age, and according to generation sets (*luba*) based on genealogical generation, for social, political and economic purposes. These two concepts, age sets and generation sets are important to a clear understanding of *Gadaa*. All newly born males would enter the age set at birth, which they would belong to along with other boys of the same age, and for the next forty years they would go through five eight-year initiation periods; the generation sets also called *Gadaa* grade would be entered on the basis of generation, and boys would enter their *luba* forty years after their fathers (Asmarom, 1973).

With this kind of *Gadaa* description and basic functions Islam as such has no disagreement. There is even some admiration of the election of *Abba Gadaa* at the age of forty which Muslims believe that it is at a time of maturation to take office as Prophet Muhammad himself became prophet at this age. Some Muslim informants say that the *Gadaa* system itself was influenced by Islamic principles; for instances they narrated the pivotal role played by one *Gadaa* official whose name was Ali Gurracha during *Gadaa* renaissance and reform of 1445 at MaddaWalabu and later became *Abbaa Seeraa* (Alemayahu et al, 2006).<sup>a</sup> However, such hasty conclusion needs further investigation. But what is clear from this is that Islam as such does not oppose *Gadaa* system and its function as a whole. Islam in political and military sphere basically teaches that as far as *Gadaa* system's tasks and activities did not affect the dignity, equality and humanistic nature of human-beings it will tolerate the functions of the latter. Islamic teaching mainly focused on the issues predominately related to the ritual aspects of human-beings. Hence, the next discussion takes us to the issue of religion and ritual practices in Oromoo community in relation to Islamic teaching as well as the features of syncretism.

### 3.1. 2. *Waaqeffanna, Qallu and the concept of Ayyaana*

Before discussing Islam connection with these Oromoo concepts, it is indispensable first to define the above three concepts. Now let us begin with *Waaqeffanna*. *Waaqeffanna* is a traditional / indigenous Oromoo belief system that focused on *Waaqa*, the Sky God. Since the emergence of *Waaqeffannaa* as a public religious affair, the Oromoo have been organizing "thanksgiving ceremony" (*irreecha/irreessa*) near a body of water or hilltop or at the *galma* of the *Qallu* every year. *Waaqa* is frequently invoked in morning and evening prayers, in seeking peace, in mediating conflicting parties for reconciliation, in testifying witness etc. (Tesema, 2012; Bartels, 1983)

According to *Waaqeffannaa*, a person is totally responsible for all sins he committed while on earth. It attributes virtue of success, happiness, peacefulness, compassion, victory etc. as a direct consequence of man's close communion with the Law of *Waaqa*. That is why; *Waaqeffannaa* always advocates honesty, modesty, truth, purity and humanity as inherent qualities of the Oromoo Society. Unlike the major religions of the world, the *Waaqeffanna*

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<sup>a</sup>Interviews with *Haji AliyTolola* and *Sheikh Ibrahim Shafi* at Assela and Hasasa on 17, 15 June 2014 respectively

religion followers do not have a cadre of missionaries. To use Abbas Gnamo's (2002, 112) words, "philosophically speaking, the Oromoo worldview is more prone to particularism than universalism" that is the Oromoo did not have a habit of imposing their views and cultures on others. Hence, this absence of strong class of missionaries and Oromoo culture of tolerance to other views made them exposed to others cultural influences including the Islamic ones.

The second important Oromoo religious concept is *Qallu*. *Qallu* is a religious leader of Oromoo. Due to this he is also the protector and guardian of Oromoo culture as well as the protector of Oromoo moral and ethical norms (*safuu*). The national *Qallu* originally lived at Madda Walabu the spiritual cradle land in Bale where *Gadaa* renaissance was held in 1445. Hence, to remember that event the Oromoo pilgrims performed a *muudaa* (pilgrimage) ceremony to it every eight years. The *Qallu* then converse with the *jila*, pilgrims about the condition of Oromoo nation, asked about the well-being of the Oromoo they represented and also anointed them with butter hence referred as *Abba Muudaa*. The *Abba Muudaa* also gave blessings, advice and guidance to the *jila* (pilgrims, delegation) who performed the *Muudaa* ceremony (Huntingford, 1975; Kanoo, 2008). The land of Arsi Oromoo *Abba muudaa* located in Dallo, around Madda Walabu in southern Bale bordering Borana Oromoo. The first known Arsi *Abba Muudaa* was Wayu Goda from the Rayya (Raitu) clan in the twelfth-century (Ketebo, 1999; Temam, 2002; Jeylan, 2005; Abbas, 2014).

*Qallu* also acts as intercessor between *Waaqa* and the Oromoo nation. The *Qallu* are people who are anointed by God to manifest His power and work. When evils and misfortune strike people the people consulted their *Qallu*. Again, when somebody possessed by spirit/*ayyaana* *Qallu* will be consulted. He performed an exorcism ceremony called *dalagaa* in which the *Qallu* appealed *ayyaana* and performed rituals to leave the person. Since *Qallu* is the representative of *Waaqa*, he had the ability to interpret the needs and aims of the *ayyana*. The *ayyana* are said to be physically intangible (Morton, 1972; Temam, 2002). They live near human-beings either in the house or around *hujuba* (a natural forest which was considered as holy). Gemechu Megersa says that *ayyaana* is by & through which *Waaqa* creates anything & everything (Gemechu, 1993 & 2005). *Ayyana* is a sign of *Waaqa* mercy to Oromoo in order to help them observe Oromoo law and custom. The Oromoo believe that *Waaqa* or *Uumaa*, meaning 'Creator' created different creatures with different *ayyaana* (Bartels, 1983; Gemechu, 2005). Moreover, T. Østebø (2012) argued that *ayyaana* perceived as the spiritual essence of created things, as a manifestation of *Waaqa* and as deriving from him.

Moreover, the traditional Oromoo religion is basically communal and humanistic in nature. It pervades almost every aspects of Oromoo life. Eschatological religious ideas are absent in traditional religion of Oromoo. Professor Tesema Ta'a (2012) says that the Oromoo traditional religion, *Waaqeffanna* by its very nature evolved from Oromoo socio-culture experience in which the society had logically convinced itself and decided to follow its creator *Waaqa*. Furthermore, he says that *Waaqeffanna* respects and treats all creation positively which is the basis for human dignity and peaceful co-existence. It relies itself and

respects natural laws with full trust in one God. It is therefore provide inclusive values. This inherent quality of *Waaqeffanna* contributed to spread of Islam among the Oromoo as far as it did not harm Oromoo identity. The existences of this kind of values in Oromoo society helped Islam to gain grounds early among some Arsi Oromoo clans.

Like any religion Islam is subjected to internal differences, varieties of ritual practices and the speed by which accommodate other cultures. It had a heterogeneous schools of thought and perceptions of faith within itself that has interrelated & integrated closely to one another under a common rubric known as five pillars of Islam, six articles of faith and *Ihsan*. This last phraseology linked it to the universalistic general principles of Islam. The main source of Islamic teaching is Qur'an and Hadith. The Qur'an is believed to be God's word while Hadith is a collection of Prophetic traditions, sayings and actions. The interpretation and application of these sources in various cultural contexts and times throughout Islamic world led to the appearance of various schools of thoughts and practices within Islam. One of these religious thoughts on which this study focused is Sufi Islam which had a greater degree of influence in Arsi land until 1990s.

Now, let us discuss some of the characteristics of Sufi Islam in relation to Oromoo cultures and belief system. One of the common characteristic features of Sufi Islam as mentioned above is the habit of adapting itself with various cultures through which it made contact. This is done either through reinterpreting the existing culture to fit with its thought or through renegotiation peacefully with the indigenous cultural practices.

To give a vivid picture of the general situations, context of accommodation and the development of syncretic features among the two traditions and religions, let see first some basic concepts in both religions. Now for the sake of convenience, we start with religious institution and belief system of Oromoo. The God of Oromoo, *Waaqa* exist before everything else. He is *uumaaa* (creator), omniscient, He has knowledge of everything and etc. Furthermore, *Waaqa* has not have sons or daughters nor images. These features exactly fit to Islamic concepts of Rabbi (God) descriptions. Hence, it was not difficult when the Arsi Oromoo converted to Islam to use both terms interchangeable. Likewise, in some places like Arsiland and Wollo even today some Islamic leader and knowledgeable person is called *Qallicha* which comes from the Oromoo *Qallu*, the religious leader of *Waaqeffanna* (Temam, 2002; Hussein, 2001). After the Arsi Oromoo converted to Islam, moreover, *Qallu* religious place, *galma* as mentioned above also modified into *zawiya* where *hadra* (Sufi ritual gathering) and *zeekkara/dhikr* (singing of litanies) ceremonies were held. The traditional *Qallu* spirit exorcism ceremony *dalagaa* now modified to fit a *hadra/dhikr* Sufi Islamic ceremony. The *ayaanaa*, Oromoo spirit that possesses participants during *dalagaa* rituals at *Qallu's galma* was Islamized as *ruhaniyya* (came from Arabic *ruh*, spirit) that could be exorcised by reading from verses of Holy Qur'an.

Oromoo common ritual gatherings festivity, *wadajaa* re-modified into *hadra/majilis* gathering. Thomas Zietelmann (2005) etymologically and conceptually links the Oromoo

concept of *ayaanaa* to the Arabic *aiyan* (sing. *iyān*), commonly used within Sufi circles. That means he tried to show that the Oromoo concept of *ayyaana* came from Arabic word of *iyān*. Furthermore, T. Østebø (2012) supporting him argued that the concept of *ayaanaa* was to some degree sustained through cross-religious negotiations situated within an Islamic Sufi tradition. He also argue that *ayaanaa* as a benevolent force found its continuity in the concept of *karaama* (the power to do something) in the Islamic traditions. The issue of *ayyaana* /*Qallu* of Oromoo and *karaama*/ *tawwasulat* in Islam had also remarkable similarities. This modification and renegotiation on major religious symbols among Islam and *Waaqeffanna* followers greatly contributed to spread of Islam peacefully among Arsi Oromoo.

Moreover, syncretic features were clearly exhibited in Arsiland in the case of the *muudaa* (pilgrimage) to Dirre Sheikh Hussein also known as Anajina. In order to compare the Oromoo *Waaqeffanna muudaa* (Oromoo traditional religion followers pilgrimage) with Islamic *muudaa* sometimes known as *ziyara* by few Arabic educated pilgrims let us see first the elaboration given about the former by Asmarom Legesse in his study of 1973: The *Waaqeffanna* Oromoo pilgrims made the expedition to the land of *Abba Muudaa* on foot, seeking the assistance of friendly communities as they traveled. The journey took one to two months and was apparently an extremely difficult undertaking. So long as they exhibited the pilgrim's insignia of which the most important was the forked walking stick, most communities gave them food and shelter. Up on arriving in Borana, they took part in the *muudaa* and offered their presents to one of the ritual leaders of Borana and received his blessings (Asmarom, 1973). Oromoo Muslim Pilgrims that went to Anajina (Dirre Sheikh Hussein) were also assisted in similar way. After the conquest of Arsiland by Menelik in 1880s and the subsequent prohibition of *muudaa* in 1900 and with the rise of Islam, the Arsi Oromoo found it difficult to go to Dallo, in Madaa Walabu, where the original Arsi Oromoo *Abba Muudaa* lived. Hence, they gradually shifted this practice to Anajina. The Islamic *muudaa/ziyara* socio-cultural practices were not very much different from those of Oromoo *muudaa* practices at Dallo. The name of the ceremony itself was not Islamized. They used the Oromoo term *muudaa* for Islamic pilgrimage to Anajina (Abbas, 1991; Ketebo, 1999; Braukämper, 2002).<sup>b</sup>

The Muslim pilgrims like the above Oromoo pilgrims went to Anajina on feet, having *wareegaa* (sacrificial animals), various gift; carrying a stick called *dhanqe*, forked shaped stick. They also exhibit religious purity and the communities through which they pass gave them what they want due to a belief that they are the strange of Sheikh Hussein (*gariba* Sheikh Hussein). During this period the people who stayed behind would renovate pilgrims' homes and prepared delicious foodstuffs at *zawiya* for them. They considered the pilgrims who returned after performing *muudaa* at Anajina, Sheikh Hussein's shrine as the one who successfully returned *milka'e galee* pilgrims like in the old days of *Waaqeffanna muudaa* to the land of *Abba Muudaa* of Dallo. People greeted, kissed their cheeks and hands in order to

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<sup>b</sup> Interview with *Obbo* Siraj Ahmed at Seru on 2 April 2014

get the blessing they missed. The pilgrims on the other hand gave the gift they brought from Anajina mainly *jawaaraa* soil dust which is used as medicines. They also distributed small forked stick, *dhanqe* they brought from Anajina. The respect for them continues even after this reception ceremony for certain periods. People work for them and fend their fences etc. (Kabir, ND; Ketebo, 1999; Abbas, 2014; Temam, 2017).<sup>c</sup>

Terje Østebø (2012) studies have pointed to the correspondence similarities between the *muudaa* to Sheikh Hussein and the *muudaa* to the *Abbaa muuda* of Dallo. The structures of the litanies, *baaroo* song; the material symbols such as the Y-fork shaped stick, *dhanqee*, the ring and the cloak worn by imam of Anajina and the arrangement of the main shrine as a sanctified space have clear resemblances to the cult of the *Abbaa muudaa*. The practice of collecting and offering sacrifices, *wareega* to Sheikh Hussein is probably also a continuation of the practice from the *Abbaa muudaa*. The pilgrims were in both cases required to adhere to prescribed moral standards, such as humility, somberness, integrity, and spiritual and physical cleanness. The exorcism ritual performed at Anajina in the form of the *hadra* ritual has several similarities to the *dalaaga* ritual of the *Qallu* (Østebø, 2012; Umar, 2006; Gemechu, 2013).<sup>d</sup>

Related again to *Waaqeffanna* religion is the issue of moral and ethical principles (*safuu* and *wayyoma*) exercised by Oromoo will be discussed in terms of how it facilitated the opening up the door for the Islamic expansion in Arsilands. *Safuu* and *wayyoma*, moral and ethical values of Oromoo emanated from Oromoo world view that underpins the social and cosmic order. These concepts teach the Oromoo that the social and cosmic order should be kept in balance least there will be no *cubbu* or evil in the world. The philosophical thought also reinforces the Oromoo unwavering support for *dhugaa* (truth and justice) and protection for liminal section of society and even to the natural environment. The ethical/moral code is a fundamental concept of the Oromoo worldview as a peace-loving nation whose underlying philosophy is based on peaceful co-existence of humans and natural environment, and humans towards humans and to *Waaqa*. These Oromoo values and ethical principles had similarities in Islam which helped Sufi Islam to propagate its ideology easily among the Arsi Oromoo.

Modesty was also given high place in Oromoo life. Oromoo married women wore descent dresses. In the case of Arsi Oromoo the modest dress involved *gufta* for head cover and *omba* for whole body cover which runs from shoulder to ankle. Many Oromoo elders also told that the modest Oromoo women clothing cover the whole body as far as at least the elbow. The Arsi Oromoo women modest clothing had to certain extent fit with Islamic teaching. Like *Ateetee* institution of Oromoo women which protects and defends women rights in Oromoo society Islam also supports the women rights. It also further gave the female folk a high position in the society as is evident from the Prophet Muhammad's

<sup>c</sup>Interviews with *Haji AliyTolola* and *Sheikh Ibrahim Shafi* at Assela and Hasasa on 17, 15 June 2014 respectively

<sup>d</sup> Ibid

sayings “paradise is under the feet of the mother and respect for the mother is three times greater than the father” (Sahih al-Muslim, Hadith book). At some places people reinterpreted even *Ateetee* women ceremony as a ceremony held to honor Fatuma, the only surviving Prophet Muhammad daughter who sired offspring. Some writers argue that *Ateetee* ceremony itself held to honor *Maraam*. But who is *Maraam*? The Arsi response is nothing but the mother of Jesus Christ who is one of the four noble women in Islam. T. Østebø (2012) who stayed for many years in the first decade of this century among Arsi of Bale also confirmed the Arsi informants’ saying.

Moreover, levirate which was a normal practice among the Oromoo was also continued when the Arsi Oromoo converted to Islam. Until 1990s when *Wahhabiyya* also known as *Ahlal as-sunnah wa-l Jamma* clerics appeared as opposing the established Islamic tradition, Islam in Arsi never allowed the marrying from within ones clan like the other Oromoo group. Oromoo tradition of marrying more than one wife also continued under Islam only the latter putting a restriction to four with a condition that the man should have enough wealth to feed his family and mental ability to do justice for all his family members which is a difficult obligation according to Islamic jurists. Marrying a widowed by the relatives of a deceased husband in Oromoo culture also continued in Islam but with the condition that her wishes will be taken into consideration. Once Islam introduced to Arsil and, it also guaranteed both children and women the right to possess and inherit property. For instance, during circumcision ceremony in Islam there is a ceremony called *aqiqa* on which for circumcised infant *hadhura* property is given like in Oromoo *Gadaa* system when the *Daballe* age set completed their grade at eighth year there whereupon a heifer would be given. This given property by parents to a child with its offspring became the property of a child until his young age. It is the same with Islam.

As closing remarks to this part we saw that how some Oromoo traditional religious practices and way of lives facilitated Islamic introduction. Moreover, when Islam introduced it also adopted some Arsi Oromoo practices to fit its dogma. To other socio-cultural practices through negotiation Islam gave new meanings. In this way after twelve century a syncretic religious features emerged in Arsi land which had played a crucial role in uniting the people together without losing some of the major Oromoo identity. As pointed out above, both the Islamic rituals and Oromoo traditional religious practices performed in syncretized form by Oromoo leaders who spoke Oromoo language. The influence of Oromoo traditional religion never completely disappeared from Arsi land and among the Arsi Oromoo during the Shewan Amhara harsh rule since Menelik period (1880s-1913) and after the Arsi Oromoo converted to Islam many years ago.

The Arsi Oromoo after accepting Islam never hardly distanced themselves from the common denominators which they have shared with the other Oromoo groups like spiritual feelings, language, and origin from a common ancestry, social and cultural values, norms, philosophical thought, and others. The above mentioned identity markers were transmitted not only by stories, folklores, proverbs, *baaroo* hymns and *zeekkaraa* songs played around the fire in Oromoo homes in the night but also at big national/international gatherings like

the *waareeor hadra* gatherings at Anajina. Hence, in spite of the Menelik conquest and Islamization, the Arsi Oromoo retained some of their indigenous culture and knowledge. Mekuria Bulcha (1996) in one of his works discussed that the different religions the Oromoo people had adopted seem not to have strongly affected the values, language and world view which characterized them as an Oromoo people.

### 3.1.3. Oromoo Mythology and Islam

Every nation has its own mythology about the creation. The Oromoo mythology about creation runs as follows. Oromoo mythology makes water the source of life. It goes like this. God/*Waaqa* first created seven skies (seven layers of skies) and seven earths (seven layers of earths). Between them there was a watery body in the form of a circle covered by darkness. This watery body is known as *Walabu*. Then *Waaqa* divided this watery body into two chunks, the upper body (*Ruudaa*) and lower body (*Dachee*). Again the upper part (*Ruudaa*) was separated into three bodies of sun, stars and moon while the lower part (*Dachee*) divided into two, the water body (Ocean, sea, lakes, rivers) and the continent of the world. This is called *Yayya bashanan* (the five chunks). After this, God created human beings. The first person to be created at *Walabu* was *Horo*. He was created first from the holy water of *Madda/HoraWalabu* and its soil and later *Waaqa* breathed His Spirit to it. It is for this reason that the Oromoo says *Umeen Walaabu baate*; creation began at *Walabu* (Tabor, 2010; Daniyya, 2006). From this Oromoo mythology we can infer that *Madda/HoraWalabu* signifies originality not source of water/place name that exist in Bale from which Oromoo made expansion in the sixteenth-century as some people think. It also reflects Oromoo world view about the beginning of creation (Cosmogony).

On the other hand, the Qur'an says that water is the base of existence for every living creature and every living thing originally created from water (Holy Qur'an, 21:30 & 24:45). Islam also makes the first person Adam created from the mixture of soil and water which later Allah breathe His spirit to it. Recently some Oromoo writers like Dirribi Demissie (2011) who wrote about *Waaqeffanna* religion also say that *Addem* (Oromoo, meaning come) was the first person to be created. Thus, from above two religions world view accounts we can conclude that the same common idea about the beginning of human beings creation (cosmogony) existed in both religions. We also argued that this is not a mere accident. There could be a common source in the earliest times.

Oromoo insistence on the supremacy of one Supreme Being who have no forms and offspring, the one with hundred names (*Waaqa tokkicha maqaa dhibba*) exactly fits with Islamic theology which based on the doctrine of *Tawhid* (the oneness of God with ninety nine names and with common name Allah it would be hundred) is also not accidental. Islamic rosary which is used for remembrance of Allah attributes is made up of a hundred *tasbi*, beads. Furthermore, the abode of *Waaqa* and Allah is believed to be above the seventh skies in spite of both of them are with people in their spiritual essence. Islam also teaches that Allah created some skies (but most Oromoo Muslim says it is seven) like in Oromoo mythology. Moreover, both Islam and Oromoo mythology at least according to Dirribi Demissie (2011) makes Adam/Addem and Hawa/Hawwe as the first male and

female creatures created respectively in this world. How both of them created and the similarities of naming itself showed us that there are some common sources. Recently, the author also discovered that the name of *Waaqa* itself having a meaning/attribute of God is mentioned in the Qur'an at two places (Holy Qur'an, 13: 34 & 37). The other similarity is the use of the term *Rabbi* and *Nabi*, in the case of Arsi and Tulama Oromoo even before the Islamization interchangeable for God and prophet. Furthermore, the Tulama Oromoo says that the first *Qallu* itself was named *Nabi* and they also called their *caffee* (assembly) *oda Nabi* (the assembly of prophet)(Wandimuu Nagaash and Boonii Tasfayee, 2015). The Arsi Oromoo also used the word *Nabi* and Allah even before conversion to Islam as the following couplets sung at Oromoo *wadaaja* indicates.

*Nabii nabii nabiiin si himaani* (oh! Nabi nabi you are known as Nabi)

*Nadhii si dibaani allemassoyyo* (anointed by butter, oh! How are you Allah)

*Hadra nabiiin qabadhuu* (take care of your Nabi)

*Jaannatattin naan galadhuu* (please make me the dweller of paradise)

The other issue related to this discussion under this part is the issue of Oromoo calendar known as *Dhaha* Oromoo and Islamic calendar. The Oromoo had developed their own calendar called *Dhaha* Oromoo since immemorial period based on twenty-seven *ayyaana* days and 29.5 days of lunar calendar. It based on the rise of new moon. The same is true to Islamic calendar which is based on the rise of new moon and 29.5 days. The Oromoo calendar is used for reckoning of time and to know the exact direction/location of important places. Qur'an also teaches that God created stars to guide the people to know the exact location of places and to reckon the time (Holy Qur'an, chapter 40: 45). The names of the days in Arsiland as far as we know have some similarities to Arabic/Islamic day names. For instance, *Arba'a* (Wednesday) similar to *Al-Arbi'a*, *Khamisa* (Thursday) similar to *Khamis*, *Jum'a* (Friday) similar to *Jumu'ah* and *Asanbata* (Saturday) similar to *As-Sabt* respectively while *Gidirsanbata* (Sunday) similar to Harari people (Temam, 2002).

As in some Muslim regions, the Arsi Oromoo dedicated some days of the week to different saints, legendary personalities and even the Prophet. Before Islamic introduction to Arsiland the Arsi Oromoo assigned different days for different ceremonies. For instance, Thursday dedicated to *Wadaaja* (Communal gatherings & prayers whose aim was to renew symbolically the strength & unity of the people) and Friday to *Ateetee* ceremony. When the Arsi Oromoo became Muslim this practices was re-modified to give Islamic tones. For instance, the Arsi Oromoo dedicated Monday to the prophet as he was born on that day. Tuesday was assigned to Sheikh Hussein. At same places Friday formerly dedicated to *Ateetee* now dedicated to Fatuma, the prophet daughter and mother of Hassen and Hussein who is revered by Shi'ates.

The name of months in Arsi is a combination of Oromoo and Arabic names. These are *Ashura*, *Safara*, *Moolida*, *Akiraa*, *Yabaqila*, *Zara*, *Rajaba*, *Heto*, *Soma*, *Fishe*, *Kifishe* and *Hajji*. The majority of the name of these months is Arabic, others Oromized from Arabic while a few of them are from Oromoo. The Arsi Oromoo also uses other names of months

like other Oromoo groups. They used the former calendar mainly for religious purposes like the *muuda* voyages to Dirre Sheikh Hussein and also to many other shrines, for fasting, *Hajji* pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia and to celebrate the prophet birth day while they used the second the pan-Oromoo calendar to forecast weather condition like to know the time of rain, cultivation and etc. The use of two calendar indicate by itself the high influence of Islam in Arsi as well as the syncretized nature of both culture in Arsiland which probably more elaborated in Arsiland than other Oromoo groups (Temam, 2002).

#### 3.1.4. Oromoo livelihood and Material cultures

During the famous sixteen-century Oromoo population movement most Oromoo society including the Arsi Oromoo were pastoralists and herders. They reared cattle which they considered as their precious occupation. They also cultivated barley which also considered as holy crop. A significant number of Arsi Oromoo partly lived in lowland areas where camel also became more important for their livelihood. Due to this economic activity most Arsi food came from animals and their products. Once some Arsi Oromoo adopted Islam, they found that Islam raised the status of pastoralists, herders and camels. Prophet Muhammad himself was a herder of goats and camels and the food come from them. The Oromoo also believed that *Waaqa* is available everywhere with His spiritual essence which helped the pastoralists to save their time for religious activities. Islam also came with the same idea which fits with pastoralist economic activities and way of lives. To elucidate further the impact of livelihood and material culture on Arsi Oromoo religious belief, the following account will be very important.

In 1957 *Abuna* Basiliyos, the patriarch of Ethiopian Orthodox Church, accompanied by the local church leaders and governors in Asella launched a large-scale missionary program in Rift Valley region and then in all districts in Chilalo sub-province and later Bale province (Ketebo, 1999; Braukamper, 2002; Temam, 2017). However, with inducement of some material gifts some Arsi Oromoo in Rift valley region where the influence of Islam was superficial converted to Orthodox Christianity. As soon as the *Abun* and his entourage left Arsi and Bale provinces people who had accepted Christianity reconverted to Islam. Braukamper (2002) argued that most of the people particularly in the Rift Valley region who had converted later on reverted to Islam due to dietary obligations of the Ethiopia Orthodox Church which Islam allowed (including drinking milk and eating the meat of camel). Furthermore, he argued that the emotional factor was also important as Christianity was associated with Amhara conquerors while being Arsi Oromoo was almost tantamount to being Muslim in the region. This account clearly shows that even if material gifts and appointments were given and promised the majority Arsi Oromoo refused to convert to Christianity due to cultural, dietary differences as well as emotional factor. Tesema Ta'a (2012) quoting Tesfahun Bezabeh looked at the issue from another angle. He gave a brief description as to why the Oromoo, 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 Oromoo 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.

The other phenomenon which we found great similarities between Oromoo and Islamic cultures is the way the dead put into graves and the mourning ceremonies performed. The way burying the dead facing Makkah, erecting flat stones on grave & planting trees on the burial places was almost similar in both religions among the Arsi Oromoo. Mortuary ceremonies of the Oromoo for the dead known as *kaaya baasu* also continued when Islam came to the region. Oromoo traditional value system not encouraged mourning ceremonies for the dead. Because it is considered as *hooda* that is it is *Waaqa's* right to take away the soul. When Islam came it also reinforces this principle. There was also a similarity exhibited in slaughtering animals both in traditional Oromoo culture and Islam. In a nut shell there are many cultural and religious similarities between *Waaqeffana*, the traditional religion and Islam in Arsi land.

#### 4. Concluding Remarks

The Oromoo people shared many cultural traits with other ancient Cushitic peoples of the northern Sudan, southern Egypt, Eritrea and Ethiopia due to its long history of living together as proto-Cushitic super-family speakers at least since 15,000 years ago (Ehret, 1976, 1998 & 2002; Bender, 1976). During the course of Cushitic population movement; linguistic bifurcation, the adoption of Cushitic religion and culture, age-grade social stratification and *Gadaa* system evolved among the Oromoo. The Oromoo were also one of the earliest peoples who had made contact with Islam. As above discussion has shown Islam has a long history among Arsi Oromoo at least since the eleven-century. The long history of Islam in Arsi land made Arsi Oromoo to be synonymous with Islam.

The above discussion also elaborated that the Oromoo culture of inclusiveness, openness, tolerance and accommodation to other views contributed to the spread of Sufi Islam among the traditional religion followers of Arsi Oromoo. Islam also adopted some Oromoo cultures as indicated above. Islam reinterpretation of some Oromoo concepts likes *Waaqa*, *Qallu*, *ayyaana* and others to fit its ideology helped Islam to gain ground among the Arsi Oromoo peacefully. Moreover, Islamic simplicity and adapt-ness to Oromoo culture made the syncretistic features of religions and Oromoo culture more visible. The traditional Oromoo religion, *Waaqeffanna* and Islam have created a symbiotic relation for mutual benefits in Arsi land for long times. The syncretic features and commonalities exhibited in Arsi cultures and religions made the Arsi Oromoo to have developed a strong cohesive social bond. This in turn enabled them not only to resist as one united force against foreign invaders like the eight year wars of Menelik of 1880s but also contributed to the survival of Oromoo culture and identity during cultural, social, linguistic and political discrimination by Ethiopian rulers. Moreover, the emerging tolerant and accommodating culture among them gradually contributed for the Oromoo to distance themselves from the extremist Islamic philosophy.

This phenomenon make Islam not an inspiration for nationalism agenda rather *Oromumma*, being Oromoo as a guiding ideology for nationalism.

This work also put forward the idea that the existence of many cultural and religious similarities between *Waaqeffanna* and Islam among the Arsi Oromoo of Ethiopia made us to raise a question of a common origin of these religious beliefs in immemorial period. But, how later on the separation between this cultural and belief systems happened and diffused throughout the Horn of Africa and beyond also needs further investigation. Last but not least, most of the available literature on Islam focused on how and when it spread among Ethiopian people while giving little or no attention to its relation with indigenous religion of Oromoo and also how both of them accommodate and influence each other. The issue of syncretistic features of Ethiopia religions was not also got attentions it deserves. Therefore, this work also call upon any interested researchers to do more research on syncretistic features of religions and cultures of the Ethiopian peoples in order to promote mutual cultural and religious understandings. Thus, this paper could be one of the materials that contribute to the study of religious and cultural syncretism in Ethiopia. It also helpful for the understanding of the role played by traditional indigenous religion and Sufi Islam in accommodation of and tolerance to various views and practices of Ethiopian people when it is badly in need now.

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