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Cultural Responses to Lightning: The Case of Maccaa Oromo

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Abstract

This work investigated Oromo cultural responses to lightning. In the work, sociocultural factors affecting the performance during responses are also discussed. Furthermore, the paper also examines and describes different rituals and taboos regarding lightning. Strategies used by the communities to minimize risk caused by lightning are also identified. Different spiritual and physical responses performed during and after lightning are justified according to worldview and the beliefs that guide the daily life of the Oromo people. Grief and sorrow are expressed with more acceptable taboo words such as using euphemisms and metaphoric expressions. In the course of a performance, each and every activity is directed by spiritual leaders and community elders, according to the cultural and religious norms of the society. Explanations with regards to the importance of certain rituals or activities and words are included. In addition, details for why certain taboos are accompanied by particular cultural rituals are presented. Community members who are the main actors during rituals are also identified. The ritual participants, types of sacrifice, and the roles of actors in the performance of rituals are also mentioned in this paper. Finally, the paper discusses the changes and continuities observed regarding the ritual and its process.

Keywords: Oromo, folklore, lightning, belief, taboo.



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Introduction

Cultural rituals, performances, sacrifices, thanksgivings, purifications and other traditional events have a connection with religion in one way or another. Rituals are one of the traditional performances based within a religious environment or context in many cultures, and has popular appeal for indigenous peoples. Rituals may be of a private nature, with a minimal audience and often with no audience at all (Okpewho, 1992).

In many cultures, religion is a source of ritual and other cultural practices. For the Oromo, *Waaqaa* is the unique God; creator of all things who gathers the clouds, who scattered the stars, the master who has no master, Him who has no order to receive, whose throne has no rival at all, who does not see any empire approaching him, who penetrates all as far as the depth of humanity, where malice is incubated who holds in his hand the good and the bad, the scourge and the reward, who allows the enemy to do us harm (De Salviac, 1901). Thus, in Oromo culture, rituals are conducted in order to honor *Waaqaa* (God) in one way or another. It is believed that the end goal of all rituals and spiritual activities are associated with *Waaqaa* (God). There is no god or spirit to receive ritual or festivity. On other hand, it is believed that natural disasters happen if humanity behaves badly, or if the *safuu* (norm) of *Waaqaa* is disobeyed. It is supposed that natural disasters are punishments for human misbehavior. Hence, the Oromo react to natural disasters spiritually by praying, sacrificing, libation, revealing one's own mistakes to *Waaqaa*, revealing hidden truths and paying a blood price for shaded blood. In doing so, they negotiate with their creator so as to save their self and their environment from disaster (Bartels, 1990; Kelbessa, 2001).

Different rituals are celebrated for the purpose of peace and prosperity within a certain ritual setting. If rituals are not conducted at the right time the life of the people will not become smooth; life will turn into disorder and full of misfortune (Bartels, 1990). For instance, prolonged drought, severe wind, lightning, irregular/heavy rain and snowstorms are considered the results of misfortune and punishment. In addition, if animals and humans suffer from intractable diseases; the sun, moon, stars and rainbows are visited at irregular positions and shown with unobserved characteristics, (*ekera*) spirits of ancestors cry, and is considered as life under the punishment of God. Thus, people come together and pray, make libation, sacrifice and search for a solution.

According to Kelbessa (2001), if lightning hits somebody's home or property, the response will be both physical and spiritual. Like that of manmade fire, they try to minimize the risk by removing objects from the fire and adding soil to it; which is physical. On the other hand, they do not add/spray water onto the fire as it is believed that lightning and fire are friends with water. To avoid the reoccurrence of lightning, the victim and their family will perform certain rituals, and avoid working and borrowing certain things on the date that the lightning occurred.

Spiritual responses include rituals of purification, using language that is considered clean, pure, and pristine. This plays a central role in the way that many cultures classify people, animals, and their habitats. The nature of sacrifice, as well as the way rituals takes place, can vary somewhat. According to Bassi (1995), when people or a group of peoples' beliefs are affected by improper behavior, the violation of *adaa* (culture) can be surpassed by someone in a community, thus conducting rituals follows in order to bring harmony with God.

Among the rituals that the Oromo people practice to reconnect with *Waaqaa* (God), the ritual of *Araara Waaqaa* (performance after a lightning strike) is the most widely known. In this work, the researchers attempt to discover the physical responses and spiritual rituals that people practice during and after a lightning strike.

The Oromo people have certain practices, traditional beliefs and customs surrounding different purification rituals and cultural performances. Among the many Oromo cultural practices, *Araara Waaqaa* (ritual purifications after a lightning strike) has received little scholarly attention. Researchers like Bartels (1990), Bassi (1995), Gemechu (2002), Kelbessa (2001), and Tablino (1999) have directly or indirectly studied the Oromo worldview and Oromo religion; and depicted the roles of rituals throughout people's lives. However, the ritual of *Araara Waaqaa* is missing from these works; hence, the current study aims to fill this gap in the literature.

On the other hand, despite the fact that *Araara Waaqaa* is a common practice among the Maccaa Oromo, studies have not focused on its collective function in maintaining harmony between people and nature. The observation of earlier researchers has been that of other traditions and cultural practices of the Oromo when compared to ritual *Araara Waaqaa*, and the way it is performed. Thus, the current study attempts to analyze the ritual of *Araara Waaqaa* among the Oromo people in particular, and its sociocultural value in general.

The general objective of this work is to conduct an ethnographic study on the rituals and performances of *Araara Waaqaa* among the Maccaa Oromo. Additionally, the study also aims to document the indigenous knowledge of the people in relation to *Araara Waaqaa*. Specifically, the objectives that are the focus of the current study examine the following:

- The role of *Araara Waaqaa* in the context of building community welfare;
- The experiences and response of the Maccaa Oromo on the phenomenon of lightning;
- The meaning attached to the rituals and performance after incidences of lightning;
- Analysis of the people's feelings about loss of property through lightning;
- Identify participants of rituals and performance during instances of lightning; and,
- Explain the performances that take place after lightning, and who exercises control over these rituals.

The current study also attempts to address the following research questions;

- What is the ritual of *Araara Waaqaa*?
- What are the people's experiences and response to the phenomenon of lightning?
- What does the ritual of *Araara Waaqaa* symbolize, and what is the meaning of the rituals and performances following lightning?
- How do the people feel about loss of property from lightning?
- How does ritual frame social experience, and how do actors behave during rituals?
- Who are the participants of rituals, and who exercises control over rituals?

As one of the founding concepts of Folklore discipline, ritual has long been a cornerstone of cultural thought: from the works of Emile Durkheim, through Gregory Bateson, Claude Levi-Strauss, countless classics have been built upon this infinitely perplexing and thus fascinating aspect of human life (Sims, 2005). It may appear that religion is a system of beliefs in mystical forces, accompanied by rituals that aim at making life

significant. The biological cycle of human life: conception, pregnancy, birth, puberty, matrimony, and death is enhanced by religious beliefs and rituals. In this regard, Malinowski stated that, "the very beginnings of human life are surrounded by an inextricably mixed-up medley of beliefs and rites". It may appear, then, that cultural rituals and myths can relate to religious beliefs (Monica, 2011). In everyday life of a human being, religious belief plays a significant role in guiding and enforcing human daily activity. In the Oromo belief system, *Waaqaa* (God) circulates everything in the Universe and on the earth (Kassam & Gegersa, 1996). The Oromo believe that natural disaster occurs if people act against the law of *Waaqaa*. In order to be at peace with *Waaqaa*, the people try to identify sinners and perform purifying rituals.

According to Tablino (1999), in the Oromo culture activities considered as improprieties are measured by *safuu* (social norms). Those who act outside of the social norm are considered as offenders and unclean; and they should perform rituals of purification in order to be filled with *nagaa* (peace) or to stay safe and escape certain misfortunes. Belief in and celebration of a Supreme Being or Creator, which is referred to by many names in various languages as *Waaqeffataa* (Oromo religion) – the Oromo often say "*Waaqa maqaa dhibbaa*" (God with hundreds of names) and "*Waaqa Afaan dhibbaa*" (God with hundreds of tongues). In *Afaan Oromoo* (Oromo language), the name for God is *Waaqaa* or *Waaqa tokkicha* (one God) or *Waaqa gurraachaa* (black God), where black is the symbol of holiness and invisibility; the holy God, the black universe (the unknown), whom we should celebrate and love with all our concentration and energy (Mario, 2005; Megerssa, 2005).

Oromo religion is closely associated with people's concepts of identity, encompassing beliefs in a supernatural being, ritual acts of worship, and all aspects of life. Their focus is on the eternal questions of what it means to be human, what is the meaning of life, and what are the correct relations among human beings, spiritual powers, and the natural world. According to Takawira (2009), African religious systems in general aim to explain the persistence of evil and suffering, and portray the world as operating with some degree of order and predictability. They uphold certain types of ethical behavior as expressed in sacred oral traditions, handed down from generation to generation through the performance of rituals and through intensive periods of traditional education, including rites of passage.

Similarly, the Maccaa traditional religion has a strong foothold in the contemporary as an integral part of the everyday life of many communities in the area. Their strong belief in the existence of spiritual beings requires that they attend their day-to-day activities and relationships with concern, respect for human dignity and in peace with nature. Offences, wickedness, violation of societal norms, and other sinful acts are unacceptable by God, according to traditional belief.

Methodology

In the collection and analysis of data, qualitative methods were employed in the current study, which primarily focused on firsthand information gathered from elders and the wider community. The use of qualitative research methods enabled the researcher to grasp a social phenomenon as well as to understand the sociocultural nature of Oromo traditional rituals and the performance of *Araara waaqaa* from emic (within the culture) and etic (outside of the culture) viewpoints.

Different categories of communities were interviewed about their perceptions of the *Araara waaqaa*, their views about the ritual and performance, and the factors that motivate them to observe the ritual, the process and their effectiveness in restoring peace with *Waaqaa* (God). Accordingly, elders, and male and female adults participated in the interviews. The data obtained from these interviewee assisted the researchers to crosscheck the data gathered from a knowledgeable informants via a focus group discussion (FGD). The participants were selected purposively on the basis of their age and their knowledge and /understanding about their culture and society. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted by focusing on the ritual practices of *Araara Waaqaa*, the date, place, time, season, as well as the participants and materials needed for the ritual.

Moreover, FGDs were employed with eight participants. The numbers of participants in a single group are decided based upon the presence of knowledge and information about the issue under discussion. Different aspects of traditional practices regarding *Araara Waaqaa* and other related issues were raised during the discussions. FGDs were held to gain knowledge about the extent and dynamics of changes in day-to-day life of the community in relation to their cultural rituals, specifically the ritual of *Araara Waaqaa*. Initiatives were undertaken that made it possible to discuss general issues relating to the participants' living and sociocultural conditions. In order to obtain additional information and supporting ideas, ritual places, shrines, and fields that have certain connections with the issues under discussion were observed during the fieldwork.

Finally, the data obtained from the fieldwork were transcribed and analyzed. The validity of the information collected in the study was triangulated across the different data collection methods. The accuracy of the data was assured by triangulation; and was analyzed and interpreted using the qualitative approach. Audio and video recordings, field photographs and field notes were used in order to substantiate the description and analyses of the subject matter.

Results and Discussion

This part discusses about the cultural responses of the Oromo people towards the phenomenon of lightning in general, and the social justification as to the causes of lightning and ritual performances for reconciliation in particular. The Oromo believe that living in accord with the natural environment and community brings peace and wellbeing. Those who refuse to live in accordance with *safuu* (social norm) and law of *waaqaa* (God) will face difficulties and be condemned by the community. In the following subsections we will present data and ideas from Oromo culture to demonstrate the relationship between *Safuu* (norm) and harmony.

Concept of Lightning among Oromo and Cultural Justifications for its Cause

The Oromo people possess an important worldview about lightning, with a significant religious dimension that equally furthers the community ideal which includes public wellness. This implies important religious beliefs, supernatural power and authority, and serves as a vital channel for inculcating and promoting the ideal of harmonious living in society. It is believed that lightning strikes people's property if the owner breaks the law of *Safuu* (social norms). *Safuu* is the law of *Waaqaa* (God) it is the boundary between what is good and bad, what is culture and what is not, what is of *Waaqaa* and what is of evil ghosts. In such cases, the victim may offer a reconciliation ritual which revolves around their

offence. In place of the victim, elders and *Guulaas* (people who have passed through Gadaa¹ rituals) will pray and perform the necessary rituals.

Araara waaqaa ritual is usually administered by the elders; especially by *Guulaas* or *jaarsa biyyaa* (local elders). They are specialists in leading others in rituals. Traditionally, specialists in ritual administration follow the profession from father to son; through several or even many generations, handing down steps that forms their typical experience and habitual shrines where application could be made to *Waaqaa* (God). Rituals and rites are a means of bringing to attention the experience of a group of people, constituting some kind of religious expression. For this reason, it is conducted with great care according to their forefather's experience. In simple terms, it is acts or forms of worship or communion, as well as communication between oneself and one's worship.

According to the research participants, there are different ways and steps to follow during the rituals of reconciliation. At the beginning, the process of reconciliation will start by collecting contributions for ritual. The victim's family goes to neighborhoods and relatives in order to collect contributions in kind, mostly grain, which will be used as food and drink for the ritual feast. The contribution is collected from everybody that has biological and social relations with the victims. On the market day, the family of the victim also plead for contributions towards the feast. While doing that, they will hold *Coqorsa* (ritual grass) so as to declare that the contribution is collected for ritualistic purposes only. On the date of the ritual, the contributors may or may not participate in the ritual depending upon their blood relationship and the extent of social relation they have with the victim's family. Most of the time only biological relatives and those who have high social integration are allowed to partake in the ritual.

Materials like *Qottoo* (axe), *dhagaraa* (broad axe), *haamtuu* (sickle), *qonyee* (bent or carved metal ploughing tool), *marashaa* (metal plate), *lilmoo* (needle), and *mutaa* (awl) are the metal tools presented on the ritual stage. These metal products are presented because it is believed that the sources of these metals are accountable for lightning. Thus, it is supposed as being very important to the completeness of the ritual. The first black metal is believed to come from the sky in the form of lightning and is buried or engraved under the earth. On the other hand, on the ritual date itself, two categories of elders are invited for the sake of fulfilment of the norm; these are from *Guulaa Gabbaroo* (elders from *Gabbaroo*) and *Guulaa Boranaa* (elders from *Borana*). Sometimes *Guulaa Dhalotaa* are used instead of *Guulaa Boranaa*.

On the ritual day, a black striped ram should be presented for sacrifice. The ram is not slaughtered; instead it is released to run across the meadow with a bell tied to its neck. The bell symbolizes the medium of communication. It is believed that the bell has a tongue and the sound it makes is communication of their prayers and sorrow to *Waaqaa* (God). If the ram wanders off, nobody looks after it; instead, anyone interested can take it for whatever function is of their choosing. Normally, the ram is simply ignored by the people. Nobody wants to be seen to take it because it is believed that the one who takes it will face the same offence or worse. The victim places the committed offence and his families' and clan's mischievous deeds and offences onto the ram symbolically, and they are sent out with the ram. Thus, the receiver of that ram is expected to become the receiver of these mischievous

¹ Indigenous politico-social institution of Oromo

acts and offences and takes them to his home and his clan. For this reason, people do not want to take the ram, not even for a single night.

Steps of the Ritual

The ritual begins with praying and blessings of the elders. For the ritual, a feast (cultural foods and drink) will be prepared from the grain collected, as previously mentioned, for this purpose. A cultural drink fills to new pot which has three buttons. Following the prayer three *Guulaa's* comes in front of the audience and announce *Tumaa* (decree) that the reconciliation has already made between the family and *Waaqaa* (God). The *guulaas* will handle the *hororoo* (a ritual staff carried by married men on ceremonial occasions). The *hororoo* symbolizes that ritual undertaking is perfect and according to the law of *Waaqaa*. The elders bring together the tips of their sticks and hold them jointly to show their unity. The blessing begins with the elders from the most senior clan. Elders' seniority considers both their clan seniority and their *Gadaa* grade. Those who performed *buttaa* ritual and completed their ruling period are called *Guulaa* and they will perform first. If there is no *Guulaa* from a senior clan at the ritual, then other *guulaa* from a more junior clan may open the blessing.

Other participants hold ritual grass in their hands to demonstrate their wish for peace and prosperity. During the prayer, all of the participants touch the ground nine times. There is no clear-cut answer as to why they do it nine times; rather, they say it is the number of *salgan Booranaa*², and passed down from their forefathers as *Aadaa abbootii keenyaati* (forefather's tradition). If one asks "*sagal maaliif ta'e?*" (Why nine?), the answer given is simply "*salgan booranaati kaa!*" (It is *Booranaas* nine). Still, the issues of the number nine require further historic and linguistic investigation.

The decree is as follows:

	<i>Equivalent English</i>
Tumame Seera	It is declared this is law
Araamee seera	Reconciliation has been made
Qe'ee warraa kanatti lammata hin deebi'uu seera	It will never hit again what belongs to this family
Seerri Kun hin jigu hin dhangala'u seera	This law never fails and never ends
Seera kana darbee warra kanatti hin deebi'u	He (waaqaa) will not cross this law
Kenni isaa kennameera	His offering is offered
Kenna isaa hindarbu	He may not cross to them the offering
Waaqni irraa araamee	Waaqaa is now reconciled to this family
Sa'asaaniitif araameera	Waaqaa is now reconciled for their cattle
Namasaanii araameera	Waaqaa is now reconciled for their total family
Sa'asaanii ni tola	May their cattle now reproduce better
Namasaanii tola	May their family now reproduce better
Waanti Kun warra kanatti hin deebi'u	They will no longer hurt
Amma harreen gaafa baastutti amma dhagaan daraarutti sinitti hin deebi'u	Until the day the donkey grows horn and

² Borana is the senior Oromo clan

stones flower, it will never come back to this family

The last line provides a guarantee and mental relief to the family. It indicates impossibility for the reoccurrence of lightning, since the donkey never grows horns and stones never flower. Following the decree, the elders pray for the prosperity and wellbeing of the community, according to their clan seniority. Prayers play an important role in the promotion of the sense of community. Mostly, traditional prayers are intensely community-centered in their content and orientation. Whether offered by an individual elder in front of his family, or by a *Guulaa* or other ritual expert in some public ritual, prayers contain many references to the community.

Prayer addresses the following issues;

<i>Nuufi dhalaafi dhalcha keenyaa nagaa nuu kenni</i>	May we and our children be always in good health
<i>Waan ittiin jiraannu nu hin dhoowwatiin</i>	Provide a means of livelihood for us
<i>Rakkoo fi iyyummaa nurraa faggeessi</i>	May problems be far from us; May poverty be far from us
<i>Dhibee fi du'a nurraa fageessi</i>	May sickness be far from us; May death be far from us.

Such prayers are very contextual. They reflect the concrete needs, aspirations, values, and relevant life-situation of the people making the intercession. The above prayer is a good example of the keen interest and concern shown for both the needs of the individual and the general wellbeing of the entire community. The individual's need for protection, good health and material wealth has its full meaning within the context of the needs of the entire community's overall wellbeing. It does not focus simply on the individual, but is asking for the health of the entire lineage and for the wider community with an abundance of children. After the prayer and blessing, the pot is opened and the drinks and foods are distributed to the audience. Every participant in the ritual serves the food and drink.

Sociocultural Significance of Lightning

Among the study community, things damaged by lightning are used to help cure disease and illness. For instance, remnants of a tree burned by lightning will be used to cure animals (horse and oxen) that are possessed (attacked) by *Budaa* (evil eye). A small piece of the tree will be burned and the evil eye chased away by its aroma. In addition, if a piece of the tree is placed near to the home, it will defend that home from lightning like a defense system.

The soil is extracted from immediately surrounding the place where the lightning struck as it also has medicinal value. It serves to chase evil eye and evil spirits that entered a human being. Most of the time, if somebody is attempting to hang themselves or otherwise tries to kill themselves for something considered insignificant, it is presumed that they are driven by an evil spirit. Such individuals should drink the juice of the soil extracted from the place struck by lightning. In addition, meat from an animal killed by lightning also has the power to heal mental illness, nightmares, and irrational fears. The meat can be cut and dried out, and then it can be kept for a long time. If someone is stained by evil eye or by an evil spirit, the meat is boiled and the affected person drinks the soup made from the dried meat. In addition, the

meat is served as a medicine for a disease called *Dhukkuba waaqarraa/biduu*, which is caused if somebody urinates or laughs facing *sabbata waaqaa* (a rainbow).

In Oromo culture, it is believed that in lightning, a bundle of metals will come down from *waaqaa* (the sky). These metals are considered to be very hot, and as fast as a rocket. It is considered that the metal immediately runs to the heart of the fire so that one cannot access it. In order to access those metals, one has to pour fresh milk on that spot from a cow that has a calf of an identical color. It is expected that the milk will cool down the heat of the metal and then slow down its speed at the heart of the fire. However, according to the research participants' experience, nobody has ever obtained these metals before. Different people have tried their best, but have been unable to discover the metals. Ideally, these metals are considered as medicine for evil eye, and will defend against or divert lightning.

Hoolaa Araaraa (Sacrificial Ram)

As previously mentioned, a sacrificial black stripe (*Qaxxamurree*) ram is normally required. The stripe symbolizes the lightning having crossed into human cultural law. Culturally, it is believed that *waaqaa* did not hurt his creation unless it broke *safuu* (moral law). Lightning is therefore considered as the result of breaking *safuu* (moral law). The word *qaxxamurree* comes from *qaxxamuuruu*, and means crossing. "*Qaxxamuree waan namatti dhufuuf qaxxamurree dhaan namatti araarama*" means "Lightning comes to humans having crossed *Safuu*, thus reconciliation must be made by *qaxxamurree* (stripe)." The ram is expected to take away the mischief of the victim. Because of this, the disappearance of the ram is considered as a good omen since it is perceived that their misdeed leaves with ram; hence people do not want to accept the ram.

Beliefs and Taboos about Lightning

To decide upon the date of the ritual, the victims go to *waabeekaa* (a fortune-teller). The fortune-teller will decide whether the date should be specifically on the same date of the occurrence of lightning or may choose another possible date. The fortune-teller decides the date of the ritual favoring the benefit of the victims. In order to identify possible dates, the fortune-teller uses different time-recalling mechanisms. Looking at the palms of the victim's hands, observing a coffee cup (grouts), observing the moon and the stars' positions are just some of these mechanisms. On the other hand, if a human is injured by lightning, then it is believed that interment/burial in animal dung is the primary aid. Whether human or animal, it soon recovers if temporarily buried in dung. However, adding water or placing it in water will aggravate the damage, and can even cause death. At the moment the lightning occurred, nobody cries out to get help from the community. Instead, they ululate and say "*isaa бага*" for which the literal meaning is, "it is *Waaqaas* will; his will is always for good reason." To dampen the fire, water is never used. Instead, milk and soil are preferred in place of using water. Water and lightning are believed to be friends; because lightning comes during the rainy season and lightning mostly happens when it rains. Fire caused by lightning can result in flames even in heavy rain, so adding water will change nothing, it is said. Spiritually, it is believed that milk will calm a lightning fire.

Furthermore, there are certain long-term taboos which will stay forever with the family. For the aforementioned short-term taboos, there is a limited amount of time. For instance, on the spot where the lightning struck, crying and shouting are not permitted. Crying or shouting are considered as symbols of anger or irritation. Therefore, those who cry from the harm caused by lightning are seen as being angry at the damage caused by *waaqaas* (God's)

work. This is seen as disputing with God. On other hand, adding or spraying water on a fire caused by lightning is considered as taboo and is forbidden. As previously mentioned, this is considered to exacerbate the severity of the damage. These are short-term taboos and are effective at the moment. On the contrary, long-term taboos stay with the practitioners for life. The victim will remember the day, weekly, monthly and annually. On the anniversary of the lightning occurrence, families of the victim will follow certain physical rules. The date is taboo for them; they will not borrow money or lend materials. They do not give their pack animals or oxen on that date. Even they are not allowed to travel far from their domicile. If there is some neighbors' material or cash within the home and the owner needs it the next day or on the taboo date, they will place it outside their home before sunset the night before. Money or materials that spend the night in the home will never be allowed to be given to anybody, whether it is theirs or borrowed from somewhere. Journeys, marketing and social interactions are restricted on the taboo date, with some exceptions such as death and lifesaving activities. If close relatives have died, the families are allowed to participate in the funeral. Similarly, if there are critical/emergency problems among the community, they are not restricted from taking action.

In everyday life, the name “*bakakkaa*” (lightning) is prohibited. There are euphemistic names like *rooba isaa {waaqaa}* (his rain), *tiifuu* (spatter) *dheekkamsa waaqaa* (his anger), *angaasuu* (lightning), and *fincaan waaqaa* (his urine). These euphemisms are soft and they do not shock or cause fear. In reality, they are considered the opposites of lightning. Curses like “*bakakkaan si dhahu, bakakkaan sittu haa bu’uu and bakakkaa afaan bu’i*” which means “let lightning hit you” or “let you face lightning” are considered more serious. These kinds of curse are targeted at someone who disobeyed *safuu*, or disrespected the community's social norm.

It is not normative to organize feasts by owning property. Even if the victim is rich, no what his wealth, he cannot organize the ritual without first collecting feast grain and cash from relatives, the market or from his neighbors. If the ritual feasts are organized from the victim's own wealth, it is believed that the reconciliation will not be complete. As previously pointed out, the collector holds *coqorsa* (ritual grass) during the collecting of contributions. The grass is a symbol of peace, seeking peace and of reconciliation. In addition, the community considers the collecting as not a form of begging for economic reasons. Any kind of gift or contribution may be forwarded from the community. The collectors have no right to choose what they will receives; it is whatever is given, whether in kind or in cash, except for *gayyoo* (soya beans), *talbaa* (flax seed), and *caxee* (finger millet). These grains are considered cursed and are not incorporated within the feast.

For the Oromo, the community is more sacred than secular, and is surrounded by several religious forms and symbols. The sense of community and human living are highly cherished values of traditional Oromo life. A community is much more than simply a social grouping of people bound together by reasons of natural origin and/or deep common interests and values. It is both a societal, as well as a unity of the visible and invisible worlds; the world of the physically living on the one hand, and on the other, the world of their ancestors, divinities and souls of the children yet to be born to individual kin-groups. Thus, rituals in general and *Araara Waaqaa* ritual in particular have a religious, social and cultural function. This specific ritual of *Araara Waaqaa* is considered as a means of reconciliation with their Almighty God (*Waaqaa*).

Contemporary Practice of Araara Waaqaa Ritual and Radical Change Factor

Cultural change is a concept that denotes certain internal and external factors leading to change in the cultural pattern of society. It can be material as well as nonmaterial in nature. Cultural change may come from many sources, but it mostly comes through contact with other cultures, inventions and through the internal adjustment of culture. In contemporary times among this research community, society is seen as changing according to different aspects. Regarding the culture change in the area, social contact, technological change, geographic and ecological changes are considered the main factors. Contact between two societies will obviously change the culture of both societies through the process of “cultural diffusion” and “acculturation.” In the case of the Oromo, there has been long-term contact with non-Oromo neighboring groups, especially with the Amhara people. When the Amhara came into contact with the Oromo, their lifestyle, religion and language were also introduced to the Oromo. The introduction of this new phenomenon caused sociocultural changes across the land of the Oromo. Contact with non-Oromo and the introduction of an alternative lifestyle, especially Christianity-based, resulted in the community starting to forget their cultural heritage. From priest’s discourse from the old Orthodox Church to the protestant Christiana of the present day, a cold war is befalling the Oromo culture. Significant cultural changes have been observable from time to time. In an introduction of Christianity, certain Oromo cultural rituals, including the ritual of *Araara Waaqaa*, is labelled as “paganism.” The experiences of Christian missionaries’ activity and Christian religious campaigns have given rise to a radically different sociopolitical and religious background in the research areas. It has created a new social and religious order with diverse implications across the region. Urbanization has given rise to cities in different parts, and most communities are no longer homogeneous; having become heterogeneous and plural in virtually every aspect of life. A wedge has been driven between the sacred and the secular aspects of life.

It is true that traditional religion still has considerable influence in the life and culture of many peoples within the research area, but it no longer enjoys the exclusive dominance and control over the life of the vast majority of the population as it once did. The prevailing social and political orders in the area more resemble the Christian way of life. A plurality of religions now exists, with Christianity being the dominant faith. In some cases, the worldview with which people explain and control reality is no longer a traditional one which is religion-dominated. Certain traditional beliefs, customs and practices associated with the idea and promotion of community-living have been outlawed. This is as a result of the combination of several factors, including Christian missionary preaching, improved modern Western healthcare services, and of changing economic circumstance. The traditional belief in ancestors and other spiritual patrons, as well as the vital role they were believed to play in fostering community life, have been seriously suppressed in contemporary society. Schools have largely displaced traditional initiations as the main channel for formal education and the socialization of the youth. The dramatic changes seen in the sociopolitical and religious aspects of life have brought considerable pressure on the people’s sense of community. With the progressive revitalization of traditional religion, the long-established role of the latter in inculcating and promoting harmony and peaceful coexistence become more and more diminished. The ability of Oromo traditional religions to promote the community ideal of peaceful and harmonious coexistence in contemporary society is in a state of progressive decline in the area. The trend is much more noticeable in urban cities than in the rural

villages. The rate of displacement of the traditional religion by the forces of radical social change in the area is generally seen as slower in rural areas than it is in the urban cities.

On the other hand, technological evolution in Ethiopia in general and in the research conducted in the area have also brought about changes in the people's culture. With the introduction of formal education in the area, the collective mind of the people changed. Those who attend school are fans of written materials rather than that which is culturally stored in the mind of its elders. Following the expansion of communication means and changes in transportation, information and people's experience started to flow with falsehoods and with widespread effect. These in turn mixed cultures from different backgrounds. Meanwhile, ritual practices such as *Araara Waaqaa* have become marginalized, and are considered "backwardness" among the educated, and "paganism" and "sin" among the Christians.

Summary

The Oromo people have always looked towards harmony with *Waaqaa* (God) as a very important and inseparable part of the human community. For them, harmony is important for the wellbeing of the community in general, and for individuals in particular. Thus, the community-centered nature of Oromo society can be understood in the context of the moral relationship that lays between the individual and the *waaqaa*, through the observance of *safuu*. Such teachings complement and strengthen a good moral relationship between the individual and *waaqaa*. The individual or the communities among which the Oromo actually live, must live according to *safuu* (moral law) and in harmony with *waaqaa*. Therefore, Oromo rituals, just like those of any other social grouping, must be understood as moral rules that regulate human behavior, especially as it impacts on the spiritual life. In this regard, ritual and taboos are meant to make the individual adjust his interests so that they conform to those of the society worldview at large. As it is endowed with specific culture, tradition and ethical norms, the indigenous people of the study area have their own ways of making harmony with God in the case of natural disasters that are culturally assumed as punishments for human misbehaviors.

The current study discovered that people living within the study area have different depths of knowledge and cultural practices regarding *Araara Waaqaa*. The ritual has wide and varied use and values amongst the people. Locals consider that religious, spiritual and culturally-related practices have played a significant role in the conservation of the traditional community. They are conscious of protecting their culture in what one may describe as a way that is unscientific, but effectual. The researchers believe that there further need to revisit the past and to integrate the old traditions and customs with current life, and thereby to safeguard tradition for sustainable development.

Notes

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