

require examination. In some places, the decline of resources to meet the basic needs of the people compel them to overexploit their resources although they know that this process will undermine the prospect of supporting the future generation. Protection of the environment at the expense of the means of people's survival is unjust. "Environmental justice demands equitable access to, and distribution of the resources of nature, in a manner which is sustainable for present and future generations" (Talbot 1998, 403).

Some scholars convincingly indicated the danger of idealizing village communities and their knowledge. Not all knowledge and activities of local people are valid and environmentally sound. Some of their practices have had undesirable local environmental effects. "The value of traditional and environmental knowledge and management practices thus not taken for granted. Some relevant traditional beliefs are incorrect or misdirected...Superstitions sometimes over-ride objective observations" (Johannes 1989, 7; Klemm 1985, 246). Unnecessary dependence on traditional beliefs may undermine objective observations and the real causes of changes. Unlike the populist perspective that seems to argue that rural people's knowledge can easily be extracted and incorporated into scientific procedures, some writers argue that "RPK [Rural People's Knowledge] is always fragmentary, partial and provisional in nature. It is never fully unified or integrated in terms of underlying cultural logic or system of classification" (Scoones and Thompson 1993, 4). It can also be argued that communities who live in areas of abundant resources (forests) may not be considered as environmental protectors.

2. TRADITIONAL OROMO RELIGION AND THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

2.1 The Oromo Concept of "Waaqa" and Human Destiny

There are three religions in Oromiya: traditional religion, Islam and Christianity. Many Oromo practice traditional religion parallel with Islam or Christianity. Oromo religious belief is based on the view that there is only one *Waaqa* (God). The Arabic word *Rabbi* is also used by the Muslim Oromo and others to refer to their supreme being. According to the Oromo traditional religion, *Waaqa* has multiple attributes. *Waaqa* is He Who is before everything else. *Waaqa* is *Uumaa* (a creator of everything in the world). *Waaqa* is *Hunda beekaa* (omniscient). *Waaqa* is *hundaa tolaa* (omni benevolent). *Waaqa* is *hunda danda'aa* (omnipotent). *Waaqa* is the source and lover of *dhugaa* (truth). *Waaqa* is *Qulqulluu* (pure). *Waaqa* is intolerant of injustice, crime, sin and all falsehood. The Oromo never worshipped carved statues, trees, rivers, mountains or animals as substitutes.

But who is the creator of *Waaqa*? All of my informants agree that *Waaqa* is not a created being. *Waaqa* does not have an elder. There is nothing that has power over *Waaqa*. For the Oromo *Waaqa* is eternal and the final cause of all things. The Oromo thus had the concept of the monotheistic supreme God from time immemorial although the Oromo conception of God is quite distinct from the Western one. The Oromo conception of *Waaqa* illustrates that Momoh's generalization is unfounded. "There is

extremely generated on account of our colonial exposure" (Momoh 1996, 62). Momoh contends that Africans have gods. He identified three gods, such as the ancestors and founders of the clan, the god of the water, mountain, forest or desert and the god of the staple crop or animal. He adds, "there are gods of the elements -wars, trade, hunting, moral gods -vengeance, protection; destiny gods-luck, blessing, misfortune and fate" (Momoh 1996, 63). Momoh further argues that "[t]here are no known African people who have one word for God. What we have are attributes, expressions and litanies describing and designating God. This, in line with what we have been arguing, is absolute proof that the notion of God in Africa is a result of Christian and Islamic Influences" (Momoh 1996, 64). The absence of proverbs, said Momoh, is a clear indication of the absence of the concept of God in traditional Africa (Momoh 1996, 67).

However, as has been stated earlier, the Oromo have one word for the supreme being- *Waaqa*. There are various Oromo proverbs⁶ which praise *Waaqa*. Examples include:

- ◆ *Waaqa malee, gaariin hin jiru* (BABO 1998, 624) (There is no one who is kind except *Waaqa* /God).
- ◆ *Waan Waaqni fide lafti ba'aa hin dadhabu* (BABO 1998, 122) (Whatever *Waaqa* brings the Earth does not fail to carry it).
- ◆ *Namni yaa Waaqi jedhe Waaqarraa hindhabu* (BABO 1998, 481) (One who worships God will get everything).

Some writers reported that the Oromo also talked about *Waaqa diimaa* (the red *Waaqa*). Bartels writes, "for the sake of completeness ... people sometimes also speak of 'Waaq dema' – the light-colored *Waaqa* (or 'the red *Waaqa*') in contrast to 'Waaq gurraacha' – the dark-colored *Waaqa*' (Bartels 1983, 107). Daniel also reported that through his interviews he has found out that there are three meanings of *Waaqa*. The concept of *Waaqa* could be used to refer to the expanse of the sky as seen from the Earth, a supreme being, and also could be understood to mean the heaven, as the abode of the Supreme Being (Daniel 1984, 105). Daniel states that "[t]he 'black' aspect of *Waaqa* is usually regarded as the guardian and protector; whereas -- the "red" one is considered to be the aspect of *Waaqa* which is there to punish men in case of wrongdoing" (Daniel 1984, 106). Tippet on the other hand said the following:

[i]n some places [*Waaqa*] is conceptualized as two gods, resident in the sky...one black and one red...either the red god being provoked to anger manifests this in displays of lightning which the black god muffles and turns to thunder, or the two gods manifest themselves in cloudy and sunny days. For some informants these are manifestations of the one god, for others they are two gods. Where they are regarded as two gods the black one is the more friendly to man...and spoken of as creator and father (Tippet 1970, 153).

My informants state that the concept of "the red *Waaqa*" is non-existent in their belief. The Ambo Oromo identified *Waaqa* as *gurraacha* (the black *Waaqa*). They believe that *Waaqa* is above the sky, the cloud. In fact, they mentioned that *biduu* (the rainbow) has three colors one of which is red. *Biduu* is believed to be the belt of *Waaqa*.

Some Western and Ethiopian writers defined *Waaqa* as sky-God. According to Bartels (1983), the word *Waaqa* has a double meaning: sky, i.e., the vault of the sky as we see it and God. Tilahun in his *Oromo English Dictionary* defined *Waaqa* as God and sky (1989, 586). Mudée (1995, 330) defines *Waaqa* as the creator of human beings. Ludolphus (1982) reported that *Waaqa* for the Oromo means "the Heaven" which governs the world. Ceruli (1922) viewed *Waaqa* both as heaven and as God.

I think that the definition of *Waaqa* as a sky God does not seem to be plausible. The phrase "sky God" does not represent the early Oromo concept of *Waaqa*. The Oromo have a common myth that in olden days *Waaqa* was visible and living on the Earth. He used to speak with the people and solve their problems. According to the tradition, one day a goat stepped on *Waaqa* when He was sitting on the ground wearing a cotton blanket. It was after *Waaqa* cursed a goat that its tail was lifted up. A mule is also said to have kicked *Waaqa* and became sterile because of misbehavior. Besides, other people committed sin and annoyed *Waaqa*. *Waaqa* then left the Earth in anger and became invisible. Following this, the Oromo say the black *Waaqa* is living above the blue sky. Thus *Waaqa* is not the visible blue sky (Informants (hereafter: inf(s): Emanssa; Fufa; Merga Jara). Some informants indicate that *Waaqa* is always with us although we don't see Him (Infs: Dusso; Merga Jara; Nagara Fite). Likewise, the Akans of Ghana say that "if you wish to say something to God, tell it to the wind" (Abraham 1995, 52) for God is with the people. It seems to me that the definition of *Waaqa* as a sky God is a recent phenomenon and has become popular through European writers. The Europeans and the Hebrews advanced the notion of a heavenly or celestial God, located at a certain distance in the sky. God has been called the heavenly God, the celestial God, or the God of heaven (Dunquah 1995, 101). In most cases European writers tend to use their own concepts in their anthropological study of African people.

The important question to the Oromo is : how did the idea occur to *Waaqa* to create human beings and the world in which we live? The Oromo believe that above all things *Waaqa* stretched out the Earth, and created all other things. *Waaqa* created the first human being from the soil by breathing at it. After the appearance of the first human being, the Earth cried and asked *Waaqa* the reason why He took its meat and bone to create a human being. *Waaqa* replied that like the cry of the Earth human beings will cry and return to the Earth when they die, whereas, His breath will go to Him. Unlike some ethnic groups in Africa, the Oromo do not believe that the soul of departed ancestors retakes bodily form in new babies in their families and clans. Instead, they believe that at the moment of death the soul will be separated from the body and goes to *Waaqa*. In fact, the Oromo prayed to the spirit of the dead. They prepare a thick local bread, cheese with melted butter, local beer, and honey and celebrate the *Ekeraa* ritual in December every year. *Waaqa* also created devils, vultures, dogs, wild animals and so on. One may wonder why *Waaqa* created good and bad things. According to the informants, illness and misfortune in general is often considered a punishment from *Waaqa* for sins a person has committed. It is because of the errors of human beings that *Waaqa* allowed evil things to exist in the world. Otherwise *Waaqa* is all-good. If *Waaqa* had not tolerated both good and evil things, he would have been ungrateful; His omnipotence and omniscience would not have been known. The Oromo believe that the coexistence of good and bad, beauty and ugly is necessary. In the absence of wise men, the unwise

cannot improve their knowledge (Infs: Emanssa; Erko; Fufa; Gamachu; Nagara Fite; Nagassa).

The Oromo believe that humans can influence *Waaqa*'s actions. Individuals who live and act in accordance with *Waaqa*'s order will be happy, and be respected members of their society. On the contrary, when a person fails to act in accordance with *Waaqa*'s order, *Waaqa* will punish him/her. *Waaqa* can make him/her blind, and can cut his/her hands (Infs: Merga Jara; Ragassa). These supernatural sanctions can result in various types of misfortunes ranging from illness, mishaps, and bad luck for the guilty person and his/her relatives.

As has been stated earlier, the Oromo do not have a dualistic conception of reality. They believe that *Waaqa* and *Lafa* (Earth) are inseparable. They consider the Earth as their mother. They underscore that they suck the breast of the Earth as the baby sucks its mother's breast. All things originate from the Earth and depend on the resources of the Earth for their survival. The Earth is the source of nourishment, survival and life (Infs: Fufa; Gamtessa). Nothing can be outside the Earth. The following proverb illustrates this: *Allaattiin hanga feete barartullee duuti isii lafuma* (The birds that flew in the air come and die upon the Earth) (BABO 1996, 325). This shows that the Earth is the final abiding place of all things that lived and grew. For the Oromo, *Waaqa* is like a father. He gives them rain and helps the Earth grow different plants. In fact, the Oromo do not say that the Earth is *Waaqa*'s wife. What is clear is that *Waaqa* is considered as a male whereas the Earth is considered as a female. I have a serious doubt concerning Haberland's assertion that the Eastern Arsi Oromo believe that "lafti niitii Waaqaati"--"the Earth is *Waaqa*'s wife" (Haberland 1963, 607). Bartels (1983, 108) also said that the Western Matcha Oromo do not consider the Earth as *Waaqa*'s wife. As I have argued elsewhere (1997a), the link between *Waaqa* and the Earth has been expressed in certain myths of Oromo origin, people's blessings, oaths, curses, rituals, proverbs and so forth. As Knutsson noted, "the earth itself is superhuman in character, although it is not equivalent to the heaven. To give weight to the truth of what one says or to a request for something, evidence is presented or a question posed 'in the name of *Waka* and *Lafa*'" (Knutsson 1967, 56).

My informants disagree whether the land belongs to all, the living the dead and the unborn included. Most of them agree that before the conquest of the Oromo by the Abyssinians in the 19th century, the land was free, and no body owned it. Land couldn't be bought or sold. People had use-rights over the land resource, which belongs to *Waaqa*. The land did not have a boundary in the strict sense of the term. But Emperor Menelik and his followers proclaimed that the land belongs to the government. He apportioned the Oromo land and gave it to his soldiers, relatives and churches.

Some informants argue that the land belongs to the living, for they use the resources of the land for survival. They maintain that the dead have already left the land and couldn't claim it. The living will hand it over to the next generation (Infs: Fufa; Gonfa; Galata). Others contend that the land is the private property of the dead; they were buried in the land, and no body can force them to leave the land or to change their place. Human beings originated from the land and returned to it (Infs: Dagaga Kana'a;

Gamtessa). The third group believes that the land belongs to all, living, dead and unborn included. The living get the necessities of life from the land. The dead were buried in the land. The unborn will be born on the land (Infs: Daksissa; Nagara Fite). The third group shares the view held by many Africans. "For Africans land belongs to all, living and dead. We will live in this land where our for parents lived and where our great-great-grand children will live. To make sure that all benefit from this wealth, we have to take care of it properly now. This value system cuts across all ethnic groups in Africa" (Omari 1990, 174). Generally, the Oromo people believe that the present generation is under moral obligation to preserve the land and hand it over to the future generation.

2.2 The Concept of "Ayyaana"

Oromo traditional religion teaches that there are many saint-like divinities called *Ayyaana*, each seen as a manifestation of the one *Waaqa*. *Ayyaana* is believed to be the angel of *Waaqa*. It is the intermediary between human beings and *Waaqa*. *Ayyaana* is created by *Waaqa* and cannot create anything. *Ayyaana* can only communicate the problems of humans to *Waaqa*. During possession the *Ayyaana* speaks in the mouth of the *Ayyaantuu* (*Qaalluu*) with the people. When individuals ask *Ayyaana* for help, the latter will say s(he) will ask and beg *Waaqa* for him/her. *Ayyaana* acts according to the will of *Waaqa*. *Ayyaana* alone cannot hurt or kill individuals. But with the help of *Waaqa* *Ayyaana* can be invoked to bring misfortune upon the person unwilling to comply with the traditions of the society (Infs: Emanssa; Fufa). Thus, Ambo Oromo attitude towards the *Ayyaana* (spirit) is at variance with Lewis' view. Lewis reports that the *Ayyaana* (spirits) "can directly affect all aspects of life. They can kill a man or cure him; slay his ox or increase his herd; make him mad or destroy his enemy. They can be vengeful toward the impious or benevolent to the faithful" (Lewis 1970, 174). Unlike *Waaqa* the color of *Ayyaana* is unknown. It should be reiterated that *Waaqa* could only create or destroy human beings and other things (Infs: Emanssa; Fufa; Nagara Fite). The view of my informants is at variance with the idea that "one's *ayyaana* determines one's destiny, since it is assumed that when some one is born, the person is born into an *ayyaana* that determines his or her future" (Daniel 1984, 107). As I will show later, the Oromo believed that *Waaqa* with their respective *Ayyaana* created the days in each month. But for the Ambo Oromo, it is not the *Ayyaana* that determines one's destiny but *Waaqa*.

According to Oromo traditional religion, all created things in the universe have their own *Ayyaana*. Thus there are numerous *Ayyaanas*. For instance, hunters are expected to sacrifice animals for the wild animals they killed during hunting. Otherwise the guardian spirit of the concerned wild animal will attack the hunter.

The *Ayyaana* is attached to individual *Qaalluu* and speaks through his mouth during possession. Both are inseparable. The *Qaalluu* serves as an intermediary between human and the *Ayyaana* (spirit). The role of a *Qaalluu* is similar to the role of a Bishop in the Christian world and of Imam in the Muslim world. He or she is expected to respect traditional taboos (*Safuu*) and ritual observances and follow the truth and avoid sin. The Ambo Oromo identifies several *Ayyaanas*. Each lineage (*balbala*) has its own *Ayyaana*, and each clan (*lammii*) has its own *Ayyaana*. The former may be called *Ayyaana xinnaa* (small *Ayyaana*) whereas the latter can be called *Ayyaana Guddaa* (big *Ayyaana*). The

qaalluu is the leader of religious rituals. The *Qaalluu* is also known as the *Ayyaantu* for s(he) has the *Ayyaana* of his lineage or clan.

The *Ayyaana Abbaa* (*Ayyaana of one's father*) is invoked for help in order to fulfill one's duties, to be successful, and to avoid evil acts, for it is believed to be more powerful than one's own *Ayyaana*. Likewise, the *Ayyaana* of the clan is more powerful than a father's *Ayyaana* (Infs: Fufa; Nagara Fite).

The Oromo also use "*Ayyaana*" to refer to a holiday. The days on which the Oromo perform traditional ceremonies are called *Ayyaana*. Some days have been assigned to some of the spirits and conceived as *Ayyaana*. Also the concept of *Ayyaana* can be used to refer to a person's fate (Bartels 1983; Daniel 1984). That someone is *Ayyaantuu* may mean s/he is lucky.

Nabi is believed to be the ancient *Ayyaana* of the Oromo (Inf: Emanssa). To give birth to a child, the spirit called *Araashittii* should possess pregnant woman. *Booranticha* is a male spirit, and is believed to be the protector of ox and calf. It is also known as the spirit of the river. An individual is required to prepare traditional beer, Niger seed, flour of roasted barley with butter, salt, pancake-like bread, sauce of lentils, nine *buddena* (large local bread cooked only on one side) and celebrate the *Booranticha* ritual at the river-bed so as to appease the spirit of the river (Inf: Kumalcha).

What is interesting is that the *Qaalluu* institution has had a positive impact on the environment. The Oromo build *Galma* (traditional Oromo ritual hall/Church) at a special place. The *qaalluu* lives and worships in this place. Although the Oromo can build *Galma* on a hill, they generally believe that a slope or a hill is not a favorable place, for it exposes the *Galma* to different dangers. For this matter, they build a *Galma* under a hill, by the side of hideout, or by the side of isolated places (Infs: Emanssa, Merga Jara). These places should be free from yell. Women who have menstruation are forbidden to enter the *Galma*. Such women are considered impure. The believers visit the *Galma* and dance, sing and beat drums to perform a ritual called *dalaga* in order to achieve a state of ecstasy, which often culminates in possession. It is at the height of this that the possessing *Ayyaana* speaks through the *Qaalluu's* mouth and answer prayers and predict the future. It should be noted that the Oromo perform prayer ceremonies besides permanently flowing rivers, by the side of big mountains, hills, stones and trees. The land around the *Galma* and the natural resources on this land are viewed as sacred and are well protected.

In Oromo traditional culture, some individuals claim to know the mystery of human nature and predict the future. These individuals are known as *Xibaartuu* Or *Warra Waa beeku* (those who know something) or *Warra siinii ilaalu* (those who look at the lees of a cup of coffee and predict the future). They also claim to know the message of the smoke of incense. When people get sick and face life crisis, they visit these yarn spinners. The *Qaalluu* leaders also advise individuals to visit them and understand what to do in order to avoid their problems. It should be noted that *Xibaartuu* has a lower social status than the *Qaalluu* leaders. Some informants believe that *Xibaartuu* is knowledgeable and can help the people (Infs: Duresso; Emanssa). The majority of my informants, however, said that the *Xibaartuu* is a deceiver, and does not know anything.

The yarn spinners exploit the people by fabricating false stories. Some even say that they are the instruments of the *Qaalluu* leaders. They advise people to offer money, animals and other gifts to the *Ayyaana* will solve their problem. But the advice of *xibaartuu* is groundless (Infs: Eticha, Gamtessa; Merga Jara; Ragassa).

On the other hand, the Oromo believe that there are hidden *Seexanas* (devils) which are the enemies of the people and *Waaqa*. *Waaqa* "has become the enemy of devils whom he can effect at any time" (Bartels 1983, 121). In fact, *Waaqa* creates the devils. Like human beings they are mortal. But they can be the cause of conflict between human beings, and they can bring harm to individuals and disturb their health. Devils are invisible, destructive and the sources of evil things, misfortunes, and all kinds of human sufferings. When people suspect that a devil brought harm to their child, they will take the latter to *Ayyaana Guddaa* (Big *Ayyaana*). The *Qaalluu* can force the devil to release the child. The *Qaalluu* can make the devil swear not to disturb the child in the future (Infs: Gutema Mitafa; Nagassa). Rivers, ash, mountains, various trees, and the place hit by lightening, and draft is believed to be the abode of devils. The Oromo are used to appease devils by providing various offerings.

2.3 The Concept of "Maaram"

Maaram is believed to be the divinity of women. *Maaram* was created by *Waaqa* and addressed as *haadha baar* (the mother of ocean). I think this is to indicate that *Maaram* came to the Oromo from outside. The Oromo believe that *Maaram* is the mother of a child. The Oromo women perform traditional ceremonies in respect of *Maaram*. It is believed that *Maaram* will help *barren* women to beget a child, and help pregnant women to give birth to a child. When a woman gives birth to a child Oromo women will gather and ululate (say *ilili ilili*). They also prepare porridge, and splash butter. It is normal for the Oromo to sacrifice an animal during this ceremony. Moreover, *Maaram* is worshipped for the health of the environment, animals, human beings and crops.

The Oromo *Qaalluu* leaders pray to *Maaram* every two weeks for the continuation of offspring of humans. *Maaram* has her own ritual house. Ritual goods include *Jaaloo* (earthen caldron), and *Qoloo* (traditional shirt). It has also *madabii* (raised platform of Earth). The dancing ceremony is performed on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays (Infs: Durezza; Emanssa; Fufa).

2.4 The Concept of "Ateetee"

Some writers have explained the nature of *Ateetee* and *Maaram*. Knutsson states that the names *Ateetee* and *Maaram* are used interchangeably for the same kind of being (Knutsson 1967, 55). Daniel states that the various songs of *Ateetee* imply that "[a]teetee is a ceremony prepared for *Ayyolee*, *Maaram* and *Waaqa* as thanksgiving by those who have children and a lamentation by the barren women" (Daniel 1984, 111). Bartels, however, questioned this assertion. To the Oromo of Western Matcha, *Ateetee* is the name of the ritual in which *Maaram* is invoked (Bartels 1983). Baxter (1979) had similar observation concerning the belief of the Arsi Oromo. For Cerulli, *Ateetee* is conceived as the goddess of fecundity (Cerulli 1922, 127; Harris 1968, 50).

The view of the Ambo Oromo is at variance with Knutsson's argument. According to the Ambo Oromo, *Ateetee* and *Maaram* are different and have different functions in Oromo religion. The materials used during their ceremonies are different. But both *Ateetee* and *Maaram* are believed to be females.

For the Ambo Oromo, *Ateetee* is the mother of cattle and the spirit of *bakkaa* (melted or processed butter). The Oromo also identified *Ateetee* as *Aayyoo Baar* (the Mother of Ocean) and as *Hadha Dambal* (the mother of overflow, full). The purpose of the *Ateetee* ritual is to help cattle breed well, and to help oxen plough well. There are *Ateetee* cattle in Oromo culture. When a heifer drops a calf, her butter will be stored and used during the *Ateetee* ceremony. Yogurt is also required to be kept for two weeks before the *Ateetee* ritual. The *Ateetee* ritual can be performed in June and January or in any other month. Most of the time, the *Ateetee* ritual is performed on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday (Inf: Gutama Mitafa; Urgessa Gutama). The women can begin to celebrate the *Ateetee* ritual on Friday, and splash butter on Saturday. Or they can begin on Wednesday, Thursday and splash butter on Thursday and Friday, respectively. Traditionally, it is believed that Monday is the day of the ghost. Wednesday is believed to harden its heart towards the people. But the proper date for *Ateetee* ritual is determined by time reckoning experts. The Ambo Oromo perform *Ateetee* ceremonies every two years (Infs: Duresso; Lami; Merga Jara).

Five or more women are required to participate in *Ateetee* rituals. The wife of *Guulaa* (an individual who have gone through all the rituals of the *Gadaa* and who has his-ruling period behind him)--*Kalaalee* will be elected and spill the melted butter over the women who perform *Ateetee* ceremony. When the son of *Kalaalee* has gone through all the rituals of the *Gadaa*, the *Kalaalee* would be called *Cifree* (Inf: Lemo). The women should not perform *Ateetee* ritual with plaited hair. Their hair should be *daabee* (it should flow down the neck, the front and the sides). She should curl her hair with leaves of *Qobboo* (*Ricinus communis*). Her husband is expected to carry *Caaccuu* (necklace of beads). On the third day the five women perform fertility ritual by splashing their chest, and neck with warm butter. Women are expected to eat porridge. Porridge will be served with *Jaaloo* (tray made of straw). On the fifth day, the husband will take his cattle to the place where the cattle will drink *horra* (mineral water). On mid-day, the husband will return cattle to his premises. When the cattle return home, the woman will milk cows and pour the milk on the back of cows. This is believed to help cows breed well.

During *Ateetee* ritual, an old healthy cow should be sacrificed for the cattle to breed well, for a bull to serve a cow, for a pregnancy to be successful and for a land to be leveled. It is a taboo to sacrifice a cow with broken horns, blind eye, wrong tail and other defects. If a person does not have a cow, he can slaughter coffee (coffee fruits stewed in butter) (Inf: Fufa). The slaughtering of coffee may have been symbolic. "The cherry-like coffee fruits are bitten open and stewed in melted butter. The butter enters the fruits and reaches the beans inside. These beans which, because of their shape, account for the coffee fruits 'use as a symbol of the woman: their shape is reminder of the female organ much as cowry-shells are'" (Bartels 1983, 287). When the husband sacrifices a cow, the *Ateetee* spirit will possess his spouse. The people anoint stick with

butter and prop it against their body. The husband will make libations by curdled milk. He is also expected to set up two green poles in front of the house. The people eat meat, drink yogurt, unfermented ale, and traditional beer. The milk will be served with *Guchuma* (large gourd). The people then praise the cattle in their song. The women dance during the night (Infs: Emanssa; Lemo).

It is believed that if a person fails to perform *Ateetee* ritual, cattle cannot breed well, the calf cannot grow, the teat of animals will be closed, and a person can be visually impaired and crippled. The Oromo say "*Ateetee* ijaaf ijoof gabbaru" (*Ateete* ritual is performed for the sake of the eyes and destiny).

In general, the *Ateetee* ritual has symbolic meanings. The anointment of sticks with butter, the planting of green poles, the shedding of old cows blood, the splashing of the chest and the neck with butter are the symbols of fertility, procreation, and continuation of life on Earth. They symbolize that the survival of most Oromos depend on the survival and rebirth of herds.

2.5 The *Mowata* Tradition

Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian anthropologists who have studied the nature of *Waaqa*, *Maaram*, *Ateetee* and *Ayyaana* have been silent about the nature of the *Mowata* culture among the Ambo Oromo. In what follows, I will present a preliminary observation about how *Mowata* has been practiced by the Ambo Oromo. My analysis relies exclusively on oral information both from the study sites and outside. Those who have been practicing the *Mowata* cult and other peasants were interviewed. The readers are advised to consider each position and form their own position.

My informants agree that *Mowata* came to Ambo from Soddo via Walisso⁷ although they could not identify the exact date of the appearance of *Mowata* in Ambo. It is believed that originally *Damaamitii* (the deity of *Mowata*) came down to the Earth from the sky; it is an invention of *Waaqa* and it cannot be inherited through blood ties. I think that the *Mowata* tradition has religious and social dimensions.

The *Mowata* ritual is largely associated with women, although men mostly *Fugaa* (woodworkers who are socially despised) and hermaphrodites participate in *Mowata* spirit possession. The *Mowata* society has its own leader who is called *Habaqii*. In most cases, a *Fugaa* is the leader of the *Mowata* society. There is the saying that "Dubartiin qeetti dhirsaan nakkarte ala baateet jaarsi *fugaa* dha doobbiif goraan reeba" (A woman who challenges her husband in his premises will be beaten by a *Fugaa* elder outdoors with nettle and raspberry plant" (Inf: Ragassa). Each locality has its own *Habaqii* and those who reside in the area participate in *Mowata* spirit possession through the guidance of their *Habaqii*. The *Habaqii* is required to be given a whip made from the skin of a hippopotamus by the *Ayyaana*. For instance, Obboo Kumalcha, the *Habaqii* around the city of Ambo, reported that the spirit called Danfaa of the Qaalluu leader Obboo Fayissa Inika gave him a whip. When the *Habaqii* ties the whip in a firm knot, the members of the *Mowata* society will be possessed by the spirit and gather around the *Habaqii*'s premises. By tying the whip, the *Habaqii* can make them unconscious, and may force them to stimulate crying at a funeral, to fetch water, to eat food, and to perform any other duties. In particular, when the *Qaalluu* of *Danfaa* and *Maaram* (well

known spirits in Ambo) and one of the members of the *Mowata* society dies, the members of the *Mowata* society will induce crying at the funeral⁸. To do this the *Habaqii* should be informed about the death of the concerned individual. When the *Habaqii* thinks that they have performed their duties, s/he will dispossess the members of the *Mowata* society of the spirit by untying the whip. The *Habaqii* can pacify a person who is possessed by the spirit and unconsciously tries to attack other people by using fire, thorny bushes and the like. The *Habaqii* employs various phrases to lead the spirit possession. These phrases are considered the language of *Mowata*. For instance:

- ◆ *Ashimmoo damaamitii* (Be possessed by the spirit)
- ◆ *Sebir* (Leave him or her)
- ◆ *Tadumdumii* (Be silent)
- ◆ *Tonyii* (Sit down) (Infs: Kumalchaa; Lemmo).

Individuals who participate in the *Mowata* spirit possession cut the leaves of various trees, whereas, those who do not properly celebrate the *Mowata* ritual cut the thorns of different trees and take part in a funeral.

The *Mowata* tradition is much more complicated than what has been stated. According to informants, the *Mowata* spirit can possess a person in two different ways. A *Qeerransa* (leopard) can, on the one hand, kidnap a person. Initially, a person will be afflicted bodily or mentally (Infs: Duresso; Kumalcha; Lemo). Obboo Kumalcha's personal story illustrates this.

I was ill for about fourteen months. I suffered from diarrhea and vomiting. I was not able to eat well. I only drank coffee and water. Sometimes I ate roasted grains. After the first four months, a red snake with long hair came to my bed. My parents looked after me during my illness for I was not married. My parents did not understand the cause of my illness and why the snake came to my place. They suspected that the snake is a symbol of *Ayyaana*. They had to put butter on my head several times a day. The snake was licking butter. If the snake had not found butter, it could have pierced my head and thereby killed me.

After fourteen months a leopard took me. In the meantime, the members of *Mowata* society began to look for me. The leopard fed me rootworm, beetle and other insects, and protected me from other wild animals. Two or three leopards did this. When the first one collected worms and insects, the other one stayed with the patient. These leopards were special and different from other leopards. Personally, I did not see any of them for I was unconscious at that time. Finally, the *Mowata* expedition saw me after a week. At that time I was with a leopard. All persons who were possessed by the spirit knelt down in front of the leopard to influence it. Then a leopard was given a goat and left me. The fact of the matter is that a leopard did not eat goat given to it. It hit it and thereby killed it. Some times a leopard might refuse to leave the patient alone. When this occurs, *Fugaa* will catch it and throw it away and ask the relatives of the patient whether the latter belongs to them by pacifying the *Mowata* members for they may attack the former. Later the *Fugaa* will clean the patient and ask the members of the *Mowata* to bring the patient

to his premise on a stretcher. In my case, after going home, I drank warm water to clean my stomach from worms and insects. Later on I was given a whip made from the skin of a hippopotamus⁹ with eight bells by *Danfaa* (the spirit) of Obboo Fayissa Inika so as to save pregnant women from hurting themselves during spirit possession. Consequently I became a *Habaqii* and prepared a *Mowata* ceremony in respect of the whip. The whip has its own ceremony.

After one year, a leopard came to my place in May for the second time. Firstly it made my mother unconscious by tying its tail. My mother was a member of the *Mowata* society. Hereafter, a leopard took me out of the house by lifting up the door. It then returned to my parent's house and released my mother from the spirit by untying its tail. But nobody saw it when it did all this. The members of the *Mowata* saw me after five days. After performing all the necessary conditions, they returned me to my place. Since then I have been the *Habaqii* of the *Mowata*. I have personally observed the leopard during our search for a patient (Inf: Kumalcha).

It is also believed that a leopard can take a woman if she leaves her house during the night. The leopard may kill a patient if it is not given a goat on time. Some time ago, the members of *Mowata* failed to see a certain Merge, a young girl, for six weeks. Eventually they realized that this girl was killed by a leopard and eaten by a wild animal. They only found her plaited hair, neck and leg at Fincha valley in Wollega. A patient taken by a leopard can only be seen by the *Mowata* members for the spirit helps them to do so. Unlike other *Ayyaana* the *Mowata* spirit does not require a special gift of a bull to be sacrificed (Inf: Kumalcha).

There is also a second way by which a person can be possessed by the *Mowata* spirit. From the outset, a person will suffer from diarrhea, vomiting and other diseases. Following this, two snakes will come to his or her place--one lying at the head of the bed and the other lying at the lower end of the bed. The patient will be unconscious for about one week or two. When the patient seems to stop breathing, his parents will shroud him or her and begin to cry, which in turn will lead to the gathering of the *Mowata* members. Meanwhile, the spirit can possess women if a snake coils itself. Consequently, these women will attack those who are not the followers of *Mowata* spirit and force them to leave the house. The members of the *Mowata* cult will then leave a patient with an old and respected woman and go out for *labsii* (announcement). They will inform other followers of the *Mowata* spirit about the patient and come back to the patient's place. The *Habaqii* will then free the women from the spirit and give them boiled grain. The next morning the *Habaqii* will give the patient a stick. A stick will stay on the lap of the patient for seven days. The *Habaqii* will give the patient food. Finally, the *Habaqii* will free the patient from the spirit. The patient will then be healthy.

A person can also ask the followers of *Mowata* to induce crying during his or her funeral by preparing a big feast. The person is not required to be possessed by the *Mowata* spirit. The person is expected to prepare traditional Oromo beer, food, bread, a sacrificial cow, and inform the *Habaqii* to arrange the *Mowata* ritual. Two *Guulaas* and the followers of the *Mowata* spirit are required to take part in this special ritual. The two *Guulaas* are expected to lead the ritual by beating the law for the funeral purpose. If the