

# SACRED NETWORKS

Religion and social life among Oromo in Norway



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Immediate associations to the notion of ‘inter-religious relations’ might be politics, conflicts, interfaith-dialogue, and so fourth. In this thesis, I want to bring this topic down to inter-personal relationships, to everyday social interaction, religious belief and practice. Intentionally, I choose a case-study were peaceful inter-religious relations characterise the matters at hand: a small group of Oromo, from Ethiopia, in Norway, who are close friends but adhere to different religions. Through this example, I forward perspectives about how religiosity is expressed, and how religious diversity influence social interaction and individual attitudes. I stress the importance of *deities* in religious traditions, and aim to demonstrate how representations of deities are central in inter-religious relations as well as in religiosity and social life. The following introduction will first discuss two central categories used in this thesis: the ethnographical focus *Oromo* and the thematic focus *deities*. Second, the questions and structure of the thesis will be briefly presented. Third, I will discuss the process of choosing and developing methodology, material, and method. Fourth, some tendencies in previous studies on the Oromo and deities will be considered.

## 1.0.1. *Oromo*

‘Oromo’ refers to an ethnic group in East Africa counting about 35 million people. The Oromo constitute up to half of the Ethiopian population, while about four million live in Kenya. Ethiopia is divided into nine regions that correspond to the largest ethnic groups, while the inhabitants speak about 80 different languages. It is difficult to provide correct statistics on different ethnic and religious groups since the numbers vary in the different sources.<sup>1</sup> The geographical expanse of Ethiopia and its 78,2

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<sup>1</sup> If we follow the statistics from CIA’s *World Fact Book*, these numbers could be noted: 32.1 % of the Ethiopian population is identified as Oromos, something that makes it the largest ethnic group (1994 census). The second largest is Amhara, counting 30.1% of the population. 60% of the population are Christians (Orthodox 50.6%, Protestant 10.2%), 32.8% are Muslims, while 6.4% are characterised as ‘traditional’ or ‘other’ (1994 census).

million<sup>2</sup> inhabitants implies great differences in people's ways of living. According to historian Ulrich Braukämper:

The differences in geographical conditions within the area are remarkable, and also the historical fate of the sub-groups has varied widely. The cultural diversity within the Oromo people has consequently become enormous. (Braukämper 2002: 143)

Some political movements defined Oromo as a *nation*; they claim sovereignty over a geographical area, the region *Oromia*. This will not be discussed in detail, but it could be noted that Oromo are situationally defined. Anthropologist Knut Eric Knutsson (1969) provides a study on the maintenance and development of boundaries between different Oromo groups and other ethnic groups. Knutsson demonstrates diversions in terms of agriculture, political organisation, and religion. Still, he emphasises that the language (*Afaan Oromo*) in some cases functions as a boundary towards other ethnic groups and especially the Amhara. In line with this observation, and sociologist Mekuria Bulcha (1994), I understand *Afaan Oromo* to be the ethnic boundary that defines the Oromo. Hence, I will refer to the different groups who speak a dialect of *Afaan Oromo*, with the category Oromo.

The written *Afaan Oromo* is still not standardised. I attempt to use the most common forms of words, and these are listed in the glossary in the appendix. I could also note that I refer to Ethiopian or Eritrean scholars by their full or only their first name, since their latter name is the first name of their father. This is common in Ethiopia as well as in studies on Oromo in the West. I have not included research on Oromo that is unavailable to a western audience.

### 1.0.2. *Deities*

Concepts such as *God*, *gods*, *supernatural/spiritual beings*, *the holy*, *the numinous*, *the transcendent*, and *the sacred*, are different terms used when conceptualising the central subject of religious belief and practice. I will use the concept 'deities' when referring to *counter intuitive agency* that are subjects of belief and practice. The

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<sup>2</sup> 2008 estimates. Source: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/et.html> (08.05.08)

concept of counter intuitive agents have been developed in cognitive anthropology, following anthropologist Pascal Boyer's (2001) original formulation (see Barrett 2004; Pyysiäinen 2001). The concept, counter intuitive agents, provides some useful perspectives on how individuals understand and express religious input, and also emphasises the importance of *agency*. The concept *god* will be used as a collective term to the "highest deity" in Christianity, Islam and Waaqefanna.<sup>3</sup> I will also specify which insider concepts that are used in the different contexts.

### 1.1. Questions and structure

The main questions in this thesis are: *How are religious similarities and differences expressed, and how is diversity tackled, in plural-religious social contexts?* These questions and the material call for other questions to be asked, as for example: *Why and how* do Oromo in Norway socialise within their ethnic group? I suggest some answers based on empirical examples and theoretical reflections, both from previous studies and from my own fieldwork. My aim is to contribute to the study of Oromo, as well as put forward some perspectives on the relation between social life and religion in general.

I will in the first part of the thesis examine previous studies. Chapter two briefly presents studies on Oromo history and religions. This will provide background information to the analysis since most Oromo in Norway are first-generation immigrants from Ethiopia. Furthermore, the aim is to discuss some of the shortcomings in previous studies on inter-religious relations among Oromo. Chapter three discusses previous studies on Oromo in diaspora. The intention is to give further background information as well as stress the need for studies on religion and social interaction in the Oromo diaspora.

The second part discusses the theories and concepts that are being used in the analysis. Throughout the thesis, I will focus on religion as a social phenomenon. In chapter four, sociological theories such as *social networks*, *cultural capital*, and *interaction rituals* are presented. Chapter five discusses how we could conceptualise

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<sup>3</sup> As will be discussed later, one of the findings in my material is that Muslims, Christians, and Waaqefannas use the same names for their representations of 'god', depending on the language they use: in Afaan Oromos *Waaqa* or *Waaqayyo*; in Arabic *Allah*; in English *God*; and in Norwegian *Gud*.



‘deities’ in light of previous studies. I attempt to find a way to analyse relations to deities through experimenting with the sociological theories discussed in chapter four. Hence, a central question is: could representations of deities be analysed as part of social networks, religious capital, and interaction rituals? Furthermore, I will present a proposition on how members of plural-religious networks relate to the religious diversity.

The final part of the thesis, analyses the material based on qualitative interviews and participating observations among Oromo in Norway. Chapter six will suggest some answers the question: how are relations to deities expressed in social interaction? Through examples from different forms of rituals, I will demonstrate how both religious similarity and diversity are expressed among Oromo in Norway. In addition, this chapter provide some answers to how and why Oromo-Norwegians primarily socialise within their own ethnic group. Chapter seven will examine which strategies the respondents use when dealing with religious diversity, an analysis which is based on the proposition suggested in chapter five.

## **1.2. Methodology and material**

The intentions with my fieldwork study were (1) to learn about Oromo religions, cultures, and social structures, as well as (2) to gather material in order to analyse specific tendencies. I will discuss the process of choosing and developing a research design, through demonstrating how these two strategies contested, as well as complemented each other when collecting data.

In the initial stage of the fieldwork, I contacted an Oromo cultural association. They were helpful in answering questions and invited me to different social happenings. Because I wanted to approach religion as part of the everyday social life, I did not introduce myself as a student of religions. This, I thought, could influence both the kind of social gatherings I was invited to, as well as influence the replies to my questions. Thus, when introducing myself to the Oromo milieu, I informed that I was studying sociology and writing my master thesis on Oromo culture in the diaspora. As a result I was invited to private parties and told about traditions in relation to food and dancing – which I later realised was quite relevant material. However, people seemed to have the impression that I was interested in “specialists”

on Oromo culture and most did not want to be interviewed. Lesson learned: I should have handed out an information paper in *Afaan Oromo* that described my project and intentions with interviewing at this time. To withhold information concerning my field of study might not count as good manners. Research ethics will be briefly discussed below. It could also be noted that an information paper in Norwegian and Afaan Oromo was given to the respondents before the interviews.

Initially, the first observations were only means to come in contact with respondents. I did not want to “find what I was looking for” with instructed questions, and therefore asked open questions in the first interviews. Although both the observations and these interviews became central in my final analysis, at this stage I lacked a thematic focus. As a result, I developed a hypothesis based on social networks theory, and sought to find a way to test this through survey research. When a fieldwork in Ethiopia was made part of my project, the thought was that I could compare the results from both countries.

During a language course in Addis Ababa, I worked out questionnaires with the help of my teachers. The central problem with these questionnaires was formulating good questions concerning attitudes towards different representations of deities. My teachers seemed to have a hard time understanding exactly what my questions meant, and I could not expect respondents to understand it any better. To avoid misunderstandings on this central point, I did not pursue quantitative methods. Thus in this case, a specific question was the reason why I chose semi-structured interviews as my primary method. It could be noted that none of the respondents expressed any difficulties in understanding the question “what do you think about the concepts of god in the different religions?” I could also stress that this is a somewhat instructed question, and that the results discussed in chapter seven might look quite different if I had approached this theme with other methods or questions.

I chose to use the questionnaires as a way to start off the qualitative interviews in Norway. Hence in the five last interviews, the respondents filled out the questionnaire. This gave me an impression on their knowledge of language, social network, religious practices, and the name they use for ‘god’. As my respondents had different religious backgrounds, I experienced the information from the questionnaires to help me ask better questions.

I continued to use participating observation as a way to learn about the different Oromo contexts. On one occasion, the *Erecha* festival, I gathered material in form of photos, films, and simple statistics. The notes from the different observations revealed some tendencies in forms of social interaction, which I realised in my work with the analysis, was central to the original research topic. Furthermore, some of the answers from the interviews were concerned with the same themes. In this case, the material that I originally viewed as part of a general learning process, became important to my theoretical reflections and final analysis. In a follow-up study we may adjust the methods used in the collection of data, thus provide a larger and more detailed material.

I would also like to stress that my lack of knowledge in Afaan Oromo has been a challenging obstacle during the fieldwork. During participating observations, I had to ask the participants to understand the content of prayers, songs, or conversations. Two of the interviews were carried out with a translator, in accordance with the wish of the respondents. The respondent answered in Afaan Oromo. This was translated into Norwegian during the interview. Finally, the citations were translated into English. This is far from an ideal transcription. I decided to write the thesis in English to make it more accessible for respondents and informants. A follow-up study may for example do all the interviews in English.

Every description is the result of a certain way of looking at a material, and every collection of data is the result of certain choices of focus and methods. The sociology of religion provides perspectives both from macro and micro levels. I choose to focus on individuals' behaviour in certain situations and their expression of social and religious life. Social networks theories underline peoples' relations to each other, while interaction theories shed light on how people behave towards other people. Viewpoints from a Tylorian definition of religion bring forth people's expressions of beliefs in deities. These theoretical viewpoints, as well as supplementary perspectives from sociology and psychology were central when choosing which parts of the material relevant in the final analysis. Throughout the thesis, theories will be used as analytical tools to help us understand the material. Theories are not only useful in their original framework, but provide conceptualisations and models that could be put in new contexts. Their refinement is a relevant aspiration in itself.

Bruce Lincoln (2005) provides important insights into how history of religion should endeavour to approach its subject. However, Lincoln's (ibid.: 9) argument that "reverence is a religious, and not a scholarly virtue" does not easily coexist with ethical guidelines in qualitative interviews. I have no intentions of revealing power structures, as Bruce Lincoln seems to encourage. Still, I will theorise about the material from an *outsider* position. Arguably, the analysis lack "reverence" (cf. Lincoln) in forms of selectively and generalisation. For example, I was on several occasions encouraged to write about the *gada* system and the political situation of Oromo in Ethiopia – but choose to not focus on these topics. Some might argue that it is not ethical to categorise and generalise about the complex religiosity of the respondents from some of their statements. However, I pursue to do so in a manner that will not cause negative connotations or consequences for the respondents. Further, especially because there are few so Oromo in Norway, I do not go in detail about the respondents in order to protect their identities as much as possible. I agree with Siv Ellen Kraft's (2006: 72) argument, that research ethics is not about respecting abstract ideas or, we could add, "scientific projects." Rather, it is a matter of deference towards the lives of individuals.

Throughout the fieldwork I have attempted to understand the insider perspectives on religiosity and social life. However, throughout the work with the material I have chosen to also pursue an analytical outsider distance – in order to both explore and explain some aspects of the Oromo inter-religiosity. In this context, I could mention some of my attitudes towards theories that have influenced the analysis: I tend to favour theories that make sense to my own social experiences, as well as theories that seek to define or explain cross-cultural tendencies.

### **1.3. Previous studies**

#### *1.3.1. Tendencies in the study of deities*

In the following, I will briefly summarise what the different fields of study tell us about how people understand and relate to *deities*. Most western studies on how people relate to deities seem, until recent, to be hermeneutical studies on theology. These approaches tell us that some people are capable of theorising about deities in a

very abstract and intellectual manner (e.g. Abelsen 2006; Carman 1994; Fiorenza & Kaufman 1998; Kombo 2007). Some historical and literary studies highlight that context matters to theology (e.g. Armstrong 1993). Phenomenological studies provide perspectives on how humans cross-culturally experience deities (e.g. Eliade 1974; Bowker 2003). Psychological studies analyse how people tend to relate to deities in similar ways as to their parents (e.g. Sundén 1959; Kirkpatrick 1997). Theories on the evolution of religious belief underline that power structures and environment matters to the development of representation of deities (e.g. Swanson 1964). Discourse analyses provide perspectives on how people communicate about deities (e.g. Gilhus 2005; Højsgaard 2005). Sociological studies inform that: deities are important symbols of groups (e.g. Durkheim 1912/2001; Collins 2004); relations to deities are important to identities (e.g. Asheim 2007; Bektovic & Thostrup 2005); references to a deity are central to some civil religions (e.g. Bellah 1967; Warburg 2005). How social networks tend to influence representations of deities is implicitly demonstrated by some studies (e.g. Abelsen 2006; Asheim 2007; Iversen 2005).

Sociological, anthropological, and psychological studies claim that most people practice religion in other ways than reading about and discussing deities. Some of these studies analyse how people tend to understand deities as conscious and interactive agents (e.g. Stark & Finke 2000; Barrett 2004). Sociologist Rodney Stark (2007) argues that the social-scientific study of religion was “essentially a Godless field” during most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The main reason for this, he suggests, is the Durkheimian tradition of approaching religion primarily as rituals. One may argue that some other reasons could be: the need to differ from theology, and influence from religious elites who state that they not believe in deities. We could also note that in the social sciences, the secularisation theory may have led to a lack of interest in religions, as they were believed to vanish (Stark & Finke 2000). This could be a reason why the social importance of deities has not been given the attention it deserve.

However, it seems like deities as a social phenomenon has its revival in the study of religion – not only in sociological studies (e.g. Iversen et. al. 2005; Stark 2007) but also in cognitive studies (e.g. Barrett 2004; Boyer 2001; Pyysiäinen 2003; Tremlin 2006). As deities are central to religious belief and practice, scholars such as Stark (2007) and Todd Tremlin (2006) suggest that we need a Tylorian definition of religion instead of a Durkheimian. We might, however, need both. Edward B. Tylor’s

influential definition of religion, *belief in spiritual beings*, refers to “the one characteristic shared by all religions, great or small, ancient or modern, is the belief in spirits who think, act, and feel like human persons” (Pals 2005: 26). Émile Durkheim’s (2001) emphasis the integrating function of rituals should be included when understanding religion. I will use a simplistic definition of religion: *belief and practice in relation to deities*.

### 1.3.2. *Tendencies in the study of Oromo*

The Oromo did not have a written language until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>4</sup> and thus their history has only been preserved through the oral tradition. The earliest dissertations on the people, then called Galla<sup>5</sup>, are influenced by the Abyssinian view of the Oromo as a dangerous threat (e.g. Bahrey 1593/1954; Almeida 1643/1954; Ullendorff 1965).<sup>6</sup> Jeylan W. Hussein (2006) describes this as the traditional and *hegemonic* portrayal of the Oromo. In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, knowledge of the Oromo was still insufficient:

Yet the maps are still only approximately accurate, and in the sphere of ethnography our knowledge is still very far from adequate. This is especially true of the Galla, an important people who during the last 400 years have spread over half Ethiopia. (Huntingford 1955: 9)

The history of the peoples of Ethiopia is extremely controversial. It has been almost all written from a centralist and Imperial point of view which, for Oromos, is that of their colonisers. They have been marginalised historically as well as politically. (Baxter, Hultin & Triulzi 1996: 9)

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<sup>4</sup> Towards the end of the 19th century, Oromos ex-slaves and European missionaries formed ‘Oromos language teams’ which wrote grammar and vocabulary manuscripts using *ge’ez* script (Mekuria Bulcha 2002). Emperor Haile Selassie banned this work in 1942. “As a result, the present Oromos diaspora had to re-start literacy in their language virtually from scratch in the 1980s, using *qubee* script” (ibid.: 201). This, as well as the diversity in dialects, explains why it is still not standardised.

<sup>5</sup> The name Galla is an Amharic term, also used by Western scholars until recently. The name has negative connotations and is connected to the Abyssinian anti-Oromos discourse. See for example the Abyssinian scholar Bahrey (1593/1954: 111, 129).

<sup>6</sup> Haneke (2002) argues that this prejudice, or rather lack of knowledge, still is widespread. The example he offers is a speech by a former German Minister of Economic Cooperation: “He spoke about Ethiopia as a Christian island in an ocean of Islam. I have my doubts whether he knew that he was ignoring about 40 % of the Ethiopian population” (ibid.: 135).

Today, Oromo culture and history is subject of increasing interest, mainly characterised by historical and social anthropological approaches. Most studies focus on *one* Oromo group, like the Matcha in the west (e.g. Bartels 1983), or the Tulama in the north (e.g. Arnesen 1996). The political and religious system called *gada* has been of special interest. *Gada* is at present time only practised in modern times among the Boraan, thus this group have been subject to a number of studies (e.g. Bassi 2005; Dahl 1996; Asmarom Legesse 1973). Dissertations on pilgrim sites, big cities, or the diaspora, however, include Oromo from several geographical areas (e.g. Sorenson & Matsuoka 2001; Gemechu Geda 2007).

Mario I. Aguilar (1997) provides a brief discussion on insider/outsider-approaches in the western study of Oromo. He defines the ‘insiders’ as scholars of Oromo origin, who mainly focus on “wider processes of historical disruption in the lands pertinent to the Oromo in Ethiopia, by analyzing political processes of disruption and state formation” (ibid.: 277). Some of this literature seems to be part of an ethnic identity-building project.<sup>7</sup> Such insider-descriptions tend to see the Oromo as a united, homogeneous, and repressed group (e.g. Gadaa Melbaa 1988; Asafa Jalata 2005). Aguilar (1997) proposes that the ‘outsider’ approaches tend to focus on localized identities. We could add that studies on Oromo nationalism by insider perspectives focus on the history of the nationalism movement (e.g. Mekuria 1996; Mohammed Hassen 1996), while outsider perspectives seem to focus on the discursive content in light of theories of nationalism (e.g. Haneke 2002; Sorenson 1996).

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<sup>7</sup> “... Oromos intellectuals remain robustly confident of the vigour and strength and essential oneness of Oromos culture. They see local variations in cultural practice dialects, religion and historical experience as perhaps interesting but essentially diversionary and even irrelevant to their cause. The existence of a distinct, culturally homogeneous and autonomous Oromos nation with its own distinctive common culture is assumed as an unquestioned given.” (Baxter, Hultin & Triulzi 1996: 9)

## 2. OROMO IN ETHIOPIA

The main focus of this chapter is peaceful encounters between religious traditions in the history of Oromo. Thematic studies into inter-religiosity are the history of conversion, nationalist movements, syncretism, and pilgrim sites. I will give a presentation of early Oromo history together with studies on conversion, while a description of the modern history is followed by a short discussion of nationalism and religion. Studies on syncretism and pilgrim sites will be discussed, in an attempt to describe the complexity of religious and ethnic relations in Ethiopia today.

### 2.1. Early history

*Waaqefanna* (belief in Waaqa) is a common term for the ‘traditional’ religion of the Oromo, i.e., pre-Christian and pre-Islamic.<sup>8</sup> If we follow Robin Horton’s (1971) model of African religions, *Waaqa* could be seen as the macrocosm: Waaqa is usually represented as a male, omnipotent, and creator deity (e.g. Bartels 1983; Rikitu Mengesha 2001), thus the source of all things human (*wan nama*) and ‘more than human’ (*wan waka*) (Knutson 1967: 45). Certain places on earth are nearer to Waaqa, and humans can reach him through *ayyaana*. This might be a parallel to Horton’s concept of microcosm: *ayyaana* is often translated as mediating ‘spirits’ between the divine and humans, and explained as manifestations of Waaqa.<sup>9</sup>

Religious transitions often tie in with military conquests.<sup>10</sup> The wars between the Christian kingdoms<sup>11</sup> and the Muslim sultanates<sup>12</sup> in the 16<sup>th</sup> century caused

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<sup>8</sup> Like most African religious traditions, *Waaqefanna* does not have a literal tradition. The verbal theology is made literal in anthropological studies. Both Knut Knutsson (1967) and Lambert Bartels (1983) have done influential research among the Matcha-Oromo.

<sup>9</sup> Every human, animal, plant, geographical area, and even every day have their own *ayyaana* (Bartels 1983: 113). Some humans, such as the elder and the *qallu* (religious leaders) have a more “effective channel of communication” to the *ayyaana* and hence also to Waaqa (Knutsson 1967).

<sup>10</sup> Steven Kaplan (2004: 382) notes on the general Ethiopian context: “New populations accepted Christianity following the expansion of the Ethiopian [Abyssinian] kingdom in both the medieval (thirteenth to fifteenth century) and modern (nineteenth to twentieth century) period. Ahmed Gran’s conquest in the sixteenth century was also accompanied by the widespread acceptance of Islam.”

<sup>11</sup> According to Kaplan (2004: 376), traders and merchants were the first Christians that reached Axum. During the fourth century, Christianity became the state religion in the Axumite Empire.

<sup>12</sup> Islam came to the area in Prophet Muhammad’s own time; Muhammad’s followers came as refugees to King Adriaaz in Axum (Trimingham 1952/1976). Soon Muslim sultanates established, and the religion expanded especially in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.



devastation to the southwest areas (Pankhurst 1998). This enabled the Oromo pastoral migration, invasion and settlement in the Gibe region. During the migration, “indigenous people were absorbed and assimilated, and in the process the Oromo population expanded rapidly” (Mohammad Hassen 1993: 196).<sup>13</sup> Hence, Waaqefanna became the dominating religious tradition in some of the former Islamic sultanates. According to historian Ulrich Braukamper (1992: 200) this resulted in religious syncretism, “caused by the progressive disintegration of the orthodox Islamic cadre under the pressure from the politically dominant Oromo religion.” The invasion and assimilation of non-Oromo groups seem to be the primary reasons for the geographical and cultural diversity in what is currently one of Africa’s largest ethnic groups.

The fighting between Oromo groups and the forces of King Menelik II lasted from 1870 to 1900. As a result the Oromo lost control of their land both to the empires of Ethiopia and Great Britain.<sup>14</sup> European weaponry enabled Menelik to conquer the southern territories.<sup>15</sup> After the expansion and establishment of the Ethiopian empire, the Orthodox Church functioned as theological legitimating for the monarchy.<sup>16</sup> Churches were established across Ethiopia, as part of the process known as *Amharisation*. This policy initiated already at the end of the eighteenth century, was “aimed at assimilating the masses of the conquered Galla [Oromo] into the Christian Amharic society. This was achieved by creating a complex of pressures and inducements” (Mordechai Abir 1970: 46). Several Oromo groups converted to the state religion. During the same period, however, many Oromo groups also converted to Islam.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Mohammed (1990: 21) suggests the institution of *moggaasa*, adoption into a *gossa* (clan), as a reason why “the Oromo assimilated more than they were assimilated by others.” The new members could be Oromo and non-Oromo.

<sup>14</sup> Borana, south Oromia, became in 1934 part of the British colony Kenya. After World War II, the British gave some of this area to Ethiopia.

<sup>15</sup> Guragé, Leqa Nqaqmte, Leqa Qellem, Jemma, Gibé, Illababor, Arsi, Wallaga, Kambata, Ogaden, Bale, Sidamo, Gofa, Walamo, Kafa, Harar, Borana, Konso, Masongo, Gimirra (Pankhurst 1998:179).

<sup>16</sup> “The Ethiopian monarchs became direct descendants of King David of Israel. The clergy were believed to be the Levites of this New Israel and the hermits and the local saints acted as veritable prophets of the Old Testament” (Tadesse Tamrat referred in Eide 2000: 31).

<sup>17</sup> “In the course of history, Islam slowly increased its strength in the area, and over years the Oromo of Bale abandoned their old faith and embraced Islam.” (Østebø 2005: 25)

### 2.1.1. *Explaining conversion*

Scholar of religion Steven Kaplan (2004) discusses themes and explanations in the history of conversions in Ethiopia. With references to scholars such as J. Spencer Trimingham and Braukämper, Kaplan proposes that:

In cases in which subject populations have accepted the religion of their overlords this is explained as a result of political pressure and the high status of the conquerors; when they refuse to accept this faith this is ‘explained’ as resistance. (Kaplan 2004: 382)

Most descriptions of religious transitions among the Oromo seem to follow this model. Several scholars refer to Trimingham’s (1952/1976) explanation of conversion to Islam as a protest to the Orthodox Church and the Ethiopian empire (e.g. Gadaa 1988; Mohammed 1992; Knutsson 1969). Explanations of conversion to Orthodox Christianity however, often refer to the process of the cultural repression in the process of Amharisation (e.g. Asafa 1993; Eide 2000).

On the connection between conquest and conversion, Kaplan (2004: 382) argues, the historical sources provide descriptions of religious transitions, but *not* explanations.<sup>18</sup> It is problematic to present Oromo conversions to Orthodox Christianity as results of pressure, in contrast to ‘resistant’ conversation to Islam – especially when “empirical data cannot be obtained at this field” (Braukämper 2002: 382). There seem to be alternative, non-political, explanations for conversion. For example, technological, and organisational advantages offered by both Islam and Christianity (Kaplan 2004; Braukämper 2002).<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, religious motives should also be emphasised:

When monastic holy men confronted traditional religious practitioners in the medieval period, the powers of the pagan religious officials were not dismissed as a sham, neither was it argued

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<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, Kaplan (2004) suggests that conversion is not necessarily a result of acceptance or resistance but rather a matter of assumption of new identities following macro-changes. Kaplan argues that Horton’s (1971) micro-macro theory offers insights to the history of conversions in Ethiopia.

<sup>19</sup> Braukämper (2002) offer different explanations for conversions among Oromos in the Harär Plateau: (1) Increased sedentary farming: Islamic culture with its “far-reaching commercial links and its supra-tribal cosmopolitan orientation represented an attractive model” (110). (2) Pressure from the Somali. (3) Peaceful mission by the rulers of Harär; military mission by the colonial Egyptian rulers.

that they were irrelevant to the issue at hand. ... Christianity was portrayed as a more powerful religion, rather than one with essentially different agenda. (Kaplan 2004: 384)

The success of Islam in the east, Braukämper (2002) argues, was to a considerable extent initiated the shrines of Muslim saints (*awliya*) as well as by peaceful mission by the rulers of Harar. Anthropologist Abbas Haji Gnamo (2002) refers to the syncretistic tendencies in the previously Islamic areas, and suggests an explanation for why some Oromo groups chose Christianity while others converted to Islam:

Perhaps one could argue that elsewhere in Oromo country, for instance among the Tulama and the Matcha, where ancient Islamic influences did not exist, the expansion of the Christian faith appeared smooth and unopposed. On the contrary, among the Arsi and the Oromo of Harar where there was an old Islamic presence, Christianity failed to get a foothold. The majority of the Oromo became Muslims after the colonization and subjugation of their country (Abbas 2002: 107-108)

This seems to be a more plausible explanation than the persistence/pressure-model. However, it does not explain why the people in question converted, or the following results – or why some groups did *not* convert to Islam or Christianity. All in all, conversion, religious belief and practice are seldom discussed as micro-phenomena.

## 2.2. Modern history

The policy of Amharisation continued during the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie (1930-1973).<sup>20</sup> For example, the main features of Oromo culture, Waaqefanna, the *gada*-system, and Afaan Oromo (language) were repressed. According to historian Muhammad Hassen (1996: 74), only a few Oromo were educated in the 1940s and 1950s. They were mainly Amharised Christians – yet not treated as equals by the Amhara ruling elites (ibid.). These individuals reacted against the Ethiopian state, “turned to their roots”, and formed the first Oromo nationalist movements.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> This indicates the Emperor’s Janus face: He symbolised a free Africa for the rest of the world, while for the Oromo population he was just another ruler in a line of colonisers.

<sup>21</sup> “They turned to their roots in reaction to an unbridled policy of Amharization, not to mention their realization of the legal, economic, political, social and cultural policies that affected the Oromo. It was

The formation of the *Macha-Tulama Self-Help Association* in 1963-64 and the Bale peasant revolt are early manifestations of Oromo nationalism.<sup>22</sup> Urbanisation and education among the Oromo in the 1950s and 1960s were the main reasons for the organisation of the fragmented local groups of resistance into larger movements (Asafa 2004; Mekuria 1996; Mohammed 1996). People from different parts of Oromia met through organisations and universities, and discovered that they “shared a common language with little differences in dialect, had similar experiences from the colonial establishment and a common desire for respect for their dignity and identity” (Mekuria 1996: 61). This initiates the ‘rediscovering’ or ‘inventing’<sup>23</sup> of the Oromo nation.

Seemingly, the Evangelical Christian movement has been important to the development of an Oromo identity, especially concerning the development of written Afaan Oromo (see Gilchrist 2003; Mekuria 2002). According to theologian Øyvind Eide (2000), the Evangelical churches in Ethiopia have been some of the fastest growing churches in Africa. Eide argues that both Evangelical Christianity and Islam could be seen as critical responses to Amharisation as well as to communism.

Many Oromo welcomed the communist revolution and the fall of Haile Selassie in 1974. However, after a brief time with cultural liberty, the Marxist military regime, often called the *Derg*, “continued with the old imperial policy of ‘national integration’ or national-building through Amharization” (Mekuria 1996:64). The Derg confiscated all land, controlled the labour (Asafa 2004: 87), and “unleashed a military and political reign of terror against its real and imagined opponents” (Ofcansky 1993:17). During and after the communist era, the Orthodox Church was generally still supporting and supported by the elite in power (Eide 2000). Muslims however, were still regarded as “second-class citizens” (ibid.: 35).

The fall of the Derg in 1991, seem to be marked by increases in both cultural and political liberty for the different peoples of Ethiopia. The new politics to assert

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the conflict between the ruling Amhara elites and the educated Oromo within the Ethiopian establishment that turned the latter towards the Oromo issue” (Mohammed Hassen 1996: 75).

<sup>22</sup> It could be noted that although the *Association* and the Bale revolt were connected, they followed different patterns.

<sup>23</sup> Mekuria Bulcha argues that the description of Oromo history as “invented”, is rhetorical strategy used in the academic and political discourse, “connected with the erroneous belief that Ethiopia is an ancient and immutably natural entity” (1996:49). Nevertheless, I agree with Sorenson and Matsuoka (2001: 197): “we are not singling out Oromo identity as false in contrast to other identities that are true; rather, we are pointing out how all such identities are fictions and politically motivated apparitions.”

the rights for the diverse religious and ethnic groups has led to several developments in the Islamic community (Østebø 2007).<sup>24</sup> This in its turn led to the emergence of several Islamic movements, the Salafi movements being the most notable (ibid.). Furthermore, the country was divided into nine regional states, among them: Oromia.

Anthropologist John Abbink (2006: 174) argues “that post-1991 Ethiopia saw significant political institution building and that a public ethos of democracy emerged.” However, the political situation is still controlled by the ruling coalition of Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) and Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). According to Abbink, the process of democracy has “a high ingredient of rhetoric not backed by practice.” Sociologist Siegfried Pausewang (2007: 65) notes how international observers “unanimously agree that the public atmosphere before the 2005 [parliamentary] election was much more open, inclusive, and democratic than any time before.” However, disagreements about the votes ended in violent public demonstrations. Several of the opposition politicians were arrested and not released until the summer of 2007.

### **2.3. Oromo nationalism and religion**

The harsh treatment of the southern peoples after the Ethiopian invasion stands as a national trauma for the Oromo. Several studies on the Oromo refer to the historical oppression (e.g. Gadaa 1988), and it seems to be a central theme in the Oromo nationalist discourse (see Sorenson & Matsuoka 2001). This may be both the primary reason for the development of nationalist organisation as well as an important theme in the discourse. I will focus upon one of the results of the nationalist movement: the cooperation between Oromo Christians, Muslims, and Waaqefanna.

Mohammed Hassen (1996) describes how the *Macha-Tulama Self-Help Association* developed from being an organisation in the region Shawa, to a “Pan-Oromo” movement – initiated by a meeting held on 1966 in the Arsi region:

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<sup>24</sup> “As a consequence, restrictions on *hajj* and the ban on import of religious literature were lifted, confinement on construction of mosques was removed and Islamic organisations and newspapers and magazines were legalised.” (Østebø 2007: 5)

There tens of thousands of Oromo from different regions, both Muslims and Christians, met and discussed how they were all subjected to harsh economic exploitation and political oppression. ... Muslims ate meat slaughtered by Christians and Christians ate meat slaughtered by Muslims. This was an unheard of event in Ethiopia, which outraged the Amhara ruling elites. (Mohammed 1996: 76)

This exemplifies how the nationalist movement stressed unity among the diverse Oromo groups. Abbas Haji Gnamo (2002: 99) proposes that because Muslims, Christians and traditional believers share the idea of Oromo nationalism, this “entail[s] that the path of Oromo nationalism is founded on twin policies: secularism and tolerance.”<sup>25</sup> For example, the Oromo Liberation Front, which grew out of the Association, states that it “respects religious equality and pursues secular policy.”<sup>26</sup> A shared monotheistic belief seems to be emphasised in the Oromo nationalist discourse. Gadaa Melbaa (1988) writes for example:

Before the introduction of Christianity and Islam, the Oromo people practiced their own religion. They believed in one Waaqayoo which approximated to the English word God. They never worshipped false gods or carved statues and substitutes. (Gadaa 1988: 19)

My impression is that Waaqefanna is given a central position in the political discourse of Oromo culture. For example, several scholars provide short introductions of Waaqa, *ayyana*, and the systems of *gada* and *qallu* (e.g. Gedaa 1988; Rikitu 2001). Furthermore, the celebration of *Erecha* in Busheftu (Debre Zeyet) is a popular event with clear tendencies of Oromo nationalism (pers.com. Marit Østebø 2008). In the recent years, this celebration has been dominated by young and urban participants, which sing nationalist songs and wear t-shirts with the Oromo flag and the map of Oromia (ibid.).

Sociologist Georg Haneke (2002) argues that the criteria of an Oromo identity in the nationalist movement are: common language, history, system of social structure (*gada*), and consciousness of belonging to a discriminated group. Haneke “tests” the nationalist discourse of a united identity on the general Oromo population, and argues

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<sup>25</sup> Abbas Haji Gnamo argues that Oromo nationalism is based on secularism but he seems to suggest this as an “appropriate position,” and do not support this with empirical material.

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.oromoliberationfront.org/OLFPolicies.htm> (08.04.08)

that the outlined criteria are unfulfilled as the Oromo identity is multidimensional.<sup>27</sup> Anthropologist Paul Baxter however, proposes that the Oromo nationalist movement has succeeded to gathering the population around a common identity: “Oromo are now confirmed and comfortable in their identity” (Baxter 1998: 58). I will not go into detail in these questions, as the general Oromo population is a topic far beyond the scope of this thesis, but note that there seems to be a need for further examination of the Oromo nationalistic discourse – both of its characteristics and influence.

#### **2.4. Changes and continuity**

Returning to the question of religious transitions we should note their gradual changes and tendencies of syncretism. Kaplan (2004: 376) argues that we should not “posit the existence of a ‘pure’, unchanging, eternal form of a particular” religion.

[T]hroughout Ethiopian history membership in its monotheistic religious communities was open to a broad range of believers and practitioners, who were not necessarily required to completely abandon earlier religious traditions. (Kaplan 2004: 375)

Anthropologist Mario I. Aguilar’s (1995; 1996) examines how Waaqefanna have survived and coexisted with the new religion (Islam), among the Waso Boorana (Oromo) in Kenya. He emphasises the politics of unity known as *Nagaa* (peace of *Boorana*). This is maintained through different rituals in the larger community and in the homes. “The whole societal life and subsistence of the Waso Borana is related to the caring and growth of their herds” (Aguilar 1996: 191). Some of the animals are kept near the settlements (*manyatta*), while others leave this area during the day. Men take care of the cattle, while women remain near the house and the *manyatta*. This is important for two reasons: Women play an important role in the domestic rituals, while Muslim religious practices are the main focus in the outside, public and male-dominated sphere. This diversification is the basis for the *coexistence* of different religious traditions.

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<sup>27</sup> When it comes to religion, Haneke (2002:149) argues that Islamisation renders Oromos less interested in their ethnic identity: “They are more focused on identities which are closer to Mekka than Finfinne [Addis Ababa].” He does not support this claim with empirical material nor does he discuss what this tells us about the relation between ethnicity and religion in Ethiopia.

Aguilar (1995) discusses Robin Horton's (1971) theory on African conversion, arguing that the Oromo cosmology fits Horton's description of a microcosmic dimension.

I would argue that the Waso Boorana had to change their way of explaining the world because of their isolation from the other Boorana in Ethiopia. From a microcosm, that of the Oromo people, the Waso Boorana had to change to a macrocosm, a larger British and Somali construction of the world. Their lesser beings, the *ayyaana*, and the manifestations of 'divinity' were identified with spirits and manifestations in the Islamic/Somali religious system, for example the *jinn*. (Aguilar 1995: 531)

Aguilar implies<sup>28</sup> that the “supreme being” (Waaqa), was identified with the similar representation of divinity in Islam (Allah). Through the variety of ritual practices discussed above, Aguilar proposes, the Waso Boorana was able to keep the peace (*nagaa*) within the community, as well as to “keep the flow of blessings in the *manyatta* and therefore maintain the right relationship between the Waso Boorana community and God” (1995: 536).

## 2.5. Pilgrimage sites

Pilgrimage sites make good examples of how people from different religious traditions and ethnic groups interact in ritual practices. Anthropologist Alula Pankhurst (1994) demonstrates how pilgrimages cut across political, ethnic, linguistic, as well as religious boundaries. The latter, he argues, seem to be the most frequent.

In the shrines of *awliya* in the Harar area, ethnic as well as religious barriers are surmounted: Orthodox Christians visit the Muslim shrines in Carcar, and Muslims visits the Christian pilgrimage centre in Qullubi Gabre'el (Braukämper 2002: 122).

The sanctuary of Shaik Husayn is an important Muslim pilgrimage site in Ethiopia – sometimes referred to as “the poor man's Mecca.” Pankhurst (1994: 941) categorises this as a pilgrimage site where one of the “monotheistic religions transforms indigenous beliefs and supplants them, often adopting an existing shrine and sometimes some of the former practices.” Braukämper (2002: 143) argues that as

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<sup>28</sup> I say “implies” because Aguilar (1995) does not explicit propose this correlation, but suggests it in footnote 19.



the Waaqefanna cult of *abba muda*<sup>29</sup> declined, its followers found a “substitute” in the cult of Shaik Husayn. He further notes that the shrine does not create unity among the Oromo, but among the Muslims.<sup>30</sup>

Pankhurst (1994: 941) categorises the twentieth century *Faraqasa*<sup>31</sup> as a pilgrimage “where new cults emerge which merge elements of several religious traditions, although usually one predominates.” The explanation offered for this syncretism, is the religious belonging of the founder Ayyo Momina and her family, who “moved between Christianity and Islam creating their own blend” (ibid.: 939). *Faraqasa* have Muslim, Christian, and Waaqefanna visitors. Anthropologist Gemechu Geda (2007: 31) indicates that his informants’ understandings of Ayyo Momina’s religious background run parallel with their own religious traditions. In these studies, it is not clear if it is possible to identify the religious belonging of the participants by names, practices, or beliefs.

The already mentioned *Erecha* festival takes place at lake Hora Arseddi in the end of September every year. Meskerem Assegued (2004: 53–54) notes that: “The majority of the worshippers are also followers of Christianity and Islam. Mostly, but not exclusively, these worshippers are from the Oromo ethnic group.” Pankhurst categorises *Erecha* as a site where

traditional religion may continue to exist while accommodating pilgrims who have either a nominal or real allegiance to one of the monotheist religions. ... Here we see that for many pilgrims there are no contradiction between allegiance to traditional religion and Christianity. (Pankhurst 1994: 941)

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<sup>29</sup> *Abba muda* (the “father of anointment”) was the title of the spiritual leader in Waaqefanna and a centre of pilgrimage (Braukämper 2002).

<sup>30</sup> “Within their kinsmen in other parts of Ethiopia they share their language, certain traditions and a common historical fate within Ethiopia during the past hundred years. But culturally they have almost more in common with the neighbouring Somali than with the western and central Oromo. ... The saint stays as a symbol of the solidarity of all Northeast African Muslims across ethnic and political boundaries and particularly for the close Oromo-Somali connections in Bale.” (Braukämper 2002: 146)

<sup>31</sup> *Faraqasa* is a pilgrimage center in Arsi. It seems first and foremost to be a healing centre. Some understand Momina and her successors to be a “sorcerer and a witch while others perceived her as a mediator between God and men” (Gemechu 2007: 65). The intermediate power is by some understood to be *karama* (spiritual power). Others “claimed that the leaders relied on prayers in the name of Allah so that Allah would bestow mercy on the patient” (Gemechu 2007: 65).

In this context, recall Kaplan's argument: we should not posit the existence of "pure" forms of religions. This also goes for individual religious belief and practice, as in the example of the Erecha.

Meskerem (2004) gives a short presentation on the *ayyaana* cult in Busheftu. Lomi Deme is a religious leader, or high priestess, who both leads the Erecha festival and is the medium for the *ayyaana Gurecha Arsedi*. She does not give a detailed description of the participants, but implies that this religious tradition will not seize with younger generation. This, however, does not correlate with the general tendencies in celebration of Erecha in the recent years. To conclude, pilgrimage sites in Ethiopia gather people from disparate religious traditions. Thus we could be inclined to ask: what are the visitors' attitudes towards the different religious groups?

## 2.6. Summary

Waaqefanna is the traditional Oromo religion, transmitted to non-Oromo groups during the migration, and partly replaced by Islam and Christianity after the Ethiopian conquest. The reasons for conversion are usually presented as political pressure or resistance. Some scholars put forward technological and organisational advantages as reasons for conversion. Religious motives are also suggested, for example peaceful mission and demonstrations of the 'power' of the deities in question. Although these explanations could be analysed as micro-phenomena, few scholars attempt to do so.

In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Oromo from different religions and regional areas discovered their cultural similarities and common political interests. This resulted in forming of nationalist movements. Although some studies argue that religious tolerance is one of the characteristics of Oromo nationalism, there seem to be a need for studies that discuss the role of this inter-religious cooperation in the movement. What does, for example, religious tolerance tell us about the individuals or groups in question?

Studies on pilgrimage sites describe tendencies of religious tolerance and ethnic "blending." Muslims, Christians, and Waaqefanna participants gather in different forms of shrines and pilgrimage centres. However, the studies neither discuss this nor describe how the different group interact. It is interesting to note that pilgrimage sites are popular in Ethiopia, since this indicates how the country represent a geographical, social, as well as religious common ground for Oromo in diaspora.

### 3. OROMO IN DIASPORAS

I refer to diaspora ... as an imagined connection between a post-migration (including refugee) population and a place of origin and with people of similar cultural origins elsewhere. By “imagined” I do not mean such connections might not be actual. Rather, by this I emphasize the often strong sentiments and mental pictures according to which members of diaspora organize themselves and undertake their cultural practices. (Vertovec 2004: 282)

Through previous studies on the Oromo diaspora, I will attempt to illustrate how Oromo, living outside of what they recognise as their home country, constitute a diaspora, following the definition suggested by Steven Vertovec (above). Studies on Norway as an immigrant society will not be presented – not because I do not find it important, but rather because I want to keep a focus on the topic of the final analysis: social interaction within the Oromo community. I will also present some of the reasons for and experiences of migration described by previous studies.

#### 3.1. Emigration

Sociologist Mekuria Bulcha (2002) provides a historical study of Oromo migration. As this study focuses on the push-factors for emigration, Mekuria presents the history of the Oromo in relation to the Ethiopian state. Some of his main points concerning the last twenty years will be presented.

The actions of the Derg (1974–1991) forced a considerable number of Oromo out of the country; about 500, 000 emigrated from Ethiopia in this period. In the 1990s Oromo emigration was mainly a result of the government’s discrimination and repression of the opposition:

Oromo organizations and civilians have been the primary targets of the present Ethiopian government. Since 1992, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and other international and local human rights organizations have reported extra-judicial political killings, disappearances, arbitrary detentions, and torture and rape of detainees. (Mekuria 2002:170–1)

These forms of discrimination will be understood as *push*-factors in the making of the Oromo diaspora. Mekuria does not discuss *pull*-factors to migration.<sup>32</sup> Studies on individualistic reasons for migration might be needed to better understand this question.

Mekuria uses literature, music, and art produced by refugees as the material to understand the life in exile. When it comes to the experience of migration, he emphasises expressions of loss: “Often, the individual’s separation from his/her social and geographical environment causes severe emotional distress” (ibid.: 176–177).

### **3.2. Diaspora communities**

Mekuria describes how Oromo refugees around the world have organised themselves in different kinds of organisations.<sup>33</sup> He also notes how many Oromo in the diaspora have “assumed the responsibility of challenging the myths that denigrate Oromo identity and justifying Ethiopian colonialism” (ibid.: 190). This has become an object of critique and is by many outsiders seen as nationalistic or ‘tribalist’ (ibid.: 198). The study discussed in the following exemplifies this.

#### *3.2.1. Ghostly spaces of exile*

Sociologists John Sorenson and Atsuko Matsuoka (2001) examine how Eritrean, Ethiopian, and Oromo ethnic identities are reaffirmed or restructured in a North American context. Through Avery Gordon’s (1997) metaphor of the deterritorialised space of exile as *haunted*, Sorenson and Matsuoka (2001) demonstrate how ghosts and shadows of the past influence the present. The Oromo’ concern for their home country is explained through their continuing contact with relatives, informal networks and communities. Furthermore, some Oromo “perceive themselves to be in a state of indefinite exile, and assume they will return to their original homes once an

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<sup>32</sup> Economical differences between African and European countries often are seen as main reasons for migration. This perspective typically entails that the individual emigrant is part of a larger family, or social network, which often together decides the process of migration (Fuglerud 2001:23). If one family-member moves to the West or to the East, the money she earns often benefits large parts of the family in the original country.

<sup>33</sup> Some examples are: radio programme in Afaan Oromo in Somalia; Union of Oromo Students in Europe (1974); Union of Oromos of North America (1974); networks of Oromo self-help associations in Djibouti and Saudi-Arabia; Oromo Relief Association in Sudan (1981).

independent Oromo state has been established” (ibid.: 170). Sorenson and Matsuoka present some elements of Oromo nationalist discourse among “those long-distance nationalists who are calling for the creation of an independent state of the Oromo” (ibid.: 169). The material is mainly from meetings held by the Oromo Studies Association (OSA) between 1989 and 1994.

Some of the suggested characteristics of the nationalist discourse correlate with studies written by Oromo in diaspora. For example the “emphasis on a ghostly but fundamental ethnic identity hidden beneath an externally imposed foreign culture” (ibid.: 184). Differences between Abyssinians and Oromo are stressed in the OSA meetings (see also Gadaa 1988; Asafa 1996). Furthermore, the central role of *gada* and language to this academic national movement: “Given that Oromiffa was mainly a spoken language until the 1970s, some Oromo intellectuals have concentrated on collecting oral poetry” (Sorenson & Matsuoka 2001: 181). Both Abdullahi A. Shongolo (1996) and Mekuria (2002) emphasise the importance of poems in their publications, while other studies focus on the *gada* system (e.g. Gadaa 1988; Rikitu 2001; Asafa 1993). While past glory and trauma play central roles in the nationalist discourse, Sorenson and Matsuoka (2001: 175) also note how present persecution and isolation is emphasised.

Sorenson and Matsuoka (2001) argue that there is a tendency in the Oromo diaspora to underemphasise differences or disagreements. In the case of OSA, the participants avoid discussing internal divisions as well as alternative associations and meetings such as the Union of Oromo in North America (UONA).

The processes of active forgetting have made participants at the main OSA conference reluctant to discuss these alternative meetings, in large part because they want to present the Oromo community as unified. (Sorenson and Matsuoka 2001: 173)

With reference to former OSA secretary Hamdesa Tusso, the disagreements between OUNA and OSA are described as “based on personal ambitions and on regional and religious divisions in Oromo diaspora communities”. Although this is not elaborated we should note how the “religious tolerance” previously discussed, might not be a general characteristic of the Oromo nationalist movement.

### 3.2.2. *Social interaction*

Sorenson and Matsuoka (2001: 187) argue that the experience of the immigrants' new contexts should be seen as an important influence to the nationalist movement in the diaspora: First-generation immigrants in North America face both cultural differences and growing racism. They understand this as “factors that constitute them as undesirable visible minorities and that obstruct their integration into the host societies” (ibid.: 170). This could be seen in correlation to the following description of social interaction in the OSA meetings:

Especially for those who live in North American cities lacking organized Oromo communities, OSA meetings offer a space for social interaction with people who are considered to be ‘the same’ in fundamental ways, and a chance to speak one’s own language, reconnect with friends, reminisce, and exchange information on various topics, which are not necessarily restricted to political events in Ethiopia. These activities are made even more pleasant by performances by Oromo singers, bands, and dancers. (Sorenson & Matsuoka 2001: 187)

Sorenson and Matsuoka (2001) note how the OSA meetings offer social interaction between people who have something in common. *What* do they have in common? Most are in some way concerned about the Oromo; some of them are friends from before; most share the same mother tongue and cultural preferences. Oromo in the diaspora do not simply share an “ethnic identity”, but also share knowledge and preferences in language, customs, music, dance, and so forth. This could explain reasons for socialisation in the Oromo diaspora, as well as the arguments used in Oromo nationalism.

### 3.2.3. *Gathering for coffee*

Janet Yedes, Robbin Clamons, and Amal Osman (2004) represent, as far as I know, the only study on religion in the Oromo diaspora. They note that a group of Muslim Oromo women in the USA keep contact with each other per telephone and visits, and demonstrate how they gather for the ritual of *buna qala* “coffee slaughter”. Forms of greetings are given special attention.

The intensity and number of cheek-kissing exchanges correlates with respect, intensity of feelings between the women, importance of certain moments in life, as well as closeness of family members and friends after time apart. (Yedes et al. 2004: 687)

Yedes et al. explain that greetings reflect the importance of relationships in the East African cultures. They refer to Baxter (1990: 244) who understands greetings as a way to “renew and reinforce sentiments of group membership.”<sup>34</sup> They further propose that asking about family, health, and well-being is common in East Africa. “Relationships are very important in these cultures, and asking about each other’s family and friends shows fundamental respect” (Yedes et al. 2004: 691). We might note that relationships and greetings are very important in most cultures. The next chapter will present some theories on interaction and relations.

The greetings initiated the *buna qala*: “the coffee beans and spices are roasted, ground, and prepared with water in an earthen pot” (ibid.: 691). A prayer is translated into English to exemplify the prayer given at the beginning of the ritual:

May this coffee ceremony reach the spirits that like coffee and those in our country and those here in this country. ... May Allah bestow mercy on the souls of the dead and wealth on the living. (Citation in Yedes et al. 2004: 692)

These introducing lines, Yedes et al. (ibid: 293) argue, “explicitly express a request that the *awliyyaa* ‘saints’ be reached.” In Oromo groups across regional and religious groups, “the importance of peace and the supplication of God’s help is characteristically associated with coffee” (ibid.: 694). Sharing sustenance is a central element in *buna*, and some food is also shared with the *awliyya* by spreading it on the floor. Yedes et al. propose that this is “ceremonial and has ritual value for the women” and that “the importance of sharing sustenance is also typical for all Oromo” (ibid.: 696). However, they do not argue what the concept of ‘ritual value’ implies. Further, they do not comment how the importance of sharing sustenance is a cross-cultural phenomenon.

Yedes et al. note that the coffee traditions are common in the different Oromo groups in Ethiopia, and argue that the Oromo in America have brought with them the

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<sup>34</sup> IBaxter refers to Arnold Van Gennep (1960).

*buna* tradition “as succor for the spirits of the people during times of change in the diaspora” (ibid.: 677). They do not discuss how coffee traditions function as succor or what this implies. Arguably, it is the social gathering and relations to deities that function as a succor – not the coffee tradition *per se*. This will be further discussed, but I will first provide an impression of Oromo in the Norwegian context.

### 3.3. The Ethiopian population in Norway

Persons with background from Ethiopia after immigration-category. Absolute numbers 1.1.2006

Immigration-category	All	Male	Female
The immigrant population	3 185	1 717	1 468
First generation immigration without Norwegian background	2 670	1 449	1 221
Descendants	515	268	247
Born in Norway with a foreign parent	307	155	152

Source: Henriksen (2007)<sup>35</sup>

Statistics on people from Ethiopia in Norway do not differentiate between the ethnic groups. Therefore, I will give a presentation of the whole Ethiopian population. Kristin Henriksen’s (2007) report *Fakta om 18 innvandregrupper i Norge (Facts on 18 immigration groups in Norway)* makes some notifications on the Ethiopian population: Most have lived in Norway for a short period of time (about 5 years); few are Norwegian citizens; they are relatively young (in their thirties and forties). The level of education is very high among the men and very low among the women. This, however, does not affect the employment rate, as this is almost the same for both sexes. More than one third lives in Oslo, that is 1346 Ethiopian immigrants, and the most populous counties have relatively large Ethiopian populations: Rogaland (480), Hordaland (285) and Akershus (260).

Henriksen emphasises the Eritrean-Ethiopian war, when she explains high numbers of immigrants in certain periods. She does not discuss the relations between different ethnic groups and the Ethiopian state. In 1991 the Eritrean war of independence was put to an end, thus the number of refugees fell accordingly. The

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<sup>35</sup> Henriksen (2007) found these numbers in *Befolkningsstatistikk, Statistisk sentralbyrå*.



fall of the communist regime in 1991 could also be an important reason why the number of political refugees decreased. In 1998 the territorial dispute over the town Badme led to a new conflict, which again led to a high number of refugees (ibid.). However, this could also be related to the general elections in 2000. The same could be said about the high number of refugees in 2005 – which was a year with election disagreements and new increased intensity in the Eritrea conflict.

### *3.3.1. The Oromo population in Norway*

Kebebew Negera's thesis *Identity and forced migration* (2002) is, as far as I know, the only study on the Oromo population in Norway. Kebebew has done qualitative interviews with Oromo on the causes of migration and their experiences in Norway.

The interviews and the life histories information reveal the economic background of the refugees prior to their flight and their social background indicate that they were from middle class society, and sustained their life without economic hardship. According to them it has been oppression of what is called 'colonialism' that hampers them not to live peacefully and use their resources and professions appropriately. (Kebebew 2002: 73)

Kebebew identifies a lack of cultural rights and political control over Oromia, as the root causes of migration. He argues that his respondents' engagement with music and development of written Afaan Oromo, has "contributed to internal displacement and flight" (ibid.: 86). The immediate causes of migration are described as more concrete actions with migration as the final reaction. Kebebew's respondents explain how the EPRDF-military<sup>36</sup> has caused them imprisonment, torture, intimidation, confiscation of property, and death threats, and how this – in different ways – leads them to the decision to leave the country (ibid: 87-103).

The respondents inform that they miss their old life (cf. Mekuria 2002) – and explain how they experience lack of social interaction with the Norwegian community (cf. Sorenson & Matsuoka 2001):

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<sup>36</sup> The Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)

The social network system is limited here in Norway. If individualism is a culture, with whom can we practice language? This also makes a refugee's life difficult. Oromos have a communal social system in which we share sadness, happiness, and eat together. I grew up in such a social life, culture and environment. Here I do not know even who is living next to my room. (Respondent cited in Kebebew 2002: 120)

Kebebew further points out how distances in the Oromo diaspora are problematic for social life: "Most refugees were resettled far away from each other. This makes it difficult to meet physically to practice the social life they are acquainted with" (ibid.). Learning a new language and being dependent on social support are described as difficult and as causes of mental stress. Kebebew highlights loss of social networks as a reason for the respondents' wishes to return to Ethiopia. He also proposes that for some Oromo refugees the "return to homeland is perceived as a return to serve the home community" (ibid.: 136).

The respondents explain how their life in Norway is safe and gives opportunities to still engage in political questions concerning the Oromo. They have organised into a diaspora community in order "to address the plights of the Oromo people in the homelands" (ibid.: 114). Most of the respondents call for international attention to the Oromo situation:

The reasons why I left my country requires recognitions, needs more attention, and publicized to the Norwegian society and international community (...) I am here only physically to save my life, but I am always thinking about the situation in the homeland. If this problem is solved, I hope that I will return to the homeland. (Respondent cited in Kebebew 2002: 129)

As a way of promoting the "plight of the Oromo", Kebebew argues, Oromo-Norwegians stage culturally primed events and publications. Other than this, Kebebew does not discuss culture among Oromo in Norway. Religion is not mentioned at all.

### **3.4. Summary**

Migration from Ethiopia is usually presented as results of flight from the government's discrimination and repression. Experiences of loss and disruption are stressed in some studies, while others focus on how Oromo in diaspora gather for

social interaction. Sorenson and Matsuoka's study on the OSA meetings describes how Oromo nationalism is similar to other national discourses, for example its emphasis on ethnic unity and symbols that differentiate the group from other (e.g. *gada*, Afaan Oromo). Furthermore, the discourse described in the OSA meetings seems to correlate with several of the studies written by Oromo scholars.

The study of Oromo in Norway provides some characteristics of the diaspora community. Kebebew argues that geographical distances make social interaction between Oromo difficult. He also notes that the respondents experienced learning a new language as difficult. I will pursue these issues in the following.

The only study of religion in the Oromo diaspora offers some insight as to how cultural and religious continuity is achieved in a diaspora context. How the *buna qala* ritual functions as a social meeting place is not discussed. How the participants relate to the *awliyyaa*, Allah, and the Prophet Muhammed is also not examined. Arguably, we might benefit from using analytical tools more finely tuned to religious beliefs and practices.

## 4. INTERACTION, NETWORKS AND CAPITAL

In the previous chapters, we have seen different examples of how culture and socio-political environment influence each other. For example, military conquests are often followed by religious change, and Oromo migration has resulted in organisations of diaspora communities. I will examine a range of theories on how individuals make social choices that correlate with their *cultural capital*. An important question addressed in this chapter is whether we should differentiate between religious and non-religious culture. Is it, for example, helpful to distinguish between religious and secular interaction? I will discuss how social encounters could be analysed as rituals; groups as situational and centred on different forms of symbols. How is social interaction important to relations, and what does this mean in the diaspora context?

### 4.1. Social choices

The image I have is a set of points some of which are joined by lines. The points of the image are people, or sometimes groups, and the lines indicate which people interact with each other. We can of course think of the whole social life as generating a network of this kind. (Barnes 1954: 43)

According to psychologist Inge Bø and sociologist Per Morten Schiefloe (2007: 49), *social networks* consist of relatively voluntary relations between individuals or other units, like groups or institutions. They further argue that relations between individuals are characterised by lasting expectations. These expectations are formed by restrictions and derivatives in the social context. This is often referred to as *structure*, while the individual intentions and actions are referred to as *agency* (ibid.: 50–52). Even though structure forms the social context for relations, the individuals stand relatively free to choose which relations to establish, maintain, and end (ibid.: 79). These choices are influenced by the mental, emotional, or material “profit” provided by the relation. Bø and Schiefloe point out two dimensions in social choices: the

instrumental (cost versus benefit)<sup>37</sup> and the emotional.

Bø and Schiefloe (2007: 81–85) present several theories on how people choose social relations.<sup>38</sup> For example, reduced physical distance increases the chances of social interaction. Exposure often leads to affinity; the more you get to know people the more you like them. We tend to relate to people who are similar to us, and people in close relations tend to become more similar to each other. Similarity could be personality characteristics, language, economic situation, etc. For example, immigrants often socialise within their ethnic group (ibid.:108). I understand *cultural capital* as a good way to approach this tendency.

## 4.2. Forms of capital

Social networks are important to us not only because we tend to enjoy the company of others, but also because our commensals provide important resources. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1986: 248) conceptualises this as *social capital* – “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network.”<sup>39</sup> The total qualitative and quantitative size of a network decides the amount of social capital. Through other people we have access to economic, symbolic, and cultural capital. I will focus on the latter in the following.

Cultural capital can exist in three forms: in the *embodied state*, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the *objectified state*, in the form of cultural goods ... and in the *institutionalized state*. (Bourdieu 1986: 243)

The embodied cultural capital is most often achieved through socialisation. We learn languages, social behaviour, and status codes from our parents and other people around us. “The accumulation of cultural capital in the embodied state ... costs time,

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<sup>37</sup> Collins (2004: 143-145) discusses some of the problems with a cost-benefit model: there are classes of behavior escape this model; there is no common metric; individuals seem to do very little calculating. He concludes on the other hand, that: “The theory’s main proposition is that behavior moves toward those courses of action that give greatest return of benefit over cost; individual’s behavior should be ‘rational’ in this sense in the medium run, but it is not necessarily given how they arrive at this line of behavior” (ibid.: 145).

<sup>38</sup> Bø and Schiefloe refer to different studies that demonstrate these tendencies.

<sup>39</sup> “The volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected.” (Bourdieu 1986: 249)

time which must be invested personally by the investor” (ibid.: 244). This is important to language in the case of immigrants: while ones’ mother tongues are embodied from an early age, learning a new language as an adult costs time and investments. To immigrants, language might be the central cultural capital and a main reason why ethnic groups socialise.

*Objectified* cultural capital, like certain types of clothes, books, etc., presupposes economic capital. While the embodied cultural capital is the premise for the value one attached to the material (Bourdieu 1986: 247). In the case of *religious* capital, one could easily buy a crucifix but one would need the embodied belief to value it.

#### 4.2.1. *Religious capital*

**Religious capital** consists of the *degree of mastery and attachment to a particular body of religious culture*. ... through practice and social reinforcement people come to value their religious culture, to invest in it emotionally. (Stark 2007: 165, bold and italics in the original)

I understand religious capital<sup>40</sup> to be a certain kind of embodied cultural capital. It is difficult to differentiate between religious and non-religious capital, they are in many ways inherently linked. Still, it could be helpful to make a distinction, for instance if we are interested in analysing people who share cultural capital, but not necessarily religious capital. In the proceeding text, I will refer to religious capital as the mastery of and attachment to *beliefs in and practices towards deities*. Hence, we might call beliefs and practices that are not directly related to deities, ‘secular’ capital, as for example language.

Sociologist Rodney Stark (2007) argues that people prefer to maintain their religious capital. In cases of establishing new religions, as well as individual conversion, there are usually high degrees of cultural continuity. This refers to “*similarities and correspondences* between two cultures” (Stark 2007: 166, italics in the original). This implies that individuals would prefer to maintain their religious and

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<sup>40</sup> Barnaby Marsh (2008), inspired by Max Weber, uses the concept *spiritual capital*, the “internal world” of representations, beliefs, visions, needs, and emotions that influence individual’s behavior in the “external world.” I understand this as part of the embodied religious capital.

cultural capital. This further illustrates why immigrant groups tend to socialise within their ethnic group. Stark's main point regarding conversion, however, is that it is less about doctrinal teachings and more about social networks:

*[P]eople tend to convert to a religious group when their social ties to members outweigh their ties to outsiders who might oppose the conversion ... conversion primarily is an act of conformity; but so is nonconversion (Stark 2007: 199, italics in the original)*

Hence, cultural continuity and change correlates with one's social network. To conclude, we tend to choose friends and partners who are similar to ourselves in terms of cultural and religious capital. We also tend to become more similar to the people around us. This perspective is important in order to understand social as well as religious choices. According to Stark (2004: 119): "In making religious choices, people will attempt to conserve their social capital."<sup>41</sup> In making social choices, on the other hand, people will attempt to conserve their cultural and religious capital.

### 4.3. Interaction rituals

*Namni wajini nyaatee dhugee obboleeyen.*

People who eat and drink together are brothers and sisters.

(Oromo proverb cited in Yedes et al. 2004: 696)

Sociologist Randall Collins (2004) seems to conceptualise embodied cultural capital as "symbolic membership stock", hence, the mastery of and attachment to symbols used in different forms of interaction rituals. Collins is inspired by sociologist Erving Goffman's (1967) theories of social interactions as *rituals*.<sup>42</sup> Collins demonstrates how Goffman is influenced by Durkheim, and attempts to develop some of the classical theories these two developed on social interaction, rituals, and symbols. We

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<sup>41</sup> Stark defines social capital as "interpersonal attachments" (2004: 118).

<sup>42</sup> Goffman uses different metaphors to illustrating individuals interact. Bilton et. al. (2002: 502) summarise Goffman's main points: "being human involves attaching meaning to each other's actions. ... Anything we disclose in social encounters can and usually will be used by others to confer identities on us. ... Since this is so, we soon learn to attempt to sculpture or manipulate other's interpretations of us. We learn to become actors on the stage of life."

could note that Goffman emphasises micro-interaction and agency, while Durkheim focus on macro-theories and social structure.

For Durkheim, rituals are practices that conserve and constitute social structures – in contrast to other ritual theorists, like Victor Turner and Arnold van Gennep, who focus on how rituals *transform* social realities (see Grimes 2000). Durkheim suggests that rituals are a priori to beliefs; rituals *create* symbols and ideas (see Pals 2001). According to Durkheim, societies need for rituals remain constant – while “the intellectual content of religious beliefs has always been changeable” (ibid.: 110). Collins (2004: 97) adopts this approach: “social ties brings ritual participation, and this brings belief.” Finally, Durkheim (1912/2001: 40) defines rituals or rites as “rules of conduct that prescribe how man must conduct himself with sacred things.”

There are rites without gods, and there are even rites from which gods derive. ... and there are cultic practices that have other goals than man's union with a divinity. Religion therefore transcends the idea of gods and spirits, and so cannot be defined exclusively as a function of that idea. (Durkheim 1912/2001:35)

Hence, Durkheim defines religion on the basis of rites, and by this Stark (2007: 14) argues, initiated a tradition of defining religions without including gods. While Durkheim sees rituals as religious practices, Collins operates with a broader definition that also includes secular interaction.<sup>43</sup> On the critique of definitions who “see rituals everywhere,” he proposes:

it provides us with a very generally applicable theory by which to show how much solidarity, how much commitment to shared symbolism and to other features of human action, will occur in a wide variety of situations. (Collins 2004: 15)

Although solidarity or shared symbolism is not among my primary concerns, I agree with Collins that approaching social interaction as rituals is useful when analysing certain patterns of everyday social life. However, it might be useful to differentiate

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<sup>43</sup> Collins (2004) refers to Goffman (1967: 57): “I use the term ‘ritual’ because this activity, however informal and secular, represents a way in which the individual must guard and design the symbolic implications of his acts while in the immediate presence of an object that has a special value for him.”



between religious and secular rituals if we are interested in knowing how they are interrelated in everyday social interaction.

According to Collins (2004), these are the main ingredients in *interaction rituals*: Firstly, they are social gathering of people. “Two or more people are physically assembled in the same place, so that they affect each other by their bodily presence” (Collins 2004: 48). Human bodies affect one another, in different manners whether the interaction is unfocused or focused; “there is a tactic monitoring, to make sure nothing abnormal or threatening is in the offering” (ibid.: 23). Secondly, in focused interactions there is a common attention upon common objects or activities.<sup>44</sup> These are the symbols that represent the group; what Durkheim calls “sacred things” (see above). Collins seems to understand symbols as anything that communicates membership; it may be visual icons, words, or gestures. Persons could also be symbols in interaction rituals, either through direct observation in a ritual, as for example religious leaders, or by indirect observations (as subject for conversations).<sup>45</sup> Thirdly: “boundaries to outsiders so that participants have a sense of who is taking part and who is excluded” (ibid.: 48). Finally, Collins understands Durkheim’s concept of collective consciousness to exist in situational groups; a shared common mood or emotional experience is a primary ingredient in interaction rituals.

Hence, Collins, inspired by Goffman, takes the concept ritual from the sphere of religion or the sacred (cf. Durkheim), into the profane everyday social interaction. We will see that Collins’ concepts and models provide helpful analytical tools to understanding certain characteristics of social interaction, as well as how people use their cultural capital in situations where social relations are developed and reaffirmed. I will not discuss theories on ‘internal ritual’ (Collins 2004) or the ‘backstage’ (Goffman 1959/1999), but rather focus on what the ‘front stage’ might tell us. It could be noted however, what Collins understands as the outcome of successful interaction rituals: increased feeling of membership to the group; emotional energy;<sup>46</sup> feelings of

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<sup>44</sup> “People focus their attention upon a common object or activity, and by communicating this focus to each other become mutually aware of each other’s focus of attention.” (Collins 2004: 48)

<sup>45</sup> “In modern societies, the foremost of these [symbols] is the individual self, treated as if it were a little god in the minor presentational and avoidance of rituals of everyday life” (Goffman referred in Collins 2004: 25).

<sup>46</sup> Collins (2004: 108) understands emotional energy as: “The emotions that are ingredients of the IR are transient; the outcome however is a long-term emotion, the feelings of attachment to the group that

morality;<sup>47</sup> and increased respect for the group's symbols. I understand successful interaction rituals as situations where social relations are reaffirmed, feelings of membership are increased, and attachments to symbols are strengthened. In line with Collins, I keep a broad definition of symbols: objects, behavior, discourse, or persons may be symbols if they represent the group.

Social network ties consist in, Collins (ibid.: 165) argues, a "certain kind of repeated social interaction." In these interactions, "symbols and emotions are recycled and sometimes augmented – and to a higher degree than other interactions those persons have with other people" (ibid.).

#### 4.4. Travel and networks in the diaspora

Social networks approaches often emphasise how the electronic revolution of the recent decades has made communication and networks communities less limited by geographical distances. Collins proposes that this does not indicate that face-to-face communication is or will be less important: "People will still prefer to assemble for little social gatherings with intimates. ... Occasions with a strong sense of sacredness will be those where people want to be there in flesh..." (2004: 63).

Sociologist John Urry (2003) also emphasises the importance of face-to-face interaction in *social networks*, as it is through conversation people achieve trusting relationships. He notes how conversation is not only made up of words, but also "indexical expressions, facial gestures, body language, status, voice intonation, pregnant silences, past histories, anticipated conversations and actions, turn-taking practices and so on" (ibid.:165). Urry further emphasises that this "meetingness" involves different forms of travel: "Travel results in intermittent moments of *physical proximity* to particular peoples, places or events. This proximity is obligatory, appropriate or desirable" (ibid.: 163, italics in the original). Urry understands participation in rituals as weddings and funerals to be *familial obligations*. He proposes that rituals with *social obligations*, is less formal but often involve strong normative expectations. These he argues, are "essential for developing those relations

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was assembled at that time. ... I refer to these long-term outcomes as "emotional energy" (EE). ... It is the personal side of having a great deal of Durkheimian ritual solidarity with a group."

<sup>47</sup> Collins (2004: 49) defines *feelings of morality* as "the sense of rightness in adhering to the group, respecting its symbols, and defending both against transgressors."

of trust that persist during often lengthy periods of distance and even solitude” (ibid.). Hence, participating in interaction rituals could be something one’s social networks expect, but it may also be a way to make friends, i.e., to extend one’s networks. Travel is important to immigrants moving across national boundaries, but it is also important within diaspora communities. Social relations are not bound to geography since people travel to meet friends and families.

Anthropologist Øivind Fuglerud and Ada Engebrigsten’s (2006) studies on Tamils and Somalis in Norway demonstrate what implications the structures of networks have for immigrants. First of all, they note how a strict immigration control have and deportation practices have hindered the Tamils in settling their extended families in Norway. Travel is made difficult by politics. The result of this, Fuglerud and Engebrigtsen argue, is that “social networks among Tamils in Norway tend to be less family-based and more friendship-based than what is the case among Somalis” (ibid.: 1122). With this, they imply that the Somalis have their extended families in Norway and do not “rely” on friendships in order to socialise. They further argue that among Tamils, meeting-places are organised by “individuals, by informal friendship associations, or by political organizations” (ibid.: 1122). Interaction rituals are organised to allow the Tamils immigrants in Norway to socialise; in the diaspora context immigrants establish new social relations.

#### **4.5. Summary**

The *structure/agency*-dichotomisation illustrates how social relations are both a matter of social context and of personal choice. According to previous studies, we tend to relate to people who are similar to ourselves. As we will see, the concept embodied cultural capital is useful when understanding *what* makes people similar. Through relationships to individuals, we learn and use cultural capital, and access situations where we gain the experience of belonging to one or several groups. I understand social relationships to be the main source of cultural influence, and the main reason why we keep doing what we have learned. Experiences and actions seem to be influenced by a two-way process. (1) We make social and cultural choices in ways that preserve our different forms of capital. In this way our social networks are partly the results of our choices. (2) We learn cultural capital through our socialisation, interaction rituals and relationships to the people around us.

We might differentiate between religious and secular cultural capital to better understand what kind of “mastery and attachment” people share. Is it possible to analyse certain cultures as religious and others as secular? I find analysing everyday interaction as rituals both useful and relevant. Still, when analysing forms of interaction, we could benefit from deciding what defines rituals as religious or secular. I understand *deities* to be the defining ingredient to both cultural capital and interaction rituals.

## 5. DEITIES IN SOCIAL NETWORKS

[S]upernatural agents are understood to be social agents, members of the human social network, residents of the cognitive niche. This is the only reason why religious activities like prayer, sacrifice, rituals, and good behavior make sense. (Tremelin 2006: 113)

Could deities be perceived as parts of social networks? How do people express their relations to deities? How could representations of deities be analysed as symbols in interaction rituals? Because few of the previously discussed studies on deities seem to provide the necessary tools to analyse these questions, I will attempt to “incorporate” representations of deities into theories on social structure and interaction. Through relationships to individuals, humans learn and use cultural capital and access interaction ritual situations. I understand deities to be the boundary that defines phenomena as religious. In this case, *religious capital* and *religious interaction rituals* have clear connections to representations of deities. A central question in this chapter is how people in close relations, who adhere to disparate religious traditions, understand each other’s religiosity. Inspired by cognitive dissonance theories, I attempt to use dissonance-theory to better understand inter-religious relations on a micro-sociological level.

Most of the previous studies on that “something” which is the object of religious belief and practice are of comparative character, thus the term *gods* is most commonly used. I will also keep a comparative perspective in the theoretical discussion, but use the term *deities* when referring to all kinds of supernatural agents. The reason for this is to avoid some of the problematic connotations of terms as *gods* or *supernatural beings* (see Pyysiäinen 2003). It could be noted that Oromo primarily belong to monotheistic religions: Islam, Christianity, and Waaqefanna. In these religions, we find one god who has created and/or is part of different kinds of supernatural agents, like *jinns*, *angels*, *saints*, and *ayyaana*. I will not differentiate between these kinds of deities, as the theories and studies that will be discussed do not make this distinction. I will also not go into detail on the debate about the concept of ‘monotheism’. It could be noted that *The Encyclopedia of Religion* defines monotheism as: “experience and philosophical perception that emphasize God as one,

perfect, immutable, creator...” (Ludwig 1987: 68–69). I will, however, not focus on philosophical or theological perceptions, but rather on how we could approach religiosity as a matter of relations to *interactive agents*, as well as representations of deities as *symbols* in interaction rituals.

### 5.1. Deities as interactive agents

People pray to *something!* ... To something having the ability to hear prayers and having the supernatural powers needed to influence nature and events. Real or not, such "somethings" are Gods. Variations in how God or the Gods are conceived are the crucial difference among faiths and cultures. (Stark 2007:15)

Stark defines gods as “supernatural beings having consciousness and intentions” (2007: 10). He emphasises that anthropomorphic characteristics are important for humans in order to understand deities as relevant to them. Cognitive studies on religion suggest both social and biological reasons why people tend to anthropomorphise their religious concepts.

[O]f the available ontological categories, a god is best understood as a *Person*. ... Studies from comparative religion also confirm that basing supernatural being on the *Person* template makes it very difficult to talk meaningfully about god without drawing on *Person* terms: personality traits, physical attributes, even gender. (Tremelin 2006: 95–111)

Scholar of religion Todd Tremelin (2006:113) states that deities think, know, have feelings and concerns; they see, hear, communicate and act. Similar to Stark (2000), Tremelin argues that humans interact with deities as they interact with other humans, in forms of social exchange: “interactions between gods and people are characterized by giving and receiving, by promises and protection, by reward and punishment” (Tremelin 2006: 113). This could be exemplified through the previously discussed study by Yedes et. al. (2004: 692). *Buna* is a gift to the *awliyyaa* “that like coffee.” This could be seen as an exchange for what is asked for: “mercy on the souls of the dead and wealth on the living.” The logic here demonstrates that religious rituals are not merely interactions that increase feelings of membership (e.g., Durkheim

1912/2001; Collins 2004), but also reciprocity with interactive agents that are able to appreciate smells and are able to bestow mercy and wealth.

Inspired by Tremlin, I therefore suggest that relationships between humans and deities could be analysed in much the same manner as relationships between humans, e.g., more or less important, influential, emotional, practised, and so forth. People may have experiences of divine presence, for example, the presence of deities is often believed to be stronger in some places than others. Through individuals' experiences of godly presence, deities could be seen as participating in interaction rituals. Experiences of interactive with deities do not necessarily involve other people, as for example in the case of personal prayer.

Expressions of beliefs are in several cognitive theories seen as *hard-to-fake*, *costly* commitments that signal group membership (see Atran 2002; Kolstø 2007). Richard Sosis (2006) argues that religious language communicate with speaking, singing, and writing, but “most effectively and uniquely communicate” through behaviour, badges, and bans. With *behaviours* Sosis refers to rituals, as the coffee ceremony discussed above. He defines *badges* as physical manifestations, or we might say objectified cultural capital, that communicates religious belonging. *Bans* are behavioural restrictions, often called taboos, which are visible when they are at risk of being violated. As we will see in the next chapter, these concepts are helpful to understanding how religiosity is expressed. These *three b's* could be seen in light of deities as moral agents, who judge and react on right and wrong doings (e.g. Bader & Froese 2005; Stark 2001; Roes & Raymond 2002). Hence, what makes deities relevant is their possibility to be conscious and interactive. This is the premise for supernatural agents to be moralising agents as well as exchange partners. Sosis notes how religious behavior is communication with deities, but argues that the most relevant communicants are other religious members.<sup>48</sup> I will discuss this latter point, but first I will give another example of why we should understand religion as *belief in and action towards 'supernatural beings'*.

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<sup>48</sup> “When individuals pray to deities they are of course attempting to ‘communicate’ with these supernatural agents, however, for understanding the selective pressures that have shaped prayer and other religious behavior, badges, and bans the most relevant communicants are not the deities, but rather the other congregants” (Sosis 2006: 63).

Inspired by Bourdieu's (1986) concept of embodied cultural capital, I understand individuals' relationships and knowledge of deities to be *embodied*. It could be noted that Bourdieu does not seem to differentiate between mentally and bodily knowledge. He rather uses the concept 'embodied' when referring to cultural capital that is literally speaking part of the individual in contrast to institutional and objectified capital. Theories on mental and biological religiosity may inform the concept 'embodied relationship' to deities. Firstly, humans use their cognitive tools and categories to recognise and remember deities. Secondly, conceptions of deities are objects of belief and rituals when they are attached to individuals' emotions (see Atran 2002; Pyysiäinen 2004).

Through other people, individuals learn about and participate in interaction rituals. This situational chain of experiences is the input or investment in embodied cultural capital. Experimenting with Goffman's and Collins's terms, religiosity could be seen as *chains of interaction rituals with deities*. Although Goffman's interaction theory is mainly applied to everyday, secular and small-scale social encounters – it could also be helpful when analysing private religious practice, as well as formal religious rituals. Religious practices could be seen as salutations, compliments, and apologies directed at deities.

## **5.2. Deities as symbols**

The theories discussed above emphasise communication with deities, or expression of beliefs, as a way to communicate membership towards group members. In line with this, I suggest that participation in religious interaction rituals mark and enact relations to deities, both towards the 'divine' as well as to the other participants. Even though participating in rituals could indicate how individuals relate to their deities, their experience of their relations is difficult to observe for researchers. Still, religious practice is often seen as a sign of dedication to deities. This is an important assumption in theories of costly commitments (e.g. Sosis 2006). Religious practice may at least tell us how individuals want to present their relationship to deities.

In most religions, we would find different representations of one or several deities. Bourdieu's (1986) concept of *objectified* cultural capital may be helpful in this context. Objectified representations of deities are, for example, statues, images, buildings, and the written word. Arguably, the latter has traditionally been the main



focus in the study of religions. In Collins' terms, these objects are examples of sacred symbols that increase in value to people when they are the focus of attention in rituals.

People can both participate and be symbols of common focus in interaction rituals. The same might be said about deities. Collins' rules for unravelling symbols inform how representations of deities could be analysed as communicating membership to a group (see Collins 2004: 97–101). Do they qualify for what Collins understands as intensely symbolic? I understand this to be a main characteristic of the representations of deities: Their presence is often understood to be stronger in special spatial zones, which are often referred to as *holy places*. Often certain people are understood as more qualified to understand or interact with deities than others. Deities are often “emotionally and vehemently and self-righteously defended ... proclaimed as a value that is or ought to be widely shared” (ibid.: 98).

Studies on religious groupings or congregations ask questions such as: “Who assembled, in what numbers, with what frequency or schedule?” (ibid.: 98). What kinds of activities are performed, how are the deities in question charged with significance – and how do these symbols circulate? Through interaction ritual theory we might analyse how representations of deities are part of religious rituals, as well as how they are part of everyday interaction.

We might also analyse how representations of deities are treated when individuals are alone. As Collins notes: “This third order of symbolic circulation is even harder to get at than the second order” (ibid.: 99). Analyses on how individuals think and feel about representations of deities, and how they use deities as symbols when they are alone, rely on information from the individuals. The same goes for how people experience their interaction with deities as agents. When Collins describes private prayer by members of a religious cult as a “ritualistic affirmation of their membership” (ibid.: 101) – he overlooks that the individuals could experience prayer as *interaction* with deities. Collins seems to be part of the Durkheimian tradition that sees rituals as expressions of membership. Hence, we may rehearse Stark's (2007: 15) insightful comment on this: “People pray to *something!*”

### 5.3. Deities in social networks

Although humans-deities relationships should be seen as something quite different from human-human relationships, I will attempt to use some of the concepts from social network theory to illustrate how people might relate to deities. We could analyse relationships to supernatural agents to be structurally and qualitatively diverse. Some may interact with their god alone at home. Others may interact with their god through mediators, like religious leaders, in public interaction ritual situations. These are two *structurally* diverse ways of relating to deities. Often the same individual does both types of interaction at different times.

Relationships between humans and deities could also be *qualitatively* diverse. Some have close and intimate relationships with deities. This may correlate to participating in successful religious interaction rituals. Others may feel distant to deities, which could be a result of them rarely or never participating in interaction rituals. They have weak ties and are part of one's effective zones. Arguably, people often experience both kinds of relationships during their lifetime. But could deities be part of one's extended zone? An individual's extended zone refers to those individuals she does not personally know, but to whom she can easily become acquainted (Boissevain 1968: 547). These are "for the most part members of the intimate networks of the persons in his own intimate network" (ibid.).

#### 5.3.1. *The triad proposition*

Inspired by sociologist Mark Granovetter (1973), I attempt to formulate a proposition based in social network theory. Granovetter proposes that if A has close ties to both B and C, this implies some kind of tie between B and C. Granovetter's 'forbidden triad'-model refers to a situations were A has close relations to both B and C, while B and C do not know each other. This, Granovetter argues, "never occurs – that is, that the B-C tie is always present (whether weak or strong), given the other two strong ties" (ibid.: 1363). In a diaspora context, this imply that new strong ties with people from their old country, introduce individuals to their friend's network in the diaspora context, but also to the immigrants' ties in their original country. Hence, immigrants' social relations with other immigrants might strengthen the bonds to the original country.

How may Granovetter's forbidden triad inform us if we see religiosity as relationships to deities? I suggest the following proposition:

*If person A has close ties to both person B and to deity C, the B-C tie is always present (whether weak or strong, negative or positive).*

Since we tend to choose friends who are similar to ourselves (see Bø & Sciefloe 2007), we could assume that the 'typical' person A and B share religious capital, and participate in the same religious interaction rituals. Hence, what is usually the case is that A's close tie to deity C strengthens B's close tie to deity C.

Bø and Schiefloe (2007: 84–85) refer to Theodore M. Newcomb: when individuals meet someone they have much in common with, they usually put to a balanced or comfortable state of mind. Leon Festinger (1976) argues that big differences in opinions between two individuals often result in uncomfortable mental states or 'cognitive dissonance'. With references to Festinger, Tremlin proposes:

We cannot enter into serious or lasting social relations unless we bring our thoughts and behaviours into alignment with those of others ... we accept ideas simply because others do. Knowing that gods matter to other people helps to make them matter to us. (Tremlin 2006: 131–132)

Nonetheless, people evidently have close relationships to others who do not share their religious commitments, without necessarily converting or changing affiliation.

### *5.3.2. Dissonance and strategies*

One of the problems facing theories previously discussed is that they do not discuss how people deal with *different* forms of religious knowledge or input. I have yet to find any theories on how person B might respond or relate to deity C, if B does *not* share A's religious capital. Festinger's theory might be useful in this context. First of all, how are differences in religiosity between A and B be dissonant? According to Festinger (1976: 13), two elements are in a dissonant relation "if the obverse of one element would follow from the other." If A expresses a belief in deity C that B does not share, either in practise or doctrine, this leads to dissonance. For example, A and B could have different opinions of moral behavior, of right and wrong. If A states that

eating certain kinds of food is prohibited by religious laws, while B usually eats this food, they come to obverse conclusions. Further, if A states that her god is the only god that exists, the ‘obverse element’ or conclusion could be that B’s god does not exist. Festinger (ibid.: 16) argues that in a situation of dissonant elements, “the magnitude of dissonance will be a function of the importance of the elements.” In the case of different religiosities, the magnitude of dissonant elements follow the importance A and B put on the practices or beliefs related to deities.

The presence of dissonance gives rise to pressures to reduce or eliminate the dissonance. The strength of the pressure to reduce the dissonance is a function of the magnitude of the dissonance is a function of the magnitude of the dissonance. (Festinger 1976: 18)

Festinger suggests different strategies for reducing dissonance: (1) Change the environment that creates or reinforces the dissonance. In the case of A and B, this means avoiding the social environment or network the other is part of. (2) Change the action or feeling that causes the dissonance. A and B might change their feelings towards the other’s religious tradition, or they might change their behavior by not practicing or talking about their religion. (3) Change or add new cognitive elements to reduce the dissonance. This seems highly linked with the previous strategies. We could say that in order to change environment, behaviour or feelings A and B will also change or add cognitive elements.

Inspired by Festinger’s theory, as well as studies on strategies used in situations with “religious dissonance” (Dunford & Kunz 1973; Mahaffy 1996), I attempt to use the dissonance-reduction model as an analytical tool in my material. The setting will be a social environment, a plural-religious diaspora community; situations where person A and person B are close friends yet adhere to disparate religious traditions. Hence, they could find some ‘techniques of neutralisation’ to reduce the dissonance caused by the differences causes. To comment on the emerging *triad proposition* suggested above, propose that:

*If person A has close ties to both person B and to deity C, the B-C tie is always present. B will attempt to have positive or neutral tie to C to avoid cognitive dissonance.*

#### 5.4. Summary

We should note that deities are not only sacred symbols, but also interactive agents. If we want to analyse how religiosity is expressed in social interaction, we benefit from understanding religiosity not only as belief in the ‘supernatural’ or the ‘sacred’, but often also as belief in and practice towards interactive agents. Studies demonstrate how people tend to anthropomorphise their religious representations, and how deities are seen as exchange partners and moralising agents. Thus, we see religiosity not merely as reverential or doctrinal but also as *relational*. These relations are ‘embodied’ through chains of religious interaction rituals. Relations to deities are expressed to the outside world, or to social networks, *through* behavior, badges, and bans. These expressions are, in turn, situated *in* interaction rituals.

If religiosity is to be seen as relations to deities, we could analyse deities as parts of social networks. These relations are not only important to them, but also to people in their intimate social networks. Differences in religiosity between friends (or other associates) might cause cognitive dissonance. Hence, we could assume that members of plural-religious social networks find some strategies to reduce these differences. In the next chapters, these questions will be discussed in light of my material. Furthermore, I attempt to demonstrate that the suggested *triad proposition* is a useful analytical tool.

## 6. EXPRESSING RELIGIOSITY

In order to understand how deities could be included in the triad proposition<sup>49</sup>, we should examine how relationships to deities are expressed. Working with analysing my material, I found little evidence that relations to deities, or even religious belonging, are talked about among Oromo-Norwegians. Therefore, I will focus on the findings where relationships to deities are expressed: in *interaction rituals*. I will use *deities* as the element that defines cultural capital, rituals, time, and place as *religious*. In what situations do Oromo-Norwegians express similarities in religiosity, and when do they communicate differences? Another central question will be *why* and *how* Oromo-Norwegians socialise across religious differences. I start off these questions of ‘inter-ethnic group socialisation’ with a classic interaction ritual example: *salutations*. Secondly, I attempt to use some theories on salutation to illustrate how rituals could be seen as marking *relations* to deities. Thirdly, I will demonstrate how these ‘sacred relations’ are communicated and celebrated in religious rituals. Fourthly, we come to a more ‘delicate’ question: how do we characterise religious rituals where people from different religious traditions participate? How is religiosity expressed in these contexts? Finally, I will discuss how secular cultural capital and secular interaction rituals are important to Oromo in diaspora.

The analysed material is based on observations from both religious and secular gatherings, and seven interviews with Oromo respondents in Norway. The interviews are anonymous and I will use pseudonyms. Two of the respondents are women, *Kiya* and *Jalale*, and five are men, *Hassen*, *Bulcha*, *Gemetchu*, *Taddese* and *Ifa*. All of my respondents in Norway are middle-aged, except Jalale who is in her early twenties. I will not describe the respondents’ backgrounds, professions etc. in detail of anonymity reasons. The interviews and observations are discussed with supporting material from three interviews with informants, and three interviews with Oromo respondents in Ethiopia.

As previously discussed, I define Oromo in Norway as a diaspora since they share an ethnic identity and involvement in their homeland. Six out of seven

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<sup>49</sup> Recall the hypothesis discussed in the previous chapter: If person A has close ties to both person B and to deity C, the B-C tie is always present. B will attempt to have positive or neutral tie to C to avoid cognitive dissonance.

respondents stated their engagement in Oromo nationalism; two mentioned their affiliation with the Oromo Liberation Front. Three respondents told stories about the common history and present situation of the Oromo. I will not discuss this further, but it could be noted that the nationalist discourse downplay religious differences among Oromo (see Sorenson & Matsuoka 2001).

### 6.1. «Nagaa dha!» Salutations as rituals

*People arrive at the starting point for the pilgrimage in small groups (most of three or four). As people come, they greet each other. Most greet each other with hugs and kisses on the chins (three or four times). Some greet each other with handshakes, some with handshakes and shoulder-to-shoulder hugs.<sup>50</sup> (Observation, Erecha, 29.09.07)*

*I meet the people who are taking me to service. When we approach the Church, they meet someone they know. They greet each other with several hugs and kisses on the cheeks. They seem happy to see each other. (Observation, Easter Eve, 08.04.07)*

*The party had already started when we come. The people I arrive with greet the guest from Ethiopia, who sits in the middle of the room, with handshakes and hugs. Then they greet the elders in the room, and finally they greet everyone present in the room. (Observation, private party, 20.10.07)*

The main difference between these observations is their contexts. The first two initialled religious celebrations; hence we could see them as expressions of relations to deities. Person A and person B meet, greet each other, and reaffirm their relationship. Religions provide social arenas to ‘mark and enact’ personal relationships. Since the time and place are connected to one or several deities, we could also see greetings as expressions of common religiosity. In terms of the *triad proposition*: A and B demonstrate to each other that they both relate to deity C.

The third observation is from a private party, a secular association and place. The guests, or the participants in the salutations, were from different religious

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<sup>50</sup> We counted: ca. 10 hand shakes (excluded ourselves); ca. 20 hand shakes and shoulder hugs, ca. 70 hugs on the chins (3-4 times). As we did not observe everything, we should expect that the numbers were higher than this.

traditions. Some of the words used in these greetings might referring to deities, and thus express religiosity.<sup>51</sup> However, the verbal language (Afaan Oromo) and the body language (kisses and hugs) could be classified as *secular*. Hence, in the two first situations the participants used secular capital in a religious setting, expressing religious and cultural similarity. In the last situation, the participants demonstrated secular cultural similarity.

Greetings exemplify how embodied cultural capital is important to social interaction.<sup>52</sup> In Goffman's (1967: 57) terms, such salutations are a form of interpersonal or interaction rituals.<sup>53</sup> They are codes people use when they meet; acts of deference or respect. Greetings are form of "stereotyped verbal interchanges that make up polite or friendly routines of verbal interaction" (Collins 2004: 17). In a greeting between two individuals with similarly embodied cultural capital, both will understand the ritual codes or 'symbolic implications' of their actions. Both body and verbal language are important in salutations as well other forms of interaction rituals, for example conversations or dancing. As previously discussed, shared cultural capital, and especially forms of language, may be a central reason why first-generation immigrants often socialise within their ethnic group.<sup>54</sup> In an Ethiopian context, a large population shares the cultural capital used in for example greetings. In Norway however, the Oromo population is small. Thus, the cultural capital is quite "exclusive." Of course, the Oromo-Norwegians share cultural capital besides the language of greetings. Still, this illustrate how important embodied culture is to reaffirm relations and when initialling social happenings.

Furthermore, greetings demonstrate social networks as people "mark and enact personal various forms of relationships" (ibid.: 18). When individuals greet each other, they demonstrate that they already know one another, or for other reasons want to communicate their acknowledgement of the other. The latter is often a result of common acquaintances (recall Granovetter's triad hypothesis). Counting the

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<sup>51</sup> In a follow-up study we may do a discourse analysis on the content in the greetings (jf. Yedes et al. 2004). For example, I have been told that to Oromo Muslims in Ethiopia, it is important to use *Allah* when they are referring to their deity in greetings. However, the phrase "*Isa haa galatoo*" (Thanks be to him) is neutral and is used by both Christians and Muslims.

<sup>52</sup> To me as a researcher, knowing the basic greetings was important to get an in pass.

<sup>53</sup> "Greetings provide a way of showing that a relationship is still what is was at the termination of the previous coparticipation ... Farewells sum up the effect of the encounter upon the relationship and show what the participants may expect of one another when they next meet." (Goffman 1967: 41)

<sup>54</sup> Recall Bourdieu's (1986) emphasises on *time* and *investment*, discussed in chapter 4.



frequency of greetings, as in the example above, could be a way of analysing the density<sup>55</sup> of the social network in a situational group. In the case of *Erecha*, most of the adult participants greeted each other. Hence, the participants may be part of a dense social network, and the festival was a situation with a high degree of socialisation and face-to-face interaction. These greetings illustrate how social networks interact in situational rituals: Individuals meet, reaffirm relations, or get to know other Waaqefanna, Orthodox Christians, or Oromo in the diaspora.

## 6.2. «Galatoo Waqaayyo!» Rituals as salutations

If we do not have contact with Waaqa, I believe that we cannot live; one cannot live without contact with Waaqa [...] When I was in prison, I prayed to Waaqa and when I pray to Waaqa I sleep a little better. Like comforting. [...] The connection with Waaqa is stronger when one is in difficulties. (Kiya)<sup>56</sup>

Allah, I think that he is God [...] he helps us and if we pray [...] every day, every night, and all, all [emphasise] the time, yes. [...] If I am alone, if I am with people [...] If I am alone as well, sit at home and so. So, God helps me, or if I say to him, him, I think he hears me [laughs] I just think like that. (Jalale)<sup>57</sup>

Both Kiya and Jalale emphasise personal experiences of prayer. Jalale explains how she experiences Allah as continuously present or close – always ‘available’ to hear or help her. Kiya explicit states that she understands contact with Waaqa as *life sustaining* (“one cannot live without”), and how this connection is especially

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<sup>55</sup> “[W]here the relationships among a set of persons are dense, that is, where a large proportion know one another, then the network as a whole is relatively compact and relatively few links between the persons need to be used to reach the majority” (Mitchell 1969: 18)

<sup>56</sup> Note 1: In some of the interviews there was a translator present, who translated from Oromo to Norwegian. I will specify this in each case. Note 2: the respondent said ‘Waaqa’ in *Afaan Oromo*, which was translated to ‘Gud’ (God). “Om Gud, vi har ikke kontakt med Gud, jeg tror at vi ikke kan leve, man kan ikke leve uten å ha kontakt med Gud. [...] da jeg ble fengsel, så jeg ber Gud og når jeg ber Gud jeg sover litt bedre. Sånn trøst. [...] Kontakten med Gud er sterkere når man er i vanskeligheter.” (translator, Kiya)

<sup>57</sup> “Allah, jeg tenker han er Gud [...] han hjelper oss og hvis vi ber [...] hver dag, hver natt, og hele, hele [e] tiden, ja. [...] Hvis jeg er alene, hvis jeg er med mennesker [...] Hvis jeg er alene også, sitter hjemme og så. Så Gud hjelper meg, eller hvis jeg sier han, han, jeg tror han hører meg. [laughs] Jeg tenker bare sånn.” (Jalale)

important in times of crises.<sup>58</sup> Gemetchu also seems to experience prayer to Waaqa comforting in time of crises: “especially when I have some special problem... I feel at that time always, pray to God.”

These cases exemplify why it is problematic to reduce private prayers to ritualistic affirmations of membership (e.g. Collins 2004: 19, 101). Private prayers, as well as other religious rituals, could in addition be seen as marking and enacting relationship to deities. In order to understand individual religiosity, it is helpful to see prayers as *salutations*: they follow specific rules and codes in different contexts, and they are acts of deference and respect. Prayer could also be seen as an activity that leads to a common focus for participants and their representations of deities, and as a way to communicate experiences, wishes, feelings, and thoughts. Expressions of gratefulness are for example central to Ifa and Gemetchu:

Yaa Rabbii koo ana nagaan galchite galata kee. That means oh God you gave us this day for this day you gave us peace, thank you, and. In the morning you gave us peace for this night and thank you. (Gemetchu)

So when you begin with thanking Waaqa for [...] that you slept well, if it is morning. Or in the evening “thank you Waaqa that I have had a good day.” Then you begin like this, then you go in detail what you need, what you ask Waaqa for. (Ifa)<sup>59</sup>

Morning prayers may function as a reminder of where they stand towards their deities.<sup>60</sup> Repeating the form of the prayer links past situations with the present into a chain. Evening prayer is a way of marking that the relationship still exist and will be resumed in the future. These kinds of chains of interaction rituals with deities could be seen as constitute relations to deities. In this context, deities as interactive agents

Hassen explains that he performs prayer every day, five times a day, to fulfil a duty. When I asked Bulcha about differences between Islam in Ethiopia and in Norway, he answered: “Ways to, you [Muslims], pray to Allah is the same, same

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<sup>58</sup> cf. Asheim (2007: 44-47)

<sup>59</sup> “Så når du begynner med å takke Gud at du har vært, du har sovet godt, om det blir morning, eller sånn det blir om kvelden ”takk Gud for at jeg har hatt en god dag”, så begynner du sånn, så går du til det du trenger i detaljer, det du spør Gud om.” (translator, Ifa)

<sup>60</sup> As between individuals (see Collins 2004: 18).

time. So. No difference” (Bulcha).<sup>61</sup> Hence, prayer is a duty that should be performed in the same ways at the same time. In this context, the rules and codes of prayers are emphasised. Gemetchu explains how he learned when and how to pray from his family:

Even though I am Orthodox I, eh. I have not that much trust that people are, eh, communicating through somebody else to God, let us say priest or something like that, I just pray to. God. Personally. [...] Frequently I pray before going to bed and early in the morning. So that, eh, the traditional fact I inherited from my family, they do it that way. Every Oromo. Traditional or others, they, in the evening they say, Yaa Rabbii koo ana nagaan galchite galata kee.<sup>62</sup>

This exemplifies the complexity in private prayers: Gemetchu emphasises that he do not need to communicate “through somebody else”, or *with* somebody else since he express that he prefers to pray alone. Still, he refers to how his family and other Oromo perform this prayer. It seems important to Gemetchu that he is not the only one who performs the prayer or that interacts with his deity.

Private prayers seem important to my respondents’ religiosity and expressions of beliefs. On the one hand, private prayer could be understood as directed towards one or several *interactive agents* or deities. On the other hand, I agree with Collins (2004), who sees private prayers as an affirmation of membership to a group (e.g. Gemetchu’s membership as Oromo). Private prayer is a good example of how individuals use their embodied *religious* capital. I attempt to keep this perspective of rituals having a double function throughout this chapter.

### 6.3. Expressions of religious similarity

Shared religious capital is expressed in different forms of interaction rituals. As argued in the previous chapter, the typical scenario is that A and B participate in the same religious interaction rituals. Thus, they express a similar relation to deity C, and as Tremlin (2006: 132) puts it: “Knowing that gods matter to other people help to

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<sup>61</sup> “Måter å, du, ber til Allah er den samme måte, samme tid. Så. Ingen forskjellig.” (Bulcha)

<sup>62</sup> Gemetchu explains the meaning of the prayer above. We could also translate it with: Oh my God, Thanks be to you for you have brought me safely (in peace).

make them matter to us.” The following examples illustrate how religious similarity is expressed in interaction rituals. I also attempt to demonstrate how religious rituals are centred on representations of deities as interactive agents as well as symbols.

### 6.3.1. *Small-scale religious rituals: Ifa and his network*

When I was a child, I didn't know them [*qallu*] that well, but when I grew up I became very sick. [...] And my wife had asthma and it was very serious. Then a friend took me to the spiritual people, and we went and talked to him. He told me what had happened, and he prayed for me to Waaqa, and he told me that from today, you would not be sick any more. [...] So, because of this I became well and my wife got well, and we started to believe in them and took contact. (Ifa)<sup>63</sup>

Ifa explains how his relation to Waaqa became more important after experiencing recovery from illness. Although he was socialised in a Waaqefanna family, he did not practice this himself until experiencing a meeting with the *qallu* as an adult. This experience may be seen as a turning point in the relationship between the respondent and the *qallu*. Firstly, it demonstrates how Ifa emphasises health as ‘embodied evidence’ of the power of *qallu*, or how relations to deities become stronger through physical experiences. Secondly, that his wife had a similar experience (recovery from illness) and that it was his friend who brought him to the *qallu*, which illustrates the importance of social networks.

When Ifa and his wife immigrated to Norway, they could no longer visit the *qallu*. However, Ifa explains how some communication with Waaqa goes through his friends and family in Ethiopia. They go to celebrations, to the *gamla* (shrine) or other holy places:

I can talk with friends who live there [Ethiopia] and they can go to the celebration and pray to Waaqa for me, on my behalf. Waaqa accepts prayers from everywhere, but it is a special place

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<sup>63</sup> Note: the respondent said ‘Waaqa’ in *Afaan Oromo*, which was translated to ‘Gud’ (God). “Da jeg har vært barn, jeg ble ikke så kjent med de [*qallu*], men så når jeg vokste så jeg var veldig syk, [...] Og kona mi hadde asma, som var veldig alvorlig. Så det var en venn som tok meg med til de spiritual folk, så vi gikk der og snakket med ham og han har fortalte meg hva som skjedde og han har bedt for meg, Gud, og han sa til meg at fra i dag så blir du helt fri, du skal ikke være syk mer. Så, jeg blir frisk og kona mi blir frisk på grunn av det, og vi begynte å tro på de og så kontakt.” (translator, Ifa)

one has to go to, as the Muslims go to Mekka or the Christians go to Jerusalem. Mainly it is a house called *gamla*. They go there, but in some occasions they go to a river ... and a mountain.<sup>64</sup>

Hence, even though he can contact Waaqa everywhere, there are some places that are nearer to Waaqa than others. Ifa can reach these places through his friends and family in Ethiopia, and they can contact Waaqa through the people who are filled with *ayyaana*: "He is filled by a spirit, then he talks, he feel what you think, it is a special ability from Waaqa. He knows all you think and have done, and explains you how to behave."<sup>65</sup> The advices from Waaqa, transmitted through *qallu*, and again through Ifa's family, demonstrate how Waaqa is an agent that influences Ifa's life. This might strengthen Waaqa as symbol, or a common focal, in these 'section-to-section' interaction rituals: (1) The initial and final interaction is between Ifa and his friends in Ethiopia, which could both be seen as a way to get information from Waaqa, as well as a way to keep in touch through a religious ritual. (2) Ifa's friends have to contact *qallu*. In this context, Waaqa, *qallu*, but also Ifa, are symbols of common focus. For the group, this might be a way to remember Ifa and make him important in their context. (3) The interaction between the *qallu* and *ayyaana*, could also be a symbol and common focus for the group. This exemplifies how immigrants pragmatically find ways of keeping contact with their local religious institutions and situated deities. Further, it shows how religious practices are arenas for social contact, how the *qallu* make Ifa matter to his family and visa versa.

Ifa explains how he and his family have a weekly prayer together were they eat<sup>66</sup> coffee and burn incense. This ritual is often called *buna qala* (slaughter of coffee). This could be seen as an interaction ritual: The family gathers, and focus on common *activities*, praying, sacrificing, and eating, as well as *objects*, the incense and coffee. It is a religious ritual, as the communication with Waaqa is central:

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<sup>64</sup> "Jeg snakker med venner som bor der slik at de går til feiringen der også de ber Gud for meg, også på vegne av meg. Gud aksepterer ber fra hvor som helst, men det er spesielt sted hvor man må gå, for eksempel som muslimene går til Mekka og de kristne går til Jerusalem. Det er hovedsakelig et hus som heter hus som heter galma. Det er der de går, men det er i tilfelle, noen tilfeller hvor de går til elv ... til fjells." (translator, Ifa)

<sup>65</sup> "Han blir påfylt av en spirit, så snakker han, så kjenner han hva du tenker, så det blir sånn spesiell evne for fra Gud. Han vet alt det du tenker og det du har gjort og forklarer for deg hvordan du må oppføre deg" (translator, Ifa)

<sup>66</sup> Yedes et al. (2004: 683–685) provides a good account for how the buna beans are differently perpetrated. Among some Oromo groups it is common to eat the beans with butter, milk, or water.

To pray to Waaqa what we need from Waaqa. I pray Waaqa what I need from Waaqa. One explains what one need from Waaqa, and if you have asked Waaqa and got answer, you thanks Waaqa. Oromo they talk directly to Waaqa. (Ifa)<sup>67</sup>

When I ask about the incense, Ifa answers: “Waaqa likes good smells, so it is to show respect to God, to give sacrifice”.<sup>68</sup> This is an example of representing deities as interactive agents with abilities to, in this case, *smell*. To burn incense is as a way of communicating with, or giving thanks or salutations to Waaqa. When I ask about the coffee, he answers:

Yes, it is related to tradition, so it is no special meaning why people use coffee when it is prayer, but it have been like this for a long, long time. They use coffee when they pray to Waaqa. (Ifa)<sup>69</sup>

I understand this as a way of relating the coffee to a tradition Ifa and his family share with their relatives in Ethiopia, as well as a larger Waaqefanna community. On the one hand, this is a ‘ritualistic affirmation’ to membership of a larger in-group than those present. On the other hand, these rituals do not express Ifa’s religiosity to the diaspora milieu, besides his closest family.

### 6.3.2. Large-scale religious rituals: *Erecha* and *Easter Eve*

*About midnight, one third of the congregation participate in the dancing and singing that marked the resurrection of Jesus. They move Tzna Tzil (bells) from the left to right in a rhythm. The dance gradually evolves: At first the women stand at the right side, and the men at the left (they sat on each of these sides during the service). In the middle one of the ‘leaders’ drums on a big drum. Both men and women dance towards the middle. Some of the women shout ‘ililil’. (Observation, Easter Eve, 08.04.07)*

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<sup>67</sup> “Be Gud det vi trenger fra Gud, Forklarer du det du trenger fra Gud så om du har bedt Gud og fikk skikkelig svar, du også takker Gud. Oromo de snakker direkte til Gud” (translator, Ifa)

<sup>68</sup> “Gud liker det som lukter godt, så det viser respekt for Gud, for å gi sacrifice” (translator, Ifa). Note: the respondent said ‘Waaqa’ in afaan Oromoo, which was translated to ‘Gud’ (God).

<sup>69</sup> “Ja, det er jo tradisjon knyttet, så det er ikke noen spesiell betydning hvorfor folk bruker kaffi når det er bønn, men det er sånn som har vært lenge og lenge. De bruker kaffi knyttet til når de ber Gud” (translator, Ifa).

*The group starts to walk and dance in the small streets towards Skomakerdiket (the lake where they do the sacrifice). The dancers and singers are mainly men, while most of the women walk behind them. One of the younger men holds up a flag with the oda tree and the Oromo colours (green, red, black). Several of the participants pick up green grass (tchokorsa) and branches. They tell me that the songs are about Erecha and honour Waaqa. (Observation, Erecha, 29.09.07)*

Similar to the salutations previously discussed, these dances require certain embodied cultural capital. They were performed during religious celebrations, thus we might say that the participants express relations to their respective deities. In both dances, the group consisted of about twenty people who focus on a common activity and who express a shared mood. In Collins' (2004: 154) terms this is an interaction ritual: "Dancing is a bodily symbol, an enactment of a degree of membership." In Sosis' (2006) terms, this is costly commitment that signals membership to a group. Religious *similarity* is expressed. Dancing was only one of several interactive rituals, or forms of behaviour, in the religious celebrations.

*After reading from the Bible, it is carried round to the congregation. Everybody put their front head to it and kissed it, and repeated this three times. [...] One of the deacons brings a brass can, and pours the water from it while the priest washes his hands. Both go behind the curtains. After a prayer, the priest comes from behind the curtains and goes round to the congregation. He holds his hands in front of him, and everybody put their head to his hands and kisses them as they did with the books. (Observation, Easter Eve, 08.04.07)*

I was told that these rituals give "blessings." If someone is sick, they can be healed. I was further told that when the priest have been near the holy<sup>70</sup> books and other holy objects, and after prayer and chanting, the participants "get something holy" when they are near him. They perform the same ritual with a large wooden cross, and I was told that this was especially important during *Easter Eve*<sup>71</sup>. In these rituals and in the

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<sup>70</sup> The informant used the term "holy."

<sup>71</sup> *Easter Eve*, the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus, is considered to be the 'feast of feasts' in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (Aymro & Joachim 1970: 68). "Letters or messages are exchanged between friends and the whole day is one of spiritual and physical feasting ..." (ibid.).

dancing, the participants' relations to deities are expressed – both to their representations of deities and their fellow participants.

*The group goes to the left, down a small hill, to the water. Two of the elder males take the bottles of dadhii (honey beer) and spray them in the water. Then they throw small peaces of dufo (bread) in the water. Five women and four men sit on their knees in front of the water, put the grass (tchokorsa) or leaf into the water, and then slap it on their backs. They do this on each side (left/right) three-four-five times. The dadhii is sent around and everybody drinks. The dufo is parted up in small pieces and distributed. (Observation, Erecha, 29.09.07)*

The participants direct their actions toward an agency that is able to see and appreciate the gifts of *dufo* and *dadhii*. When I asked about the offering, one of the participants answered that: “We go here to pray to God for all that we get from him.” In other Erecha celebrations, the explanation that has been given is that they give the gifts to Waaqa.<sup>72</sup> Another explanation is that the *ayyana* (spirits) are in the water and send the gifts on to Waaqa (see Bartels 1983).

Activities like eating and drinking are practised in several of the religious and secular interaction rituals. Collins (2004: 62) proposes: “The ingestion of food and drink are part of the bodily coparticipation; these are ritual substances when they are consumed together in the atmosphere of a sociable occasion.” Previous fasting is emphasised in some celebrations, e.g. Easter Eve<sup>73</sup> and ‘*Id al-Adha*’<sup>74</sup>. It may be seen as a sign of *commitment* to their respective deities, as well as an expression of the participants’ membership.

Both Erecha and Easter Eve could be analysed as religious interactive rituals. First of all, people meet each other and “affect each other by their bodily presence” (Collins 2004: 48). Second, they focus on common activities (e.g., singing, chanting), as well as objects (grass, books, and so forth). Third, their body language expressed similar emotions: on some associations they smiled and laughed; on other associations

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<sup>72</sup> <http://www.bt.no/lokalt/bergen/article302580.ece> (08.02.07).

<sup>73</sup> *About 4 am, after the service, is the food served: buddeena with different forms of stew (itto). I was told that some fast in two months before Easter; they do not eat meat, eggs or fish. This meal ended the fasting. Honey beer is served after the food, followed by cake and coffee. Everybody talk with each other – the sexes remain for most part separated. (Observation, Easter eve, 08.04.07)*

<sup>74</sup> *‘Id al-Adha*: The feast of sacrifice (Waines 2003: 92); the celebration at the end of the time of pilgrimage (*hajj*) to Mecca. “The sacrifice of animals and the distribution of the meat to the poor are performed not only in Mecca but throughout the world...” (ibid.).



they were serious and quiet. The boundaries to outsiders, however, are somewhat different. Erecha was performed at a public space, so the participants' behavior constitutes a social boundary: The dancing and singing 'insiders' wore white dresses and colourful flags. The walking and small-talking 'outsiders' wore normal clothes; they stopped, looked, and asked questions. In the case of Easter Eve, they gathered in a building, hence there was a physical boundary as well as a social boundary to outsiders. While the group membership in the latter is 'Ethiopian Orthodox Christian', the group membership expressed at Erecha was 'Waaqefanna' but also explicit 'Oromo'. The latter was communicated through flags with the Oromo colours, and some of the participants wore scarves or medallions saying: "I am an Oromo."

The Orthodox Christians had different ethnicities and nationalities, both Ethiopian and Eritrean. Hence, the participants in Easter Eve shared religious capital, but they have some differences in secular cultural capital, as for example mother tongue. One of my informants however, expressed that "we are all the same." In the case of Erecha, the participants shared both religious as well as secular cultural capital. It could be noted that a Norwegian man and a Kenyan woman participated. The man explained that he had travelled in Ethiopia, and was interested in Waaqefanna. During the celebration, he danced, drank *dafu* and ate *dadhii*. One of my respondents, Kiya, commented this:

Several foreigners are interested also in participate. So, like you for example know how beautiful and interesting it is so you are interested in celebrating. And me, who am Oromo, am more interested in celebrating it [...] more feelings for it. *Bayye jalata Erecha*. (I like Erecha very much.)<sup>75</sup>

Hence, Kiya see herself to be more attached to Erecha than the foreigners are. This illustrates the concept of 'embodied cultural capital': People may have an interest in languages, celebrations, dances, and so forth, but it takes time and personal investments before they know how to master, and have feelings attached, to a body of culture.

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<sup>75</sup> "Flere utlendinger som er veldig interessert også i å delta. Så, sånn du foreksempel vet hvor vakkert og interessant det er så du blir interessert for å feire det. Og jeg som er oromo er mer interessert i å feire det [...] mer følelser for det. (translator) *Bayye jalata ireecha*." (Kiya)

Several of the participants in Erecha had travelled in order to come. Some came from the surrounding areas of Bergen, others came from Oslo, and a few from Denmark. The people, who organised the festival or *ayaana*, explained how they invited people from different European countries. They also emphasised that Bergen was the only place in Europe where Erecha was celebrated. In the case of Easter Eve, I was told that the priest travelled from Italy to the Orthodox Church in Bergen. We might note how both the festival and the ceremony are events with obligatory or desirable *physical proximity* for the participants (cf. Urry 2003). They are held at certain places and times, that is, only once a year. When I asked one of the participants why he had travelled from Oslo to celebrate Erecha, he explained that it was not a religious duty but that he enjoyed being with his friends. This illustrates how religious celebrations offer opportunities for the participants to meet their friends and families, to reaffirm relations through face-to-face interaction. As previously argued, religions provide social arenas where A and B may demonstrate to each other that they both relate to deity C.

#### 6.4. Ambiguous rituals

Because people have come, it is just to make a party in the evening [of Erecha]. The singing, it is to gather everybody. Those who have different religion, you know, those who didn't go to the mountain and celebrate, but in the evening when it is singing, they come and join.<sup>76</sup> (Ifa)

[During El al-Adha, we] go to Mosque and pray there, finished, back home. Then eating . Then the whole family, if you have family and friends, and Muslim and Christians you shall invite theirs [show gathering movements with his arms]. Eat together. Big [emphasis] party.<sup>77</sup> (Bulcha)

In the case of the celebration of Erecha, people from different religious traditions gathered in the evening to eat, dance and enjoy concerts. Bulcha explains how one

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<sup>76</sup> “Også fordi folk har komme til, det er bare for å skape sånn fest om kvelden. [...] Så sangen, det var for å samle alle. De som har forskjellig religion, ikke sant, de har ikke vært oppe på fjellet for å feire det, men på kvelden når det blir sang, de kommer inn og være med” (translator, Ifa)

<sup>77</sup> “Gå til moske and pray there, ferdig, tilbake hjem. Etterpå spise. Så alle familie, du, hvis du har familie, og venner, og sånn muslimske eller kristne du skal invitere deres [show gathering movements with his arms]. Spise sammen. Stor [emphasis] fest.” (Bulcha)

invites Muslim as well as Christian friends and family to the meal in time of *'Id al-Adha*. Tadesse, who is not Muslim, informs that he has been invited to celebrate Ramadan.<sup>78</sup> These interaction rituals seem *ambiguous*, since they bear disparate meanings to the participants. To some, the association is a religious celebration – to others it might be a secular social happening. The multi-religious network meets *after* the religious ceremonies; hence, they meet at a places and perform activities that could be seen both as religious and secular.

Participants express *differences* in religiosity in these interaction rituals. Relations to deities are communicated through participating or not participating, in the previously held religious ceremonies. These examples illustrate the triad proposition: If person A has close tie to person B, she might invite B to celebrations that express her relation to deity C. This indicates that B in some way relates to C, or at least is aware of A's tie to C. In the next chapter, I will present some examples of how people in plural-religious social networks express their attitude towards different religions.

The next example was situated in a secular setting (private party) and occasion (it was not a holy day). The initiating prayer before the meal indicates a 'multi-religious' or ambiguous ritual, since the participants are from different religious traditions.

*The man and the lady who owns the house stand up (three women sit on the floor). An elderly man pray in Afaan Oromo, and the others join at the end of the sentence, including the ones who sit. The man to the right follows up with a prayer, then the next man to the right. They tell me that the meaning of prayer was to ask god [Waaqa] for peace [nagaa] and give thanks for the food. After prayer, everybody help themselves to the food, buddeena and itto. They encourage me several times to continue eating. There is an enjoyable atmosphere. (Observation, private party 15.02.07)*

I have been told that a similar prayer took place during a cultural-political meeting with people from different religions. During the meeting, an elderly man said a prayer in Afaan Oromo. The participants explained that the prayer expressed that all participants believe in god. Arguably, in these prayers the participants communicate

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<sup>78</sup> “Derfor når for eksempel når de feirer ramadan, vi får å besøker dem, besøker hverandre.” (Tadesse)

to their respective deities, as well as state to the participants that one believes in a deity. Across what is typically identified as religious boundaries, the participants expressed *similarities* in religiosity. A and B demonstrate through the prayer that they have a common relation to a deity.

We could say that the participants in the prayer share some religious capital; they master and are attached to prayers to a god. These examples demonstrate how difficult it is to identify the content or boundaries of different forms of religious capital – or religious discourses and identities for that matter. These rituals seem general in contrast to the more specified rituals at Erecha and Easter Eve. First, the ritual was only verbal prayer. The participants expressed their thanks towards god and asked for peace. They did not do any bodily gestures. Second, their intentions with coming to the party and the meeting do not seem to be religious motivated, since the prayer was only constituting a small part. The motivation might rather be to participate in ‘secular’ interaction rituals.

## 6.5. Secular rituals

*Most of the adults join the dance, but the length varies. The adults encourage the children (teenaged girls) to join the dance and learn different traditional dances. One parent tells me that they think this is important, especially if the children are going to visit Oromia. Everybody smile and sometimes laugh during the dance. They repeatedly encourage others, including me, to join the dance. (Observation, private party 15.02.07)*

This interaction ritual exemplifies how some Oromo in Norway are part of multi-religious social networks that interact in ‘secular’ rituals. Dancing, singing, drinking, and eating is examples of how shared *secular* culture turns the focus away from religious differences, while emphasising common culture.<sup>79</sup> The observation also exemplifies how cultural capital is transmitted from the first- to the second-generation immigrants in a diaspora community. Dancing and singing seem to be central in

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<sup>79</sup> The large event of 2007 in Ethiopia was the celebration of the millennium. This was promoted as a celebration for the whole Ethiopian population, for all ethnic and religious groups. The official arrangements at New Years Eve were centred on secular interaction rituals, e.g. big concerts with singers and dancers. Some of the people I talked with however, emphasised that it was a *Christian* celebration.

meetings and private parties arranged by informal friendship associations. As Tadesse puts it:

Yes, the meetings is, eh, fist we discuss how we integrate in Norway and the situation in Ethiopia. About Oromo people, about what we should do and how to raise our children in relation to culture, our culture, here in Norway. [...] And after the meetings, we always have parties. Singing and dancing, in the evening.<sup>80</sup>

This quotation illustrates how Oromo-Norwegians share secular cultural capital as well as concerns for their original country. Furthermore, they are immigrants in a new country. First generation Oromo-Norwegians, which have lived most of their lives in Ethiopia, might not share much cultural capital with their new fellow citizens. I understand this to be the main reason *why* Oromo in diaspora for the most part socialise within their ethnic group. When socialising in interaction rituals with other Oromo, they ‘profit’ from their cultural investments.

However, we should note that several of the Oromo speak good Norwegian. Some also participate in interaction rituals with other Norwegians, for example at school, work, or at Protestant Christian services. Furthermore, at one of the private parties I attended, some of the guests were Norwegians; a family who were neighbours to the host. They ate *buddeena* and *itto* but left when the dancing started. The father in the family told me that they were going to the city centre to watch a football match. We could say that the Norwegians did not have the cultural capital required to participate in the dance, or that they were not up for the kind of commitment dancing would imply.

At the same party, there was a guest from Ethiopia – a close relative of the host. His visit seems to be the reason why people were invited. This illustrates how migrants keep relations with their social network in their original country. Furthermore, this demonstrates the importance of “meetingness” to social relations (cf. Urry 2003). Although the guest and his family in diaspora keep contact through e-mail, they still wanted to meet face-to-face.

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<sup>80</sup> “Ja. Møtene er, eh, først vi diskuterer hvordan vi integrerer med norske og situasjonen i Etiopia, om oromo folket hva skal vi gjøre og hvordan skal vi oppdra vårt barn i forhold til kultur, vårt kultur, her i Norge. [...] Også vi har etter møte, vi har alltid fest. Sang og dans, om kvelden.” (Tadesse)

### 6.5.1. Expressions of religious diversity

*At the time I arrive at the party, people sit around the tables and eat (buddeena, itto) and drink (soda, red wine, beer). As far as I see neither the Protestant Christians, the Muslims, the young women, nor the children drink alcohol. Most of the men sit around the tables, while some of the young women work or eat in the kitchen (in the same room). After the food, the oldest male lifts the whiskey bottle and says a prayer in Afaan Oromo. Then he serves whiskey to the guests. The young women help with glasses and ice. There is a cheerful atmosphere. Some of the guests left the party. Some of the men went outside to smoke cigarettes. (Observation, private party 20.10.07)*

The prayer before serving the whiskey is an ambiguous ritual, similar to the prayers discussed above. We could classify the other interaction rituals (e.g. dancing, eating), as ‘secular’ since they are not centred on deities. The same activities are characterised as religious in the examples discussed above. Hence, the differentiation follows the focus and context rather than the activities in themselves. It is the setting that is secular, and thus ‘makes’ the interaction rituals secular. This does not imply that the participants are not religious. Some of the participants for instance express their religiosity with bans and badges, e.g. the Muslim women wear *hijab*. Their behaviour or participation in the rituals (eating, dancing), on the other hand, seems quite similar.

There were not huge differences in expressions of mood between those who drank and those who did not. The Protestants and Muslims who did not drink alcohol communicated their religiosity, their relations to their deities, to the other participants. To avoid drinking because of a ban could be seen as a costly commitment signal to their respective religious group. Some left the party at this time, which may be connected to another ban, as many Protestants in Ethiopia consider dancing to be a sin. However, this did not seem to influence the atmosphere between the participants. When I asked Jalale what she thought about drinking alcohol at parties, she answered:

We do not drink alcohol, so those who drink, and they drink next to us, we drink soda, it does not mean anything to us, for the whole family, no, it does not mean anything. We drink soda

here, and they drink there, we are happy together. It is no problem between, yes. I think like that.<sup>81</sup>

Jalale emphasises that it is not problematic that some people drink alcohol and that they are “happy together.” This exemplifies how the participants can choose not to engage in certain activities, but still share a common mood as they participate in other activities. I asked Jalale about dancing and she answered: “Yes, we dance together also.”<sup>82</sup> To conclude, participants in secular interaction rituals express their religious diversity through badges and bans. The diversity seem to be recognised by the participants and generally do not make any boundaries between the different groups.

## 6.6. Networking in a new context

The different forms of interaction rituals demonstrate how Oromo in diaspora socialise. They choose to participate in these interaction situations and to establish or maintain social relationships. To first generation immigrants, there are big differences in social situations before and after migration. Socialising with family and friends are usually more *habit* than a matter of choosing and organising. When migrating on the other hand, from rural to urban areas as well as to another country or continent, the social situation changes and the persons in question might need some new tactics in order to socialise.

Migrants bring with them embodied cultural capital, which provides new status and relevance in their new country, while keeping some of its role in the diaspora community. I understand these to be the main differences between the social networks of Oromo in Ethiopia and in Norway: (1) Leaving most of their family results in friendship-based, rather than family-based, networks. Some of the Oromo-Norwegians I have met lived with their closest family, i.e., spouse and children. Others did not have any family living in Norway. Thus, the ties between the households are based on friendship rather than family relations. (2) More arenas to socialise with people with different ethnicities might provide multi-ethnic social

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<sup>81</sup> “Vi drikker ikke alkohol, så de som er drikker alkohol, også de drikker ved siden av oss, vi drikker brus, det betyr ingenting for oss, for hele familien, nei, det betyr ingenting. Vi drikker her brus, og de drikker der, vi er glad sammen. Det er ikke problem i mellom, ja. Jeg tenker sånn.” (Jalale)

<sup>82</sup> “Ja, vi danser sammen også” (Jalale).

networks. However, my impression is that Oromo in Norway mainly socialise with Oromo, and it could be noted that this is a relative small social milieu. These kinds of social networks seem to result in: lack of boundaries between different groups and factions, stronger social boundaries to outsiders, and social interactions that are organised by informal friendship associations.<sup>83</sup> In an Ethiopian context, these characteristics seem to be similar to migrants from the countryside to the big cities.

## 6.7. Summary

The rituals I have sketched up reveal different ways of expressing relations to deities. Greetings are good examples the difficulties related to the differentiation between secular and religious social phenomena. Is it the time, place, or discursive content that decides if the greeting could be characterised as religious or secular?

Salutations in religious contexts both reaffirm the tie between A and B as well as their common ties to deity C. Both these and greetings in secular settings illustrate how important embodied cultural capital is to social interaction. Furthermore, salutations are good illustrations of social relations: through face-to-face contact, people mark and reaffirm their relations; they demonstrate for instance where they stand towards each other. This could be said about communication with deities as well. Through rituals such as prayers and offerings, people enact and affirm their relation to one or several deities.

The respondents' narratives of *private prayers* demonstrate how deities are perceived as interactive agents, e.g., they hear and comfort. Thus, rituals are not only affirmations of membership to a group, but could also be seen as affirmations of relations to one or several deities. Relations to deities are marked through different forms of language, as for example prayers, offerings, and kissing holy books. Many of the informants explained how they experience that deities comfort them and help them in times of crises, e.g., illness, in jail. Using Collins terms, religiosity is a form of interaction ritual chain that includes deities.

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<sup>83</sup> These assumptions are inspired by Fuglerud & Engebriksen's (2006: 1122) findings on networks among Tamils in Norway discussed in chapter 4, but based on general observation and analysis of the interviews.



Ifa's narratives of small-scale religious rituals exemplify how he keeps contact with the *qallu* institution through friends in Ethiopia. In the Norwegian context, prayers and sacrifices to *Waaqa* involve his closest family. In this case, as well as in *large-scale* religious rituals religious similarity is uttered. Arguably, this is the most common situation: A and B participate in the same rituals and express a common relation to deity C. Through different forms of interaction rituals, the participants express their relations to deities.

As emphasised by Collins, interaction rituals such as dancing and eating are demonstrations of belonging to a group. The celebrations of *Erecha* and Easter Eve took place at certain religious times and places. They required travel and physical proximity; they represent good occasions for the participants to mark and reaffirm their relations to people in their social network.

In some religious rituals the participants have disparate religious backgrounds. I have chosen to call these *ambiguous*. For example, Christians were invited to celebrate *'Id al-Adha*, and we could assume that they perceived the celebration differently than the Muslim participants. In these cases, religious diversity is expressed. Another example of ambiguous rituals is when multi-religious networks in secular gatherings participate in common prayers. This could be a way of communicating religious similarity. Finally, during secular interaction rituals, religious diversity is expressed through bans and badges. However, cultural similarity and membership to the group is demonstrated through interaction rituals such as dancing and eating.

The different interaction rituals provide good examples for how Oromo-Norwegians socialise. We might note the diversity in social interactions and in the groups they socialise with. Through the concept of 'secular cultural capital', I have attempted to demonstrate that despite religious differences, Oromo share mother tongue and preferences in for example food and dancing. This shared embodied culture should be seen as an important part of the experiences that first-generation immigrants bring with them from the original country, and seems to be the main reason why Oromo in diaspora socialise.

## 7. FINDING STRATEGIES

As already discussed, the typical scenario is that A and B share religious capital, interact in the same religious rituals, and that both have ties to deity C. Thus, most often the tie between A and B results in cognitive *consonance* rather than dissonance. The religious interaction rituals discussed in the previous chapter illustrates this. The ambiguous and secular rituals, however, demonstrate how Oromo are members of ‘multi-religious’ social networks. Shared cultural capital seems central to understand why Oromo-Norwegians socialise across religious boundaries. According to cognitive dissonance theory, big differences between people who socialise can cause uncomfortable mental states.<sup>84</sup> Individuals might respond to this by finding strategies that remove or reduce cognitive dissonance. Keeping the triad-hypothesis in mind, I will demonstrate how these strategies could be seen as B’s response towards A’s relation to deity C.

Religious differences are expressed in interaction rituals, but how are these perceived? My material reveals four different strategies: downplaying differences; focusing on similarities in representations of god; recognising differences; and participating in ‘new’ rituals. I will elaborate what these strategies involve, as well as discuss whether these strategies are changes of environment, of feelings or actions, and whether they seem to be cognitive strategies. The same individual can respond to religious pluralism through different strategies. I would like to emphasise that this is not intended to be a verification or falsification of the triad-hypothesis. I rather use this as an analytical tool to better understand how people respond to plural-religious situations. This might not be important to individuals that are not religious or have ‘weak ties’ to their deities. The private prayers previously discussed, illustrate how my respondents seem to have close relations, or strong ties, to their deities. Hence, we could understand the respondents to be part of a *sacred network*.

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<sup>84</sup> Recent studies on cognitive dissonance focus on how this also leads to uncomfortable emotions or negative affects (e.g. Harmon-Jones 2000).

## 7.1. Downplaying differences

Many people, different. Christians, Muslims, Waaqefanna, and others, so. Who live here, you cannot know who is who, religion. In fact, Islam you know because we go together to mosque and other parties, someone else, but other religion, you don't know really, but maybe Waaqefanna, maybe Christians, maybe Protestant, maybe Orthodox. Therefore, I am not sure, cannot say like this, this, this. But I have Christian friends, but I don't know [what kind].<sup>85</sup> (Bulcha)

This quotation implies that religions are not usually talked about among Oromo-Norwegians. Bulcha expresses that he knows who are Muslims, since they interact in religious rituals together, but that he does not know much about his other friends' religiosity. When I asked Gemetchu whether the people he had contact with in Norway shared his view of 'god', he answered:

No. Not necessarily, because the Oromos, the Oromo is a very, big, nation. Eh, they follow different, eh, different religion other than Christian, the Oromo are. Half are Muslim. [...] Any person, we, has contact, just, eh. I approach him just as an Oromo, regardless of his religion. [...] The point which bridge us, is the political, eh, grievance or political problems, which we have in common, so our contact or our intercommunication is not based on religion. Just to discuss about the Oromo issues, the Oromo problems, how to liberate or to make free our people under repressive regime. So, that is what brings us together.

Gemetchu further expresses how people in the diaspora are concerned about the relatives they left behind.<sup>86</sup> He approaches other Oromo as persons who share his interests in politics or Oromos' situation in Ethiopia, and downplay any religious differences. During the interviews, I asked how many of the respondents' friends and

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<sup>85</sup> "Mye folk, forskjellig. Christians, Muslims, Waaqefatta, and others, so. Som bor her, du kan vet ikke hvem er hvem, religion. In fact, Islam du kan kjenne islam fordi vi går sammen til moskeen og andre fest, noen andre, men other religion, du vet ikke skikkelig, kanskje waaqefatta, kanskje kristne, kanskje protestant kanskje ortodoks. Derfor, jeg er ikke sikker, kan ikke si sånn sånn sånn. Men jeg har kristne venner, men jeg vet ikke hvilken religion." (Bulcha)

<sup>86</sup> "I have no peace in my mind, because we hear everyday how many people are dying, how many students are dying every day, how many Oromo farmers, peasants are dying every day. So even though I am save, at safe place, I have no peace in my mind. [...] Still my relatives are still under that problem. And, day and night we always think about our families our general about Oromo problems [...] What makes me happy is when Oromo nation is free." (Gemetchu)

families who practice the different religions.<sup>87</sup> All of the respondents expressed that it was difficult to answer this question, especially concerning their friends' religiosity. However, all of them answered that they had friends that belonged to different religions than themselves.

This indicates that religious differences are recognised, but generally not something one talks about or focus upon. Hence, *downplaying religious differences* seems to be a strategy for avoiding the 'cognitive dissonance' religious differences might cause. To the triad-hypothesis, this means that if person A and person B do not share religious belief and practices, the relation between A and deity C are underemphasised when A and B socialise. According to Bulcha, Oromo-Norwegians do not explicitly express religiosity when they are socialising. In the case of Gemetchu, he explains how he does not think about religious differences when he meets people.

The private parties described in the previous chapter, are good examples of situations where A and B focus on their common *secular* culture.<sup>88</sup> The participants in social events downplay religious diversity through interaction rituals like eating and dancing. Hence, the strategy seems to be a matter of attitude or feelings (e.g. Gemetchu) as well as a behavioural strategy, e.g., secular activities. To downplay differences seems to be a 'discursive strategy' in the context of Oromo nationalism (e.g. Sorenson & Matsuoka 2001). This strategy could also be called 'secularism', which we could note, was the political result of religious disagreements in Europe. Abbas Haji Gnamo (2002) argues that Oromo nationalism is founded on secularism and tolerance. As I attempt to demonstrate, when it comes to inter-personal relations among the Oromo, religious *tolerance* seems to be the most important.

## 7.2. «The god we talk about is the same»

The triad-hypothesis became important to the question asked in the five last interviews.<sup>89</sup> One of the central questions was: *What do you think about the concepts*

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<sup>87</sup> See questionnaire in appendix.

<sup>88</sup> While secular interaction rituals seem to downplay religious diversity, the religious rituals discussed in the previous chapter seem to underemphasise *ethnic* differences. In these cases the secular cultural capital of A and B is not focused upon, as the shared religious capital is centre of attention.

<sup>89</sup> That is, the interviews with Kiya, Jalale, Tadesse, Bulcha, and Hassen.

of 'god' in the different religions? My intention was to examine how the respondents understood their friends' representations of god – as a way to understand how person B related to person A's representation of deity C. All my respondents express that the conceptions of 'god' was similar. This implies that *focus on similarities* is one of the strategies for members in a plural-religious network. However, they also emphasise differences in language, practices, and theology. When I asked Kiya how she understood the concepts of god in the different religions, she first laughed and said: "Gaafiin gaarii dha. Waaqayyo tokko" (Good question. God is the same). She explained:

It is like people have different languages [...] so they call God different names. [...] We only use different concepts because we have different languages. Otherwise, the god we talk about is the same.<sup>90</sup>

While Kiya understands language to be the difference between the conceptions of god, Jalale emphasises that the differences is "between humans."

I do not think it is a difference, because they all see, they all know [...] the Christians and the Waaqefanna, all knows, Allah, or God, right. Only difference is between humans. [...] Everybody knows who. Made the earth and the sky, just one right, just God that made them. So they know. So it is no difference.<sup>91</sup>

A closer look on Jalale's social contexts could give some perspectives to the correlations between religiosity and social life. She migrated with her closest family to Norway some years ago. I understand the family to be Jalale's most important in-group: They have frequent face-to-face contact and share most of their network. Further, they share religious capital and participate in the same religious rituals. Members of Jalale's intimate, as well as her effective, network are mainly Oromo immigrants whom she meets in secular interaction rituals. In these contexts, religious

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<sup>90</sup> "Nei, sånn at folk har forskjell språk og de har forskjell farge og så de brukte forskjellige navn på gud, ellers så er jo gud det samme, vi bare bruker forskjellige begrep fordi vi har forskjellig språk. Ellers jo gud den gud vi snakker om er den samme." (translator, Kiya)

<sup>91</sup> "Ja, jeg tror ikke det er ikke så forskjell, for de ser alle, de vet alle, de vet, alle de som er kristen også de som er waaqefanna, alle de vet, Allah, eller Gud, ikke sant. Bare mennesker som, kanskje litt forskjellig mellom mennesker. Alle vet hvem. Gjort jorden eller himmelen, bare en ikke sant, bare Gud som lager den, så de vet, så det er ingen forskjellig." (Jalale)

diversity is expressed. Hence, Jalale's intimate social network is plural-religious. Her effective and extended networks, however, are plural-ethnic. Jalale meets people with different ethnicities in the mosque. Further, she reaffirms her relationships with family and friends through Muslim interaction rituals. Jalale also socialises with other Norwegians, for instance, she meets people from different ethnic backgrounds at school.

In light of cognitive dissonance theory, Jalale has many different opportunities to avoid uncomfortable mental states caused by pluralism: She could have chosen to only socialise with her family to avoid diversity in both religion and culture. To avoid religious diversity, she could have only socialised with other Muslims. To avoid cultural diversity, she could only socialise with other Oromo. However, it seems like Jalale's strategy to avoid cognitive dissonance is to socialise mainly with other Oromo and focus on similarities in their representations of god. Hence, a focus on similarities indicate that person B identifies person A's tie to deity C, as similar to person B's tie to her deity. The representation of 'same god' seems to be a cognitive strategy, both to Jalale and the other respondents. How important is this to religious practice? Is this merely a response to my questions, or is it a common idea? This strategy seems to raise more questions than it provides answers.

In the prayers described in the previous chapter, this 'same-god' strategy is expressed through verbal language. The participants in the prayer belonged to disparate religions, still, they demonstrated shared religious capital in their prayer: they all believe in god. This indicate a view of god in the different religions to be the same. Arguably, references to 'god' are often understood to be the same idea (e.g. *God* in American civil religion). In the following examples, this *same god*-strategy seems important to the respondents when they are tackling differences.

### **7.3. Recognising differences**

Gemetchu and Tadesse emphasise how they consider *practices* to be what differ between the disparate religions among the Oromo: "God is only one God. [...] If you follow traditional way or that way or that way, you believe in one God, but the way you exercise may be different" (Gemetchu). When I ask Tadesse about what he understands to be the differences between the concepts of god in the different religions, he answers:

The concepts it is not that big difference, the difference is only how one pray to God. So they for example, when it comes to Waaqefanna, they pray only to God [...] they do not know about Jesus or about Muhammad, they. Only know about God, that is why they pray to God. Eh, we do not have any restrictions of for example, we follow traditional religious in our people. For example, when it comes to Muslim women they have to wear shawl, they do not eat with men for example in their homeland. They have many restrictions, for example the fasting time is very strong for Muslim. But, it is in this way, it is some. Difference. But the thought is the same, pray to God.<sup>92</sup>

Hassen and Bulcha both identify some similarities in conceptions of ‘god’, however they are also emphasising that the concept of *trinity* makes Christianity different from Islam: “Isa [Jesus] is the prophet of Allah, not the son” (Hassen).

God and his son, it is two [emphasise] It is different, there’s the basic difference. [...] As a common idea, all is the same. They pray to. One God. Right? But the way is different. [...] The idea is the same. Everyone prays to Allah, to paradise. (Bulcha)

Hence, although they are influenced by the *trinity/tawhid*-discourse<sup>93</sup> they also emphasise that the religions share “God” as a similar idea. When I asked Hassen what he thought about the concept of god in the different religions he first answered that it is the same. Then he told how he had read in the Bible, learned about trinity, and that this is the difference. We might say that the *trinity/tawhid*-discourse, as part of Hassen’s and Bulcha’s religious capital, influence how they understand Christianity. It could be noted that my respondents in Ethiopia only emphasised this point when I asked them about conceptions of god in the different religions.

Bulcha did not participate in Erecha and explains that this is because it is against Islam: “This cultural or Waaqefatta people who do like this. If you have

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<sup>92</sup> “Begrepene er ikke så stor forskjell, men forskjellen er bare hvordan man ber om gud. Så de for eksempel når det gjelder waaqefanna, de ber om bare Gud, de for eksempel de vet ikke om Jesus eller om Muhammed, de. Vet bare om Gud, derfor de ber om Gud. Eh, vi har ingen begrensninger fra forskjellige for eksempel, vi følger tradisjonelle religiøse i vårt folk. For eksempel når det gjelder muslimske kvinnene må ha sjal med seg, de spiser ikke med menn for eksempel, i hjemland. De har mange begrensninger, for eksempel fastetiden er veldig sterk for muslimske. Men, det er på denne måten, det er noen. Forskjell. Men tanken er same, ber om Gud.” (Tadesse)

<sup>93</sup> The contrast between the Muslim concept of *tawhid* and the Christian concept of *trinity* is a typical theme of discussion in Muslim theology (see Carman 1994). Abelsen (2006: 142) demonstrates how this is a central question in the process of conversion from Islam to Christianity.

religion, you don't have to go. So, I wasn't".<sup>94</sup> He understands Waaqefanna as the original Oromo culture and part of the *gada* system: "It is little bit culture and religion, you see. Little bit. Mix with culture and religion. Therefore: against Islam" (Bulcha).<sup>95</sup> Bulcha's understanding that Waaqefanna is against Islam seems to be the main reason why he did not want to participate. However, when I ask about the concepts of god in the different religions, he answers:

Really, I do not know about Waaqefanna. Waaqefanna they believe I think, I am not sure, but they said, one god [emphasis]. That god, I do not know who it is, but they said: Waaqayyo. That means in Afaan Oromo, Waaqayyo means god. But Waaqayyo, that god who has a son, or Waaqayyo like Allah, I do not know. But they said one god. But it is not go to church or mosque. (Bulcha)<sup>96</sup>

Bulcha's friends who are Waaqefanna have told him how they believe in Waaqayyo as "one God." The quotations further exemplify how theological 'details' are not discussed, for example whether the god in Waaqefanna is similar to that of Christianity or Islam. This implies that although differences are recognised, they are also underemphasised, as details are not important.

In cases of religious conflict, differences in doctrine and practice seem to be emphasised as something problematic, e.g. the debate about *hijab* in European countries. My impression of the Oromo milieu in Norway however, is that religious differences are generally not seen as problematic. In the secular interaction rituals described above, the participants expressed their religious diversity through ban and badges, but this did not seem to influence the common behavior or interaction in the group. Recall Jalales' attitude towards her friends who drinks alcohol at parties: "We drink soda here, and they drink [alcohol] there, we are happy together. It is no problem between." Hence, to *recognise differences* could be a strategy in a plural-

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<sup>94</sup> "Fordi, mot islam religion. Denne kulturell eller waaqefatta folk som gjøre sånn. Så hvis du har religion, trenger ikke å gå, gjøre sånn. Så var ikke." (Bulcha)

<sup>95</sup> "Den little bit culture også religion, skjønner du. Little bit. Mix med culture and religion. Derfor, mot islam." (Bulcha)

<sup>96</sup> "Really, jeg vet ikke om waaqefanna. waaqefanna de tror synes jeg, jeg er ikke sikkert, men de sa, en Gud [emphasis] Den gud, jeg vet ikke hvem er det, men de sa: Waaqayyo. Det betyr gud. Eh, det betyr på oromomisk, Waaqayyo betyr gud. Men Waaqayyo den gud som har sønn, eller Waaqayyo som Allah, jeg vet ikke. Men de sa en gud. Men det er ikke gå til church og ikke moske." (Bulcha)



religious network. To the triad-hypothesis, this implies that person B recognises the differences between her religiosity and person A's religiosity.

#### 7.4. Old relations, new rituals

Taddese grew up in a family that practiced Waaqefanna. He explains how his family used to visit some elders who have *ayyaana*, and that people visit them in time of celebration or when people are having problems. When Taddese came to Norway, he started to attend the Norwegian Protestant Church. Hence, in the diaspora context, he participates in new religious interaction rituals where he socialises with Norwegians. In his case, learning to appreciate Protestant services may be seen as new religious capital, which enables him to interact with a new group of people. However, Taddese informs that he mainly socialises with other Oromo, through an Oromo association. He also participated in the Erecha celebration. I asked him whether he experiences another god when he celebrated Erecha than in the Church, and he answered:

When I come to Erecha, I understand and know what is being done. In the church I do not understand everything they say [...] But anyway I understand that everyone believe in God, pray to God.<sup>97</sup>

The quotation implies how important the religious practice is: he fully understands the activity, praying to God. The content of the prayer, however, he only partially understands. This also exemplifies how Taddese's relationship to his deity is both practiced through Erecha as well as Protestant services.

Gemetchu grew up in a family that attended the Orthodox Church and practiced Waaqefanna at home. This has been common among many Oromo groups (see Knutsson 1969). Gemetchu explains how he understood this after many years:

But my, to... to tell you the fact, eh, my families way of practising their religion is something, eh [laughs] between this traditional Waaqefatta and Orthodox Church, at home they just practise in their traditional way, which came from generation to generation. And when they go to Church they follow the Orthodox Church exercise ... so... now after, when I was there, I

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<sup>97</sup> "Når jeg kommer ireecha, jeg forstår og vet hva som gjør, og i kirka jeg forstår ikke alt som, de sier [...] Men likevel jeg forstår at alle tror på Gud, og ber om Gud." (Taddese)

have no idea, what was just [laughs] going on, now when I, realise now after many years, there is still practise their traditional way of exercising their religion. That is of course in both ways believing in God.

Gemetchu explains how his family have been practising Waaqefanna in generations. When they started to go to Orthodox Church, we might say that their old relationship to Waaqa was practiced in additional ways through ‘new’ rituals.<sup>98</sup> Gemetchu was introduced to an Oromo Protestant church when he came to Norway. “There is an Oromo Church, in Oslo, which is very well organised. I had contact with them when I lived in Oslo, so I, have contact with them.” Hence, in the diaspora context he was exposed to religious input from Protestant Christianity. When he moved from Oslo, however, he did not continue to attend Protestant service.

Both Taddese’s and Gemetchu’s ‘old’ embodied relations to their deity seem to remain when they participate in ‘new’ religious rituals. When I use the word ‘new’, I only mean that the rituals are recently acquired by the individuals in question. To *participate in new rituals* seems to be a strategy in religious pluralistic contexts. Similarly to the *same god*-strategy, person B identifies the expressions of person A’s tie to deity C as similar to their own religiosity. Further, person B adopts some of person A’s religious practices while keeping her old relation to her deity. However, this does not seem to be a strategy to avoid cognitive dissonance when meeting people from different religions than themselves. It could rather be a social adjustment – a way to meet people in a new context while at the same time keeping their ‘old’ rituals and relations to deities. Arguably, the previously discussed strategies reduce dissonance caused by this social-behavioural strategy. Furthermore, to participate in new rituals could be a way of reducing dissonance caused by changes in behavior. For example, prior to migration, both Taddese and Gemetchu participated in religious interaction rituals. When they participate in new rituals in their new social context, this could be a strategy to maintain a sense of continuity in their lives.

To participate in new rituals could be compared to the ambiguous rituals described in the previous chapter. To view participating in new rituals as expressing

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<sup>98</sup> Recall Mario I. Aguilar’s theory about the different spheres of religion among the Waso Boorana: the inside, domestic sphere is influenced by “several symbols and actions from their traditional Oromo religion” (1996: 200). While the outside, public sphere is dominated by Muslim religious practices. The same could be said about Orthodox Christianity in the case of Gemetchu and his family.

an old relation to a deity, illustrates how difficult it is to understand the meaning participants attach to rituals.

### 7.5. Summary

Religious differences are both underemphasised as well as recognised by the respondents. All of the respondents expressed that it was hard to tell what religions their friends belonged to, but they also emphasised the differences in religious rituals and doctrine. The difference between the concepts of *trinity* and *tawhid* seems to be central to the Muslims, while others mentioned differences in practices. Recall what Tadesse said about the Muslims: “they have many restrictions.” However, none of the respondents presented these differences as problematic, and we could conclude that religious tolerance characterises the Oromo diaspora.

There are tendencies of a kind of civil religion where belief in ‘one god’ is central. Of the asked respondents, all answered that the concept of god in the different religions was in some way “the same.” It is difficult, according to my material, to say whether this is a merely a response to the question asked. Anyway, this expression of ‘same god’ is an interesting point that, as far as I know, has been given little attention in previous studies. It seems to be relevant both when recognising differences as well as participating in ambiguous and new rituals.

It could be argued that the latter strategy, to participate in new religious interaction rituals, is a strategy to reduce cognitive dissonance, or a social adjustment. However, it is a strategy common to several of my respondents. I understand *relations* to deities to be a useful concept in this case, since it explains how people may participate in rituals that are new to them. They keep their embodied relation to one or several deities while expressing this relation in new ways – this is the continuity in their religious changes.

To conclude, the strategies to avoid cognitive dissonance caused by religious pluralism, or person B’s responses towards person A’s relation to deity C, I found in the material are: (1) *Downplaying* religious differences, i.e., religions are not the centre of attention in social encounters. (2) Focus on similarities or the *same god*-strategy, that is, person B identifies person A’s relation to deity C as similar to person B’s relation to her deity. (3) *Recognising* differences of religious practices and theology, i.e., identifying person A’s expressions of relation to deity C as different but

not problematic. These three strategies seem to be the premise for what seem to be an environmental or social adjustment: (4) *adaptation* of new rituals as expressions of old relations to one or several deities.

## 8. CONCLUSION

Social life and religiosity among the Oromo in diaspora represents a large topic that has received little attention in previous studies. Consequently, this thesis provides more questions than conclusions. First, some questions will be asked when seeing previous studies in light of the previous theoretical and empirical discussion. What does my analysis imply about Oromo religions in general and to the Oromo diaspora? Second, I will suggest some tendencies of how Oromo-Norwegians socialise, and why they for the most part socialise with other Oromo. Third, the sacred/secular categorisation will be discussed: is this a helpful differentiation? Can we categorise some interaction rituals as secular and others as religious? Fourth, I will argue how representations of deities could be seen as part of social networks; and how my material implies a tendency of neutralising differences in representations of deities. Finally, some prospects for further studies will be suggested.

### 8.1. Oromo religions

The history of Oromo religions is often presented as a history of conversion to Islam and Christianity. Following the Abyssinian conquest, some Oromo groups converted to Islam, others to Ethiopian Christianity, while others remained Waaqefanna. Later, several Oromo groups converted to Western Christianity. Attempts to explain this usually argue that conversion to Ethiopian Christianity was a result of pressure from the State Church, while conversion to Islam and Western Christianity was a demonstration of resistance against the state. Few studies put forward empirical material or theoretical suggestions to why some groups were pressured while others demonstrated resistance. Abbas Haji Gnamo (2002) proposes that syncretistic remains of Islam in some Oromo areas could be an explanation why some groups favoured Islam over Christianity.

In line with Aguilar (1995) and Stark (2007), I understand some form of continuity to be of central importance to changes in religiosity. The *same god*-strategy provide a approach to the processes of religious changes. Have rituals in the different religious traditions been understood to be directed towards the same notions of ‘god’? Is participating in new rituals a matter of “extended” religiosity rather than of

conversion? In line with the tendency in my material, we could say that the continuity is relations to deities, while the change is ritual practices.

Processes of syncretism challenge the tendency to differentiate between religious traditions. Several of the pilgrimage sites in Ethiopia are also difficult to define as traditional, Christian, or Muslim. In pilgrimage sites like *Faraqasa*, people from different religious and ethnic groups gather to interact with deities. The disparate pilgrimage sites in Ethiopia seem to be centres for ‘ambiguous’ rituals. In the two examples previously discussed, *Faraqasa* and the *ayaana* cult in Busheftu, the visitors were Christians, Muslims, and Waaqeffanna. We could assume that the pilgrimage sites and ritual practices bear disparate meanings to the participants, although there do not seem to be any material to support this. Furthermore, as in the multi-religious prayers described in the analysis, the participants seem to share some religious capital: they express relations to the situated deities or religious leaders, in the respective sites.

Oromo nationalist movements developed during the last part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Generally, people from different religions and regional areas gathered and cooperated. Muhammed Hassen (1996: 76) provides an example of good inter-religious relations: “Muslims ate meat slaughtered by Christians and Christians ate meat slaughtered by Muslims.” However, few studies examine this kind of cooperation *between* religious groups. Oromo nationalism seems to have a lot in common with other nationalist movements, i.e., their foci on unity, history, and traditional symbols. Consequently, the religious diversity and tolerance is a characteristic of Oromo nationalism that deserves some attention. The *same god*-tendency indicate a form of unorganised civil religion. However, we should also note the disagreements based on religion in the organisations in North America (Sorenson & Matsuoka 2001).

## **8.2. Oromo diasporas**

There are few studies on Oromo diaspora but if we are to come with any generalisations, based on the preceding discussions, there seems to be a tendency to focus on reasons for migration, i.e., the political situation of Oromo, rather than reasons for and characteristics of social organisations in the diaspora. As argued by Mekuria (2002), Sorenson & Matsuoka (2002), and Kebebew (2002), Oromo lose

contact with most of their social networks in the process of migration. On the other hand, as demonstrated in these studies, as well as in Yedes et al. (2004), the Oromo diaspora provide arenas for establishing new social networks.

The only study on religion in Oromo diaspora informs that rituals provide cultural continuity. Through describing greetings and prayers, Yedes et al. (2004) demonstrate how culture is adapted, maintained, and handed down – both across religious and regional Oromo groupings in Ethiopia, as well as in the diaspora. We could note the similarities between this Muslim ritual and the *buna qala* practised by Ifa and his family (recall that they are Waaqefanna). In both contexts, coffee and incense are gifts to deities, and the content in the prayers seem similar: thanking and asking for what they need.

If we see social relations and feelings of belonging to a group as central reasons why people gather, this help us understand why people tend to practice religion with other people. For example, we could say that Muslim Oromo-Americans gather for *buna qala* in order to stay in touch with each other as well as their deities (see Yedes et al. 2004). This perspective proposes that there are social reasons why Oromo scholars arrange meetings (see Sorenson & Matsuoka 2001). Hence, the participants who travel to the OSA meetings might not only have academic and/or political, but also social interests.

### **8.3. Similarities in socialising**

When analysing social life, we should note that social relations are results of both choices and contexts. Previous studies argue that we tend to choose to relate to people who are similar to ourselves. This might explain why immigrant groups usually socialise within their ethnic group. Thus, the question we could ask is *what* do members of the ethnic group have in common?

Oromo-Norwegians mainly socialise with other Oromo. This is my impression both from my material as well as from Kebebew's (2002) study. Oromo in Norway gather for informal and formal secular happenings, as well as different religious ceremonies and celebrations. We could also note that some Norwegians participate in these gatherings, and that Oromo-Norwegians participate in interaction rituals dominated by non-Oromo. *How* do Oromo in Norway socialise? The plural-religious picture seems quite similar between the Oromo population in Ethiopia and Norway.

Waaqefanna, Islam, and Christianity are practiced in private as well as in organised ceremonies. Some Oromo-Norwegians practice Waaqefanna with their closes family, and meet for Erecha once a year. Others go to the mosque on Fridays where they are part of a multi-ethnic milieu, while they invite Oromo, also non-Muslims to celebrations like *Id al-Adha*. Several Oromo-Norwegians participate in Oromo Protestant congregations, while others in Norwegian Protestant churches. Some attend Ethiopian Orthodox Church together with other ethnic groups from Ethiopia and Eritrea. All in all, for a relatively small immigrant group there are big differences in religious social life. People from these diverse religious milieus socialise in cafés, organised meetings, and private parties. What bring them together is their similar language, cultural preferences, and political interests. This shared cultural capital seems to be the reason *why* Oromo-Norwegians socialise within their own ethnic group.

I have found the concept of ‘embodied cultural capital’ useful for understanding culture and religion as something people master and are attached to. Immigrants bring with them culture, and the diaspora community seems to provide a new context where the Oromo-Norwegians use and benefit from their cultural investments. Religiosity is a part of cultural capital, and it is transmitted, used, and profited from in situations of social interaction. When differentiating between religious and secular cultural capital, this illustrates similarities and diversity within “the Oromo.” Where cultural capital stands towards other theories on “culture” is a question that is outside the scope of this thesis. What other analytical tools would be useful in the context of culture and inter-religious relations?

#### **8.4. The sacred and the secular**

Theories on interaction rituals are useful when analysing religious as well as secular social interaction. Recall the main ingredients in successful interaction rituals: two or more people present; a common focus on objects or activities: boundaries to outsiders; and a shared mood or experience. Collins theoretical mixture, of Goffman’s micro-focus on social interaction and Durkheim’s theories of sacred symbols and collective consciousness, is useful when analysing how individuals socialise. For example, when we meet other people we tend to follow certain behavioural patterns, we tend to share moods and focus points. Network ties consist in chains of repeated



social interactions. In both religious and secular interaction rituals, we establish and reaffirm relations; we expand and maintain our social networks.

Interaction ritual theories are useful when analysing characteristics of social encounters: How many people gather? What do they do? Are there any boundaries to outsiders? Do they express similar emotions? As demonstrated in chapter 6, religious and secular rituals have much in common: Oromo-Norwegians affirm relations through greetings. They focus on common activities like eating and dancing. This behaviour constitutes boundaries to outsiders. They express similar emotions through for example smiling.

Should and could we differentiate between religious and secular phenomena? The *should*-question follows the need in a specific analytical context. When it comes to the Oromo, both in Ethiopia and in diaspora, they seem to share culture but adhere to different religions. Thus, they participate in different religious rituals and have different religious capital. If we understand religion as part of culture, we need another category to characterise *what* they have in common. We might say that their religions are to some degree similar; however, the category ‘secular’ seems to characterise their common cultural capital and interaction rituals. Hence, we should differentiate between religious and secular phenomena if it reveals some tendencies in the material. The *could*-question is more difficult to answer. Are there for example any differences between secular and religious culture? Throughout the thesis, I have used ‘deities’ as the defining boundary for religion. Thus, interaction rituals that focus on deities are religious interaction rituals. Cultural capital that is attached to deities is religious cultural capital.

Oromo-Norwegians socialise in religious and secular interaction rituals, as well as rituals which is hard to define as either one. Although the religious/secular differentiation helps us categorise different rituals, it also reveals that some rituals are hard to define. Does a prayer at a private party characterise the gathering as religious? What do we call, and how should we understand, these prayers where people from different religious traditions participate? We can assume that Christians who celebrate *‘Id al-Adha* see this as a secular social happening. We can assume that participants in multi-religious prayers see this as interaction with their deity. In a follow-up study we could ask the participants questions that may provide some answers to these assumptions.

Generally, religious similarities are expressed in religious interaction rituals, while religious differences are expressed in secular interaction rituals. Badges, bans, and behaviour are clarifying concepts when analysing *how* people express their religiosity. I have found the ‘three Bs’ to be useful, not only to understand how religious similarity is expressed but also how religious diversity is expressed. In secular interaction rituals, people focus on the same objects, activities, or *behaviour*. As demonstrated in the analysis, people could at the same time express their religiosity through badges and bans.

### **8.5. Networking and neutralising deities**

Previous studies argue that deities could be analysed both as interaction agents and as symbols of groups. To approach deities as social phenomena involve two main aspects: people interact with and relate to deities; people interact with people who interact with deities. These aspects influence each other: If the motives for participation in a celebration are to reaffirm relations to deities, this could also mark relations with the participants and increase feelings of membership. If the motivation for participation in a celebration is expectations from one’s social network, this might also strengthen one’s relations to deities. Relations to deities, as well as to other participants, usually influence people’s participation in religious gatherings. In this thesis, these are assumptions based on previous studies. In a follow up study we may ask participants why they came, how many of the participants they know, and whether they see their religious community as an important in-group.

Since people have relations to deities, we could include deities as part of social networks. This implies that members of one’s network also relate to one’s deities. To some extent, this perspective has been discussed in situations of religious groups (e.g. Tremlin 2006). We could also use this model when analysing inter-religious relations. How do people see representations of deities in other religious traditions than their own? How does this correlate with the religious loyalties of their social network? I have suggested some correlations between plural-religious networks and relations to deities through the dissonance-strategy model.

Previous studies argue that conflicting cognitive elements cause dissonance, and that individuals find strategies to avoid this. Festinger’s theory of cognitive dissonance has been used in different studies. I find the model of *dissonance-*

*strategies* useful when analysing the respondents' attitudes towards other religious traditions than their own. We could assume that differences in religiosity between acquaintances cause cognitive dissonance. The respondents seem to use these strategies to avoid cognitive dissonance caused by religious pluralism in their network: (1) Downplaying differences in religious belief and practice in social interaction. (2) Understanding the representations of 'god' in the different religions to be the same. (3) Recognising differences in religious doctrine and practice. These strategies might be part of what seems to be an environmental or social adjustment: (4) *adaptation* of new rituals as expressions of 'old' relation to one or several deities. Seemingly, the *same god*-strategy is a key factor when recognising diversity and participation in new rituals. The respondents expressed that the idea of god in the different religions was the same, but the practice was different. This attitude might explain the 'multi-religious' prayer as well as participating in rituals in disparate religious communities.

Could representations of deities be analysed as part of social networks, religious capital, and interaction rituals? I have attempted to demonstrate how *relationships* to deities are part of the religious capital, and how deities are part of social interaction as both *agents* and *symbols*. The triad proposition is an example of how deities could be analysed as part of social networks. These theories and models approach the topic of inter-religious relations on a micro-level. Relationships to deities seem to be a good starting point for further studies on religious change as well as inter-religious and inter-personal relations.

## **8.6. Prospects for further studies**

### *8.6.1. The triad proposition*

The tendencies found in previous studies and also in my material – of syncretism, ambiguous, or multi-religious rituals, and the *same god*-strategy – indicate that we should not differentiate between religious traditions too readily. Doing so runs the risk at making categories that do not help us understand the matters at hand, but rather

blur them. By this I mean that interview question ought not to be: “how many of your friends/family practice the following religions?”<sup>99</sup> or “what do you think about the concepts of god in the different religions?”<sup>100</sup> This presupposes that people differentiate certain activities and understandings of gods into categories of religious traditions. Better questions could be: “what kind of religious practices do the people you know do?” and “do the people you know share your understanding of god?” Asking these and related additional questions may provide some material that could test the triad proposition:

*If person A has close ties to both person B and to deity C, the B-C tie is always present. B will attempt to have positive or neutral tie to C to avoid cognitive dissonance.*<sup>101</sup>

One of the implications of the proposition is that the degree of multi-religiousness in social networks correlates with religious tolerance. In order to keep their friendship, B must tolerate expressions of the relation between A and deity C. This leads us to the question: do little or no social contact between people with differences in religiosity, correlate with little or no religious tolerance? Arguably, we should approach inter-religious relations from a micro or meso level of inter-*personal* relations.

### *8.6.2. Oromo religions*

Oromo from different religious backgrounds interact in several social contexts: in pilgrimage sites, in nationalist movements, in the diaspora, and we could add, the big cities of Ethiopia. *Pilgrimages sites* seem to be good context in which to study inter-religious relations. None of the studies previously discussed examine how the different groups relate to each other, for example whether they interact, or if the participants differentiate between the groupings. Furthermore, I have yet to find any studies on how visitors relate to the deities in question.

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<sup>99</sup> See questionnaire in appendix.

<sup>100</sup> See part 7.2. above.

<sup>101</sup> Does religious differences between A and B cause cognitive dissonance? How could expressions of the ‘same god’ be analysed as a cognitive category?

Arguably, when analysing *Oromo nationalism*, one should not only analyse the discourse but also the attitude and practices among the individuals who constitute the movement. Is religious tolerance common among Oromo nationalists? Is this attitude prior to the political engagement or visa versa? Are Oromo nationalists more religiously tolerant than “ordinary” Oromo? What are the strategies used to avoid cognitive dissonance individually; what are the strategies used to avoid disagreements organisationally?

Finally, a follow-up study may test my conclusions on the *Oromo diaspora* in Norway: Do most Oromo-Norwegians socialise with other Oromo? Do they often gather in secular as well as religious social interaction rituals? Is it the secular culture that binds them? Do they use strategies in order to avoid cognitive dissonance caused by religious pluralism? Relations between people from religious traditions imply several questions that deserve more attention. Some venues of further research on this fascinating field of heart-to-heart religion have been suggested.

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## 10. APPENDIX

### 10.1. Glossary

**Abba muuda** – *Father of anointment*,  
the religious and ritual leader

**Afaan Oromo** – The Oromo language

**Awliya** (Arabic) – Saints  
singular: *walih*

**Ayyaanna** – Holy day, celebration,  
spirit, grace (*ayyaana Waaqayyoo*)

**Bayy'ee** – many, much, very

**Buddeena** – A kind of pancake  
common in Ethiopia,  
in Amharic: *injera*

**Buna** – Coffee

**Buna qalaa** – Coffee slaughter (of),  
ceremony, coffee cooked with butter

**Dadhii** – Honey beer

**Dha** – It is

**Dufo** – Bread

**Erecha** – Celebration in the end of  
September, offerings to Waaqaa given  
in the river Hora  
also called *ayyaana birraa*

**Finfinne** - Addis Ababa

**Gaafiin** – Question

**Gaarii** – Good, fine, nice

**Gada** – Political and religious system,  
worship, believing, faze

**galla** (Amharic) – Oromo (negative  
connotations)

**Galtata** – Praise, thanksgiving  
*galatoomaa* (plural)  
*galatoomi* (female)

**Gamla** – Compound of the *qallu*,  
shrine

**Guracha** – Dark

**Isa** - Him

***Igziabeher*** (Amharic) – God

***Itto*** – Stew, sause, cheese

in Amharic: *watt*

***Jalata*** – To like, love

***Manyatta*** (Borana) - Settlements

***Nagaa*** – Peace, world order given by Waaqa, peace with Waaqa and man, and all the blessings resulting from this, such as fertility, wealth, good health, honour

***Odaa*** – Tree with a lot of leaves that gives shade, symbol of Oromo (used on the flag), a sacred tree where Waaqefanna perform rituals and worship

***Oromiffa*** (Amharic) – The Oromo language

***Qaluu*** – Slaughter

***Qallu*** – Waaqefanna religious leaders

***Rabbino*** – Waaqa, God  
from Arabic *Rabbi* – Lord

***Tawhid*** (Arabic) – Oneness of Allah

***Tchokorsa*** – Grass, symbolises peace and fertility

***Tokko*** – One, same

***Tzna tzil*** (Amharic) – Ritual bells

***Waaqa*** – God, supreme being, divine, sky, heaven

***Waaqayo*** – God, supreme being

***Waaqefatta*** – Followers of Waaqa

***Waaqefanna*** – Worship of Waaqa (n)

***Wan nama*** – Things human

***Wan waka*** – More than human

## 10.2. Questionnaire (in Afaan Oromo)

Mark: This is an anonym questionnaire. Please fill out the questions as correct as possible and write any remarks. You can mark of more than one rubric in each question.

### Afaan hadha kee maal?

Afaan Oromo Amhariffa Tigrinya Kan birra:

### Afaan maalfaa beekta?

Inglizii Amhariffa Afaan Oromo Norsk  
Kan birra:

### Amantiin maatii kee meeqaa? (Lakkoobsa chaafi)

<i>Islama</i>	<i>Kristiana</i>	
Sunni: _____	Orthodoxii: _____	Waaqefanna: _____
Shia: _____	Protestantii: _____	Kan birra: _____
Sufi: _____	Katoolikii: _____	

### Amantiin hiriyoota fi fira kee meeqaa? (Lakkoobsa chaafi)

<i>Islama</i>	<i>Kristiana</i>	
Sunni: _____	Orthodoxii: _____	Waaqefanna: _____
Shia: _____	Protestantii: _____	Kan birra: _____
Sufi: _____	Katoolikii: _____	

### Isa kam hirmaatta:

Bataskaana (Orthodoxii)  Mana Sagadaa (Protestantii)  
 Mazgiida  Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### Ni ayyaaneffattuu:

Wagga haaraa  Erecha  Boranticha  
 Faasikaa (Kristiana)  Masqala  Ayyaana dhalachuu Gooftaa  
 Ayyaana cuuphaa  'Id al-fitr  Kan birra: \_\_\_\_\_

### Ni gootuu:

Kadhanna  Soomuu  Buna Qalaa  
 Kan birra: \_\_\_\_\_

### Waquumaadhaf maqaa mal gargaaramta?

Waaqayyo Allah God Waaqa Guracha Igiziabehe

### 10.3. Questionnaire (in English)

Mark: This is an anonym questionnaire. Please fill out the questions as correct as possible. You can mark of more than one rubric in each question.

#### What languages do you know?

Afaan Oromo       English       Amharinya       Norwegian

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

#### How many in your family practice the following religions: (Write a number)

*Islam*

*Christianity*

Sunni: \_\_\_\_\_

Orthodox: \_\_\_\_\_

Waaqefanna: \_\_\_\_\_

Shia: \_\_\_\_\_

Protestant: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Sufi: \_\_\_\_\_ Catholic: \_\_\_\_\_

#### How many of your friends practice the following religions: (Write a number)

*Islam*

*Christianity*

Sunni: \_\_\_\_\_

Orthodox: \_\_\_\_\_

Waaqefanna: \_\_\_\_\_

Shia: \_\_\_\_\_

Protestant: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Sufi: \_\_\_\_\_ Catholic: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Do you attend:

Mosque       Ethiopian Orthodox Church       Protestant Church

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Do you celebrate:

New year       Erecha       Boranticha  
 'Id al-fitr       Christmas       The baptism of Jesus  
 Easter       Masqal       Other: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Do you practice:

Praying       Fasting       Buna Qalaa  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

#### What names do you use for God?

Waaqayyo       Allah       God       Waaqa Guracha       Igiziabeher