require examination. In some places, the decline of resources to meet the basic needs of the people compel them to overexploit their resources although they know that this process will undermine the prospect of supporting the future generation. Protection of the environment at the expense of the means of people’s survival is unjust. “Environmental justice demands equitable access to, and distribution of the resources of nature, in a manner which is sustainable for present and future generations” (Talbot 1998, 103).

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

2. TRADITIONAL OROMO RELIGION AND THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

2.1 The Oromo Concept of “Waaqa” and Human Destiny

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

But who is the creator of Waaqa? All of my informants agree that Waaqa is not a created being. Waaqa does not have an elder. There is nothing that has power over Waaqa. For the Oromo Waaqa is eternal and the final cause of all things. The Oromo thus had the concept of the monotheistic supreme God from time immemorial although the Oromo conception of God is quite distinct from the Western one. The Oromo conception of Waaqa illustrates that Momoh’s generalization is unfounded. “There is
extremely generated on account of our colonial exposure” (Momoh 1996, 62). Momoh contends that Africans have gods. He identified three gods, such as the ancestors and founders of the clan, the god of the water, mountain, forest or desert and the god of the staple crop or animal. He adds, “there are gods of the elements -wars, trade, hunting, moral gods -vengeance, protection; destiny gods-luck, blessing, misfortune and fate” (Momoh 1996, 63). Momoh further argues that “[t]here are no known African people who have one word for God. What we have are attributes, expressions and litanies describing and designating God. This, in line with what we have been arguing, is absolute proof that the notion of God in Africa is a result of Christian and Islamic Influences” (Momoh 1996, 64). The absence of proverbs, said Momoh, is a clear indication of the absence of the concept of God in traditional Africa (Momoh 1996, 67).

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

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

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

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

My informants state that the concept of “the red Waaqa” is non-existent in their belief. The Ambo Oromo identified Waaqa as gurraacha (the black Waaqa). They believe that Waaqa is above the sky, the cloud. In fact, they mentioned that biduu (the rainbow) has three colors one of which is red. Biduu is believed to be the belt of Waaqa.
Some Western and Ethiopian writers defined *Waaqa* as sky-God. According to Bartels (1983), the word *Waaqa* has a double meaning: sky, i.e., the vault of the sky as we see it and God. Tilahun in his *Oromo English Dictionary* defined *Waaqa* as God and sky (1989, 586). Mudee (1995, 330) defines *Waaqa* as the creator of human beings. Ludolphus (1982) reported that *Waaqa* for the Oromo means "the Heaven" which governs the world. Ceruli (1922) viewed *Waaqa* both as heaven and as God.

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

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

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

As has been stated earlier, the Oromo do not have a dualistic conception of reality. They believe that Waaqa and La’a (Earth) are inseparable. They consider the Earth as their mother. They underscore that they suck the breast of the Earth as the baby sucks its mother’s breast. All things originate from the Earth and depend on the resources of the Earth for their survival. The Earth is the source of nourishment, survival and life (Infs: Fufa; Gamtessa). Nothing can be outside the Earth. The following proverb illustrates this: Allaatiin hanga feete barartullee duuti isii lafuma (The birds that flew in the air come and die upon the Earth) (BABO 1996, 325). This shows that the Earth is the final abiding place of all things that lived and grew. For the Oromo, Waaqa is like a father. He gives them rain and helps the Earth grow different plants. In fact, the Oromo do not say that the Earth is Waaqa’s wife. What is clear is that Waaqa is considered as a male whereas the Earth is considered as a female. I have a serious doubt concerning Haberland’s assertion that the Eastern Arsi Oromo believe that “lafti niitii Waaqaati”—“the Earth is Waaqa’s wife” (Haberland 1963, 607). Bartels (1983, 108) also said that the Western Matcha Oromo do not consider the Earth as Waaqa’s wife. As I have argued elsewhere (1997a), the link between Waaqa and the Earth has been expressed in certain myths of Oromo origin, people’s blessings, oaths, curses, rituals, proverbs and so forth.

As Knutsson noted, “the earth itself is superhuman in character, although it is not equivalent to the heaven. To give weight to the truth of what one says or to a request for something, evidence is presented or a question posed ‘in the name of Waaqa and La’a’” (Knutsson 1967, 56).

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

Some informants argue that the land belongs to the living, for they use the resources of the land for survival. They maintain that the dead have already left the land and couldn’t claim it. The living will hand it over to the next generation (Infs: Fufa; Gonfa; Galata). Others contend that the land is the private property of the dead; they were buried in the land, and no body can force them to leave the land or to change their place. Human beings originated from the land and returned to it (Infs: Dagaga Kana’a;
Gamtessa). The third group believes that the land belongs to all, living, dead and unborn included. The living get the necessities of life from the land. The dead were buried in the land. The unborn will be born on the land (Infs: Dakssissa; Nagara Fite). The third group shares the view held by many Africans. “For Africans land belongs to all, living and dead. We will live in this land where our for parents lived and where our great-great-grand children will live. To make sure that all benefit from this wealth, we have to take care of it properly now. This value system cuts across all ethnic groups in Africa” (Omari 1990, 174). Generally, the Oromo people believe that the present generation is under moral obligation to preserve the land and hand it over to the future generation.

2.2 The Concept of “Ayyaana”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In Oromo traditional culture, some individuals claim to know the mystery of human nature and predict the future. These individuals are known as Xibaartuu Or Warra Waa beeku (those who know something) or Warra siini ilaalu (those who look at the lees of a cup of coffee and predict the future). They also claim to know the message of the smoke of incense. When people get sick and face life crisis, they visit these yarn spinners. The Qaalluu leaders also advise individuals to visit them and understand what to do in order to avoid their problems. It should be noted that Xibaartuu has a lower social status than the Qaalluu leaders. Some informants believe that Xibaartuu is knowledgeable and can help the people (Inf: Duresso; Emanssa). The majority of my informants, however, said that the Xibaartuu is a deceiver, and does not know anything.
The yarn spinners exploit the people by fabricating false stories. Some even say that they are the instruments of the Qaalluu leaders. They advise people to offer money, animals and other gifts to the Qaalluu so that the Ayyaana will solve their problem. But the advice of xibaartuu is groundless (Infs: Eticha, Gamtessa; Merga Jara; Ragassa).

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

2.3 The Concept of “Maaram”

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

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

2.4 The Concept of “Ateetee”

Some writers have explained the nature of Ateetee and Maaram. Knutsson states that the names Ateetee and Maaram are used interchangeably for the same kind of being (Knutsson 1967, 55). Daniel states that the various songs of Ateetee imply that "[a]teete is a ceremony prepared for Ayyolee, Maaram and Waaqa as thanksgiving by those who have children and a lamentation by the barren women" (Daniel 1984, 111). Bartels, however, questioned this assertion. To the Oromo of Western Matcha, Ateetee is the name of the ritual in which Maaram is invoked (Bartels 1983). Baxter (1979) had similar observation concerning the belief of the Arsi Oromo. For Cerulli, Ateetee is conceived as the goddess of fecundity (Cerulli 1922, 127; Harris 1968, 50).
The view of the Ambo Oromo is at variance with Knutsson's argument. According to the Ambo Oromo, Ateetee and Maaram are different and have different functions in Oromo religion. The materials used during their ceremonies are different. But both Ateetee and Maaram are believed to be females.

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

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

During Ateetee ritual, an old healthy cow should be sacrificed for the cattle to breed well, for a bull to serve a cow, for a pregnancy to be successful and for a land to be leveled. It is a taboo to sacrifice a cow with broken horns, blind eye, wrong tail and other defects. If a person does not have a cow, he can slaughter coffee (coffee fruits stewed in butter) (Inf: Fufa). The slaughtering of coffee may have been symbolic. “The cherry-like coffee fruits are bitten open and stewed in melted butter. The butter enters the fruits and reaches the beans inside. These beans which, because of their shape, account for the coffee fruits use as a symbol of the woman: their shape is reminder of the female organ much as cowry-shells are” (Bartels 1983, 287). When the husband sacrifices a cow, the Ateetee spirit will possess his spouse. The people anoint stick with
butter and prop it against their body. The husband will make libations by curdled milk. He is also expected to set up two green poles in front of the house. The people eat meat, drink yogurt, unfermented ale, and traditional beer. The milk will be served with Guchuma (large gourd). The people then praise the cattle in their song. The women dance during the night (Infs: Emanssa; Lemo).

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

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

2.5 The Mowata Tradition

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

My informants agree that Mowata came to Ambo from Soddo via Waliss0 although they could not identify the exact date of the appearance of Mowata in Ambo. It is believed that originally Damaamitii (the deity of Mowata) came down to the Earth from the sky; it is an invention of Waaqa and it cannot be inherited through blood ties. I think that the Mowata tradition has religious and social dimensions.

The Mowata ritual is largely associated with women, although men mostly Fugaa (woodworkers who are socially despised) and hermaphrodites participate in Mowata spirit possession. The Mowata society has its own leader who is called Habaqii. In most cases, a Fugaa is the leader of the Mowata society. There is the saying that “Dubartiin qeetti dhirsan nakkarte ala baateet jaarsi fugaa dha doobbiif goroan reeba” (A woman who challenges her husband in his premises will be beaten by a Fugaa elder outdoors with nettle and raspberry plant” (Inf: Ragassa). Each locality has its own Habaqii and those who reside in the area participate in Mowata spirit possession through the guidance of their Habaqii. The Habaqii is required to be given a whip made from the skin of a hippopotamus by the Ayyaana. For instance, Obboo Kumalcha, the Habaqii around the city of Ambo, reported that the spirit called Danfaa of the Qaalluu leader Obboo Fayissa Inika gave him a whip. When the Habaqii ties the whip in a firm knot, the members of the Mowata society will be possessed by the spirit and gather around the Habaqii’s premises. By tying the whip, the Habaqii can make them unconscious, and may force them to stimulate crying at a funeral, to fetch water, to eat food, and to perform any other duties. In particular, when the Qaalluu of Danfaa and Maaram (well
known spirits in Ambo) and one of the members of the Mowata society dies, the members of the Mowata society will induce crying at the funeral. To do this the Habaqii should be informed about the death of the concerned individual. When the Habaqii thinks that they have performed their duties, s/he will dispossess the members of the Mowata society of the spirit by untying the whip. The Habaqii can pacify a person who is possessed by the spirit and unconsciously tries to attack other people by using fire, thorny bushes and the like. The Habaqii employs various phrases to lead the spirit possession. These phrases are considered the language of Mowata. For instance:

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

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

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

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

After fourteen months a leopard took me. In the meantime, the members of Mowata society began to look for me. The leopard fed me rootworm, beetle and other insects, and protected me from other wild animals. Two or three leopards did this. When the first one collected worms and insects, the other one stayed with the patient. These leopards were special and different from other leopards. Personally, I did not see any of them for I was unconscious at that time. Finally, the Mowata expedition saw me after a week. At that time I was with a leopard. All persons who were possessed by the spirit knelt down in front of the leopard to influence it. Then a leopard was given a goat and left me. The fact of the matter is that a leopard did not eat goat given to it. It hit it and thereby killed it. Some times a leopard might refuse to leave the patient alone. When this occurs, Fugaa will catch it and throw it away and ask the relatives of the patient whether the latter belongs to them by pacifying the Mowata members for they may attack the former. Later the Fugaa will clean the patient and ask the members of the Mowata to bring the patient
to his premise on a stretcher. In my case, after going home, I drank warm water to clean my stomach from worms and insects. Later on I was given a whip made from the skin of a hippopotamus with eight bells by Danfiaa (the spirit) of Obboo Fayissa Inika so as to save pregnant women from hurting themselves during spirit possession. Consequently I became a Habaqii and prepared a Mowata ceremony in respect of the whip. The whip has its own ceremony.

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

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

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

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