

# The Transition of the Belief in *Ego* from a Traditional ‘Religion’ to a ‘Culture’: Historical Changes and the Roles of the *Alamos* in Kafa Zone, Southwest Ethiopia

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In Southwest-Ethiopian Kafa society, the widely practised belief in *ego*, a form of worship of the god *Yeero*, was conducted through the *alamo* (diviner), a medium who was believed to communicate with the spirits. This tradition was inseparable from the politics, economy, and society of the Kafa Kingdom, which prospered from the mid-14th century to 1897. Following its conquest by and incorporation into the Ethiopian Empire, the Kafa society was introduced to Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, and many converted to the faith. Nonetheless, the deeply rooted belief in *ego* continued to exert a great influence on the Kafa people, who would visit the *alamo* while also visiting the church. However, under the Derg regime, all religious activities were regulated, and it was difficult to openly practise the *ego* traditions and Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity. In 1991, with the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front assuming power, people began visiting the *alamo* again, though the belief in *ego* had weakened. This paper discusses the historical changes in the nature of the *ego* tradition in the Kafa Zone in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples’ Regional State in Ethiopia, and examines why the Kafa people are now moving away from the tradition.

**Key words:** social changes, medium, spirit possession cult, Christianity, Kafa Kingdom

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses the belief in *ego*, a spirit possession tradition in the Kafa Zone<sup>(1)</sup> of the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples’ Regional State in Ethiopia under the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) regime. It particularly examines how the changes in the Ethiopian government, from the Haile Selassie era to the Derg and EPRDF regimes, affected the society, people’s beliefs, and religious practices.

In Kafa society, belief in *ego*, was widely practised. Worship of the god, *Yeero*, was conducted through a spirit medium called *alamo* (diviner), who was believed to have the ability to communicate with the spirit *ego*.<sup>(2)</sup> This belief in *ego* was closely associated with the day-to-day lives of the people. The *alamo* was an intermediary between the *ego* and the people, offering solutions for illnesses and concerns. These *ego* traditions were inseparable from the politics, economy, and society of the Kafa Kingdom, which prospered from the mid-14th century to 1897. Amnon Orent, in his anthropological research on the Kafa Zone from 1966 to 1967, described how belief in *ego* became widespread and central to the religion of the Kafa society, especially in the 1960s (Orent 1968, 1969). When the Kafa

Kingdom was incorporated into the Ethiopian Empire, Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity was introduced under the rule of Amhara. However, according to Orent, the *ego* traditions were deeply rooted in people's lives and continued to exert a great influence on Kafa society. Orent reported that there were only 72 Ethiopian Orthodox Christian churches, five Catholic churches, and one mosque in the Kafa Zone, while there were thousands of 'ego-houses' or 'ego-shrines', with at least one *alamo* in every hamlet (Orent 1969: 223, 228). Werner Lange in his field research of southwestern Ethiopia, including the Kafa Zone, from 1972 to 1973, examined the complex and multifaceted religious expressions of the Kafa people from a historical perspective (Lange 1982: 269–324).

Orent and Lange analysed the belief in *ego* in Kafa history and its practice by the people, rather than the phenomenon of spirit possession itself. However, there have been several reports of spirit possession around the world, and cultural and social anthropology offer various explanations for the phenomenon. Boddy (1994) categorised the trends into two, noting that the anthropological study of spirit possession up to the early 1990s had changed the framework of the discussion. Lewis (2003) argued about possession from a social, political, and economic perspective, stating that it isolates particular social conditions and encourages the ecstatic emphasis on religion. Lewis classified spirit possessions as either peripheral possession cults, or central or morality possession religions. The peripheral view is that most spirits are foreign and typically considered amoral (i.e. they have no direct moral significance). In addition to explaining illness, peripheral possession can be seen as being an oblique aggressive strategy. Such marginal cults appeal to subordinates, especially women. Contrastingly, the cults that stand at the centre of society and celebrate public morality are generally male-centred and draw their inspired leaders from more exalted strata. These are collectively known as central morality possession religions and are led by male shamans who are elected by spirits. These shamans exercise ritual and politico-legal authority at every level of society. In addition, it enshrines the ancestral spirit as the guardian of customary morality. However, the status and importance of peripheral and central possession cults depend on the social situation. This suggests that the main and peripheral possession cults should be seen as opposite extremes on a single continuum rather than as completely different types of religion (Lewis 2003: 27, 128–129).

Lewis examined the relationship between spirit possession and the socio-political situation by discussing the practice of *ego* traditions under the Amhara rule based on the research by Orent. He argued that when the Kafa Kingdom was incorporated into the Ethiopian Empire and Amhara Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity came to exert a strong influence, belief in *ego* was further strengthened and increased in authority, and the *alamos* gained new political significance. The introduction and partial acceptance of Amhara Christianity did not reduce the status of the traditional Kafa religion to that of a marginal cult. Rather, a subtle, practical symbiosis occurred that enabled the old religious system to continue alongside and, to a certain extent, within the new religious system. Moreover, when the alien authorities destroyed the traditional Kafa political organisation, the old religion and its officiants acquired new political significance. Thus, even under the Amhara rule, the belief in *ego* was a central moral possession religion, and the *alamos* were the de facto political and legal authorities of the Kafa society. In the Amhara domination, the *alamo*, who was the 'national' shaman of the Kafa society, became the focus of the Kafa ethnic identity, and the belief in *ego* came to serve as a vehicle for Kafa cultural nationalism more than ever before. Therefore, the Amhara domination probably played an important role in keeping Kafa possession on the boil (Lewis 2003: 129–131).

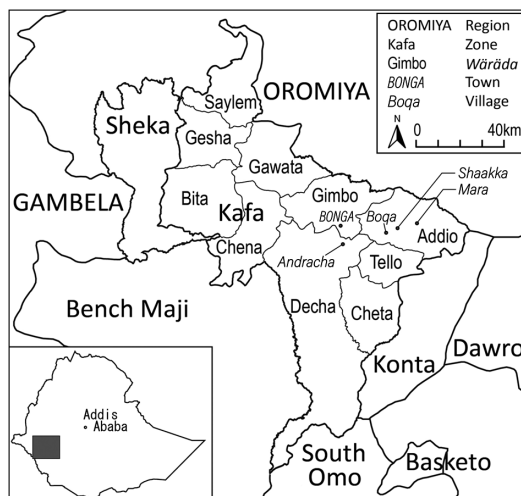
However, after Orent and Lange conducted field research during the Haile Selassie era, Ethiopia underwent drastic changes under the Derg regime from 1974 to 1991. Thus, there is a stark difference between the previous and contemporary studies of the *ego* traditions. When research for this paper was conducted in the Kafa Zone from 2005 to 2012,<sup>(3)</sup> many people were moving away from belief in *ego*. Most narratives about the *ego* and *alamos* by Christians and Muslims, especially by the younger generation, were negative. Some Ethiopian Orthodox Christians stated, 'The *ego* is a devil and the *alamo* is a person who conveys the words of the devil'; other converts to Protestantism stated, 'We did not have a religion before our conversion', denying having embraced the *ego* traditions in the past.

Why do the Kafa people today deny their past adherence to the *ego* tradition and are moving away from it? How is its rise and fall related to the social, economic, political, and religious changes in the Kafa Zone? This article answers these questions with brief descriptions of the *ego* traditions and the *alamos*, as well as the historical changes in the Kafa Zone and the *alamos*' response to them, focusing on the Kafa Kingdom era, the Ethiopian Empire era, the Italian rule, the Haile Selassie era, and the Derg and EPRDF regimes. Then, the people's reactions to the belief in *ego* and the *alamos* will be examined. Finally, the reasons for its decline from the 1960s, when it was booming, despite the historical changes that transpired in the Kafa Zone, to its present marginalised status with regard to the social, political, and religious aspects will be discussed.

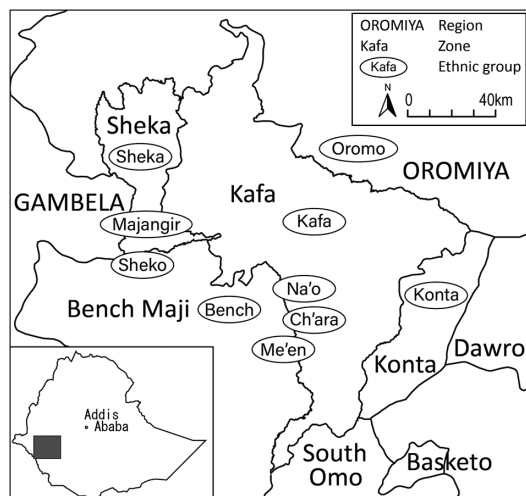
## 2. RELIGIONS IN THE KAFI SOCIETY

The Kafa Zone, located in the southwestern part of Ethiopia, is bordered by the Gojeb River to the north and the Omo River to the south (Map 1). Most people in the Jimma Zone of Oromiya Regional State, located north of the Gojeb River, are Muslim Oromo people, while in the Kafa Zone, located south of the Gojeb River, Christian Kafa people constitute the majority. The population of the Kafa Zone in 2007 was 874,716. In general, people who speak the Omotic Kafa language *Kafinnoonno* are called Kafa or Kaficho. However, within the Kafa society, people differentiate themselves as Gomoro, Manno, or Manjo. The Gomoro (hereafter referred to as Kafa), who are farmers, are a majority, followed by the Manno, who are tanners and potters and the Manjo who were hunters.<sup>(4)</sup> These three groups reside in the *wärädas* across the Kafa Zone, and their living areas within each village are different. Although the Kafa, Manno, and Manjo people speak the Kafa language and have the same lifestyle, the Manno and Manjo are marginalised in the Kafa Zone. In addition, there are Amhara people who migrated from northern Ethiopia.<sup>(5)</sup> The Na'ò, Ch'ara, and Me'en people live in the southern part of the Kafa Zone (Map 2).

People living in the Kafa Zone follow Christianity (Ethiopian Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant), Islam, and traditional religions (e.g. belief in *ego*, *qollo*<sup>(6)</sup>, and ancestral worship<sup>(7)</sup>). According to the 2007 census, 88% (769,644) of the people living in the zone were Christians, of these 61.4% (537,246) were Ethiopian Orthodox Christians, 24.8% (217,305) Protestants, and 1.7% (15,093) Catholics. As for the other religions, 6.2% (54,251) were Muslims, 5.4% (46,971) practised a traditional religion, and 0.4% (3,850) practised other religions (Table 1). However, there are some



Map 1. Location of Kafa Zone



Map 2. Ethnic groups around Kafa Zone

**Table 1.** Population by religion in Kafa Zone in 2007 (CSA 2007: 206)

<i>Wäräda</i>	Total	Orthodox Christian		Protestant		Catholic		Muslim		Traditional		Others	
Bitä	74,577	32,905	(44%)	32,993	(44%)	299	(0.4%)	5,049	(7%)	2,923	(4%)	408	(0.5%)
Chena	158,449	64,708	(41%)	69,107	(44%)	4,890	(3%)	6,180	(4%)	12,594	(8%)	970	(0.6%)
Cheta	32,619	25,238	(77%)	1,338	(4%)	48	(0.1%)	464	(1%)	5,321	(16%)	210	(0.6%)
Decha	128,887	82,354	(64%)	20,305	(16%)	4,521	(4%)	2,803	(2%)	18,436	(14%)	468	(0.3%)
Gawata	72,473	38,299	(53%)	20,968	(29%)	75	(0.1%)	12,673	(17%)	303	(0.4%)	155	(0.2%)
Gesha	85,104	34,909	(41%)	37,973	(44%)	52	(0.06%)	11,279	(13%)	496	(0.5%)	395	(0.4%)
Gimbo	89,892	78,362	(87%)	3,608	(4%)	2,822	(3%)	4,619	(5%)	312	(0.35%)	169	(0.18%)
Addio (Menjiwo)	107,731	98,465	(91%)	4,161	(4%)	800	(0.7%)	176	(0.1%)	3,453	(3%)	676	(0.6%)
Saylem	40,874	8,875	(22%)	23,406	(57%)	30	(0.07%)	8,497	(21%)	29	(0.07%)	37	(0.09%)
Tello	63,252	58,003	(92%)	1,392	(2%)	268	(0.4%)	181	(0.3%)	3,090	(5%)	318	(0.5%)
Bonga	20,858	15,128	(72%)	2,054	(10%)	1,288	(6%)	2,330	(11%)	14	(0.06%)	44	(0.2%)
Kafa Zone	874,716	537,246	(61.4%)	217,305	(24.8%)	15,093	(1.7%)	54,251	(6.2%)	46,971	(5.4%)	3,850	(0.4%)

Ethiopian Orthodox Christians who also practise a traditional religion; thus, the aforementioned figures do not paint an accurate picture of the reality.

The religious leanings in the Kafa Zone vary greatly from *wäräda* (district) to *wäräda*.<sup>(8)</sup> In four *wärädas*—Saylem, Gesha, Chena, and Bitä—in the northern and western parts of the Kafa Zone, over 40% of the population follows the Protestant churches. These *wärädas* are adjacent to the Sheka Zone, influenced by Protestant missionaries who conducted missions among the Majangir in the 1960s (Hoekstra 1995: 201–375). The Saylem *wäräda* in the northern part of the Kafa Zone, has several Muslims, partly because it is adjacent to the Simgo *wäräda* in the Jimma Zone, inhabited by many Muslim Oromo people. Contrastingly, in the Addio (formerly Menjiwo) and Tello *wärädas* in the eastern Kafa Zone, most inhabitants were Ethiopian Orthodox Christians, and although Protestants began missionary activities in the 2000s, they are not widespread. These *wärädas* faced transportation issues until the mid-2000s, and their inhabitants were said to be conservative. In the Decha and Cheta *wärädas*, the proportion of followers of traditional religions, such as belief in *eqo*, is relatively large.

Many Ethiopian Orthodox Christians, Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims came from outside the Kafa Zone. Prior to their arrival, traditional religions such as belief in *eqo*, *qollo*, and ancestral worship were widely practised in Kafa society by the original inhabitants of the Kafa Zone.

Ethiopian Orthodox Christians live across the Kafa Zone. In Kafa language, Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity is called ‘Amhara Christianity (*Amari-Kittinno*)’, and was brought to Kafa in two phases. The first phase was in the early 16th century, during the reign of Sarša Dengel (1563–1593) (Bieber 1923: 420; Huntingford 1955: 105). The second phase occurred after the invasion of Menelik’s troops.

Catholicism in the Kafa Zone is called ‘Christianity of Kafa (*Kafi-Kittinno*)’ and it was brought to the Kafa Kingdom by the missionary Portuguese priests from the Society of Jesus who worked in northern Ethiopia from 1555 to 1633. The priests had fled to the Kafa Kingdom after being exiled by the Ethiopian Emperor and actively engaged in missionary work.<sup>(9)</sup> Fr. Cesare, a priest of the Capuchin monastic mission, led the way in 1855, followed by Msgr. Massaja in 1859, who, until his expulsion from the Kafa Kingdom in 1861, conducted missionary activities in what is now Shapa in the Decha *wäräda* (Massaja 1888). After Msgr. Massaja’s expulsion, several foreign missionaries came to the Kafa Zone, and Catholic missionaries continued their activities. The Catholic population of the Kafa Zone in 1878 was estimated at 9,000 (Jarousseau 1932: 95). Today, there are more than 50 Catholic churches in the area.

Protestant Christianity has gained prominence in the Kafa Zone over the years. The Protestant missions in the area were begun by Qalä Həywät Church in 1950–1951, following the founding of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. Initially, priests and their families stayed in Bonga, and the missionary staff included nurses offering medical services. Under the Derg regime, however, foreign missionaries were deported and their activities came to a halt. Following the collapse of the Derg regime in 1991, the Qalä Həywät Church and other Protestant churches entered Kafa and resumed missionary activities.<sup>(10)</sup> A number of *ego*-believers, especially minority groups, converted to Protestantism.

The Muslim population in the Kafa Zone is rather small, originally hailing from only seven of all the Kafa clans.<sup>(11)</sup> There are various stories about the introduction of Islam in Kafa. According to Grühl, Islam was introduced to Kafa during the reign of Galli Ginochi<sup>(12)</sup> in the early 18th century (Grühl 1932: 179), while other Muslim Kafa people state that *Sayyid* Abdusalam came to Tongolla and built a mosque in the 16th and 17th centuries.<sup>(13)</sup>

### 3. BELIEF IN *EQO*

#### 3.1. *Ego* and *alamo*

*Ego* is a spirit that serves the high god, *Yeero*,<sup>(14)</sup> and is believed to dwell in a person from a certain clan and is passed on through generations. The person who harbours the *ego* is known as an *alamo*. In the *ego* tradition, the *alamo* acts as an intermediary between the spirit and the people, and offers counselling to the people and solutions to their illnesses and worries. The *alamo* is chosen by the *ego* and is usually a man. If the *ego* finds that the *alamo* lacks virtue, thus weakening its power, the spirit abandons its host and chooses another *alamo*.<sup>(15)</sup> The *egos* are said to have mobility and may have travelled to the Kafa Zone from other areas.<sup>(16)</sup> There are several *egos*, and each has its own name as well as corresponding powers and fields of expertise. The *alamo* is often referred to by the *ego*'s name, with the exception of *Ebedegoda*.<sup>(17)</sup> The *egos* have a hierarchical order owing to their powers. The *Do'ochi*, meaning 'very big', is at the top of the hierarchy, above all the other *egos*, and the *alamo* who has *Do'ochi* is referred to as *Ebedegoda*, who is selected from the Dugo clan of Kafa. The *Ebedegoda* is also called 'the good king' (*De'e-taato*) and plays a central role in the *ego* traditions. The *ego* has the ability to reveal the past to the *alamo*. It also provides knowledge of special medicines that counteract the effect of witchcraft and cure illnesses. However, *ego* cannot predict the future.<sup>(18)</sup>

There are two ways a person can become an *alamo*. First, when an *alamo* dies, the *ego* that possessed him transfers itself to or possesses his son. If the dead *alamo* does not have a son, but has more than one brother, the *ego* takes time to choose one from among them. The second way is when an *ego* possesses a person who shows signs of suffering from an unexplained illness (e.g. shivering suddenly or letting out a strange cry) and does not recover even after several months. He stops eating at other people's houses and stops eating sheep and native cabbage,<sup>(19)</sup> which are tabooed food items in the *ego* traditions. Then, his relatives take him to an *alamo* to determine whether he is ill because he is possessed by an *ego* or because of the sins of his ancestors. If the possession is by an *ego*, the *Ebedegoda* recognises the person as an *alamo* and gives him his blessing. In the other case, the *Ebedegoda* expels the bad spirits from the possessed person.

In either of the cases, anyone who becomes an *alamo* needs to be sanctified and blessed by the *Ebedegoda* (Orent 1968: 14). When the *Do'ochi* chooses a new person to be the *Ebedegoda*, honey is said to come out from that person's right-hand fingertips, and milk from the other hand.<sup>(20)</sup>

#### 3.2. Consultation with the *alamos*

The Kafa people who adhere to the *ego* traditions visit the *alamo* regularly to seek advice regarding life decisions, including the appropriate time for marriage, childbirth, migration, or hunting for themselves or their relatives as well as to find out the causes of their misfortunes and disasters, such as



illness, death, infertility, or poor crops. There are fixed days of the week when people visit the *alamo* because he can communicate with the *ego* only on Saturdays and Sundays.<sup>(21)</sup> The *alamo* does not face people and talks to them from behind a curtain, mediated by the people serving him. In response to the client's question, the *alamo* speaks about the client's past and present actions, rude behaviour toward the *ego*, and interpersonal relationships, and tells the client to make a sacrifice to resolve their issues.

People sometimes make a vow to the *ego*, and bring incense, candles, cloth, and a small amount of cash, in addition to livestock. If the vow is not kept, the *ego* punishes the person. According to Orent, punishments include leprosy, headaches, epilepsy, and other illnesses, or unexplained fires in their homes. Thus, illness was often considered to be a result of one's failure to maintain their commitment to the *ego* (Orent 1969: 233).

People bring tributes to the *egos* on special days, including on the Feast of the Cross (*mashukero baaroo*), Christmas (*genna*), and Easter (*madee kaamo*). In the Kafa Kingdom, people gave cows, goats, horses, women, slaves, and money to the *alamos* as tributes. Nowadays, tributes include oxen, goats, and cash. The *alamo* visits the *Ebedegoda*, and gives him the tributes people bring on public holidays.

People generally engage in communal labour for *alamos* (*madde shuuno*)<sup>(22)</sup> two days a week, especially during the farming season, where the men care for farm livestock such as cattle, sheep, and goats and the women cut weeds. The men engage in agricultural activities such as ploughing, sowing, harvesting, and protecting the crops from damage by wild animals. Other works include the collection and processing of starch from *ensete*, and the transport of firewood. Men are also involved in the construction of the huts and fences used in the rituals of the *qollo* and of ancestral worship, and the cutting and transporting of trees.

However, not all *alamos* engage and exploit their people. Some may provide food, livestock, and cash, given to them by other people, to those in need.

### 3.3. Maintaining the holiness of the *alamos*

Many things are considered taboo in the Kafa society, and some are related to the belief in *ego* and its influence on the maintenance of social moral law. Once a man becomes an *alamo*, he is subject to a series of stringent taboos that emphasise his position as a diviner and sets him apart from other men. Violating these taboos makes the *ego* angry and causes the *alamo's* death. This is meant to highlight the sanctity of the *alamos*. The *alamo* is prohibited from openly eating with others and must sit behind a curtain. His meals are cooked by a special cook or by his wife. The *alamo* should not use tableware used by other people. He should use special tableware reserved only for him. Foods such as sheep, chickens, and native cabbage are considered taboo and should not be consumed at all, while meat and cheese should not be eaten on Wednesdays and Fridays. Furthermore, the *alamo* can drink water only from the spring that is attributed to the spirit, *qollo*. The act of excretion must be concealed because what is excreted from the *alamo's* body is believed to have new powers (Orent 1969: 225–226).

Taboos, including food restrictions, are also imposed on those who practise *ego* traditions. Menstruating and puerperal women are not allowed to enter their own homes because the Kafa people consider menstrual blood to be dangerous. During their menstrual period, women live in small huts on the sites of their homes, especially built for the purpose (*dupphe kexo*). Women without a menstrual hut sleep and eat near the entrance to their main house and also refrain from entering the purlins and kitchen sheds to prepare food and coffee. They sit near the doorway of their house to drink coffee.<sup>(23)</sup> At the end of their menstrual period, they wash their bodies with water. Postpartum women are prohibited from entering the purlin for approximately 40 days after giving birth.<sup>(24)</sup>

*Alamos* were respected as religious leaders, and when people visit the *alamo*, they kiss the ground in front of him, bow at the entrance to his home, and kiss the doorway and the pillars of the door. People pay homage to the *alamo* from a distance and refer to him with honorific titles such as 'master', 'mister (*doono*)', and 'my lord (*taroon*)'. People lie on the ground and greet the *alamo*, saying, 'I will die for you (*shoowo moogochi qebona*)', in the same way that it was done to the Kafa people by the Manno

and Manjo people, and the occupational groups in the Kafa society before the Derg regime. When the *alamo* passes them on the road, the people kneel and bow, not raising their heads until he has passed. The *alamo* is also not allowed to attend funerals and to see dead bodies. His burial ground is called *guto*, which is distinct from the burial grounds for the general public.

The *alamo* avoids contact with people who eat tabooed foods, with mourning persons, and menstruating puerperal women. It is also taboo to maintain with the Manno and Manjo people, and other occupational groups, shake their hands and for them to enter the *alamo's* house.<sup>(25)</sup> The Kafa people have similar taboos as the *alamos* with regard to the Manno and Manjo people and occupational groups.

#### 4. HISTORICAL AND RELIGIOUS CHANGES IN KAFA

##### 4.1. *The Kafa king and the Ebedegoda*

The Kafa Kingdom was ruled by the Minjo clan in the Kafa Zone until 1897. According to Bieber, in the 14th century, the original inhabitants of the Kafa Zone were the Manjo, Na'o, She, Bench, and Majangir people, who were apparently displaced by the immigrant royal clans of the Minjo and Kafa (Bieber 1920: 495). The Kafa people were said to have descended from the Gongga people, who lived in western and southwestern Ethiopia. In the 16th century, the Christian Empires based in the Gojjam and Shewa regions of northern Ethiopia and the Muslim Oromo people living in southeastern Ethiopia endeavoured to expand their territories to include the lucrative land of Gongga, which is rich in human and natural resources. Therefore, most Gongga people supposedly evacuated to Southwest Ethiopia. The southwestern part of the refuge was blocked by the Oromo people and the deep forests, and southern Gongga maintained political independence until the end of the 19th century (Lange 1982: 11–12).

Since the mid-19th century, the belief in *ego* has been closely linked to the politics and economy of the Kafa Kingdom. Sometimes, the king asked the *alamo* for advice, on matters ranging from personal to political. For instance, during the war between the Kafa Kingdom and the neighbouring kingdoms, the Kafa king and the warriors often asked the *alamo* for advice on victory. People from northern Ethiopia who visited the Kafa Kingdom between 1530 and 1540 brought Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity and built six churches there.<sup>(26)</sup> In the mid-19th century, two events stood out during Gawi Nechochi's reign (ca.1845–ca.1854).<sup>(27)</sup> The king's daughter Shashe married the king of Gera, Abba Bakibo (Bieber 1923: 530). This union opened the trade route to Gondar in northern Ethiopia, and simultaneously Ethiopian Orthodox Christians began carrying out missionary activities in the Kafa Kingdom. However, Gawi Nechochi, who followed *ego* traditions, feared the conversion of the people to Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity. He felt that Christianity would reduce the number of sacrifices and tributes brought to the *Do'ochi*, which would consequently affect his coffers. Gawi Nechochi thus oppressed and killed Christians. In contrast, his son Kage Sherochi (ca.1854–ca.1870)<sup>(28)</sup> responded differently to Christians (Orent 1970: 278–279).

After his father's death, Kage Sherochi ascended the throne and allowed the Capuchin monastic mission to operate in Kafa. He offered them land to build a church, thereby curbing the Ethiopian Orthodox activity in the area (Orent 1970: 279). The Capuchins continued their missionary work until the expulsion of Msgr. Massaja from the Kafa Kingdom in 1861. Concurrently, Kage Sherochi began to form close ties with the *ego* traditions. He insisted that he had the *Do'ochi* and made himself *Ebedegoda*. He exiled *Ebedegoda* Ajjawo to a place known today as the Sheka Zone and misappropriated his wealth and property.<sup>(29)</sup> Kage Sherochi destroyed the *ego*-house in Shaakka in a place now called the Addio *wäräda* and brought the main pillar to Andracha, where the palace was situated, and built a new *ego*-house there. It is said that *Ebedegoda* Ajjawo died in a place now called the Gesha *wäräda*, after his exile. However, the descendants of *Ebedegoda* lived in the house and on the land of the *Ebedegoda*. The followers of the *Ebedegoda*, consisting of five Kafa clans, have been await-

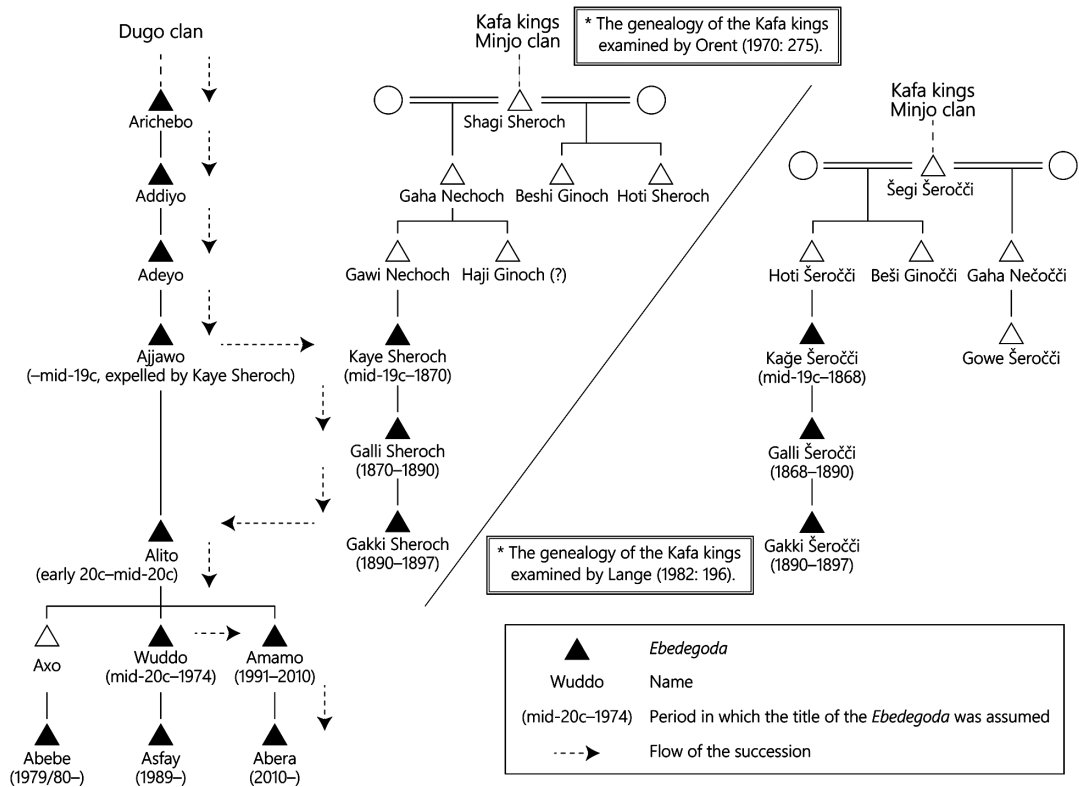


Figure 1. Transmission of the title of *Ebedegoda*<sup>(31)</sup>

ing his return for generations.

The last three Kafa kings—Kage Sherochi, Galli Sherochi (ca.1870–1890)<sup>(30)</sup> and Gakki Sherochi (1890–1897)—thus had both political and secular authority, and religious authority akin to the *Ebedegoda* (Figure 1). However, Lange indicated that the Kafa elders in the 1970s believed that the last three Kafa kings did not actually possess the *Do'ochi*, the *De'e-taato* spirit (Lange 1982: 319). Under their regime, the tribute to the *Do'ochi* was collected along with the taxes paid by the inhabitants of the kingdom. The tax was collected by the administrative officer for each district (*worawo*) and was paid to the Kafa king. The *alamo*, in the role of an administrative officer, collected the tribute to *Do'ochi*, as per the hierarchical order discussed earlier.

#### 4.2. Incorporation into the Ethiopian Empire and Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity

In 1897, the Amhara army from the Ethiopian Empire, led by *Ras Wolde Giyorgis*, invaded the Kafa Kingdom's capital. The Kafa people were unable to fight back; many were killed, and the Kingdom was devastated during the nine months of battle. The Kafa Kingdom was then incorporated into the Ethiopian Empire, and the last Kafa king, Gakki Sherochi, who was also the *Ebedegoda*, was deposed and taken to Addis Ababa. Thus, no *Ebedegoda* came to the fore thereafter. The Kafa Zone came to be governed by a centrally dispatched administrative officer, *Ras Wolde Giyorgis*. According to Kochito, in the first seven years, the administrative structure of the Kafa Kingdom was kept intact, except for the king and his councillors. Because of the nine-month-long battle, the lives of the local Kafa people and the Kafa economy were almost completely destroyed, and *Ras Wolde Giyorgis* implemented a policy to rebuild the Kafa society and its people (Kochito 1979: 19–22).

The Amhara rule also had a major impact on the culture, religion, and life of Kafa society. *Ras Wolde Giyorgis* focused on the conversion of the Kafa people to Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity.



In Andracha, the royal palace of the Kafa Kingdom and an '*ego*-house' that was used for rituals were destroyed and an Ethiopian Orthodox church, Mädhane Aläm Church, was built instead. *Ras* Wolde Giyorgis summoned 70 priests from the Shewa and Gojjam regions and had built 19 churches by the time he left the Kafa Zone (Orent 1969: 110–113). He cracked down on Catholicism, and most Catholic churches were reconverted to Ethiopian Orthodox churches (Lange 1982: 307). He further ordered the Ethiopian Orthodox Christians not to plough land together, not to eat meat with them, and not to marry their kin. Some Catholics were martyred under pressure to convert to Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity. Thereafter, the administrative officers who visited the Kafa Zone continued to build, renovate, and relocate Ethiopian Orthodox churches.

During the first five years of *Ras* Wolde Giyorgis's tenure, many Kafa people converted to Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity. Orent believed that the Kafa people were very anxious to conform to the Ethiopian standards of a 'good person' and of being Christian (Orent 1975: 83). Thus, in the short period from 1897 to 1928, most of the local deities were forced into the minor position of nature spirits, and the god of the Amhara became the main deity (Orent 1969: 173–174). With the establishment of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity in the Kafa Zone, new habits of fasting and food-related taboos were introduced to the society. The conversion was accompanied by acculturation and the adoption of Amhara customs, such as clothing styles and wearing a string around the neck to denote that one is Christian (Orent 1969: 112). In addition, the Amhara officials sometimes forced the Kafa people to change their names to Amhara or Ethiopian Orthodox Christian names. An important custom of the Amhara Christians is the traditional biblical injunction of circumcision. However, the meanings of such customs are not always understood. Orent states that male circumcision and clitoridectomy were new in the Kafa Zone, and the old lady who performed clitoridectomy did not know what she was doing (Orent 1975: 83). Therefore, the Kafa people's acceptance of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity might have been superficial.

In the 1930s, under Haile Selassie I's policy of modernisation, Western European missionary activities were sponsored and numerous missionary groups came to Ethiopia. However, during the Italian rule, most missionaries' activities were suspended, and only the Italian Catholics and the Hermannsburg Mission were allowed to work (Böll et al. 2005: xviii). The church in the Kafa Zone that was consecrated to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church during the Ethiopian Empire era was re-consecrated to the Catholic Church. In addition, the Catholic Church provided primary education to the Kafa youth, operated medical facilities and flour mills, taught woodworking techniques, and supplied electricity to the church sites in Bonga, the capital of the Kafa Zone. However, when the Italian rule ended, the missionary corps withdrew, and the schools and churches remained closed from 1941 to 1956.

#### 4.3. *The alamos' authority during the Haile Selassie regime*

After the collapse of the Kafa Kingdom, Alito, the son of *Ebedegoda* Ajjawo, returned to the Kafa Zone.<sup>(32)</sup> According to Orent, Alito joined the Ethiopian armies against the Italians in World War II and thus won himself the approval of the government, which rewarded him with the title of a *mälkäñña*<sup>(33)</sup> (Orent 1968: 8). His return meant the return of the *Ebedegoda*, who had been absent since the collapse of the Kafa Kingdom in 1897.

In the 1960s, the Kafa people visited the *alamo's* house every Friday night, stayed until Saturday morning, and went to church on Sunday.<sup>(34)</sup> The people attended the services at the Ethiopian Orthodox churches and prayed and made vows to God, the Virgin Mary, and the angels. The *alamo* sometimes instructed his clients to offer incense and send cattle to the Ethiopian Orthodox churches as a vow or sacrifice (Orent 1969: 228–233).

With the increasing number of converts to Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, the Amhara officials and the Kafa *balabbats* (local leaders or local governors) promoted the construction of Ethiopian Orthodox churches. The *alamos* who converted to Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity also actively funded or built these churches. For example, *Ebedegoda* Wuddo,<sup>(35)</sup> the son of *Ebedegoda* Alito, was also an Ethiopian Orthodox Christian. Wuddo built four churches in Addio *wäräda*: Mariam

Church in Mara in 1945–1946; Giyorgis Church in Qolla in 1947–1948; Kidane Mehret Church in Shaakka in 1949–1950, and Gabriel Church in Boqa in 1967–1968.<sup>(36)</sup> Wuddo said, ‘I will be buried in the grounds of one of these churches after my death’.<sup>(37)</sup> Wuddo told one of my informants that more churches were being constructed to accommodate the growing number of Christians who would need to be buried in the church grounds. The *alamos*’ investment in the construction of churches also increased their influence and prestige. Further, it improved the relationship between the *alamos* and Ethiopian Orthodox priests. However, while many Kafa people converted to Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, Amhara officials never visited the *alamos*. Thus, the *alamos* kept their social and political status intact by establishing connections with the Amhara and Ethiopian Orthodox Church officials.

According to Orent, during this period, the *Ebedegoda* earned the Kafa people’s loyalty as a *mälkäñña* (Orent 1968: 19). In 1942, land registration was carried out in the Kafa Zone, which legally established and confirmed the landowners, who were required to pay taxes for the land. During the Kafa Kingdom era, each clan owned a specific piece of land, but in most cases only one man from each clan went to register the land, and the person who paid the tax for it was recognised as the legal landowner. These men were generally called *balabbats*, along with the *gasha shum* or government officials. Orent argues that the *Ebedegoda* was the de facto leader of his people, both in the secular and spiritual realm, even though he was a self-proclaimed Christian in the 1960s (Orent 1968: 1).

Some *balabbats* were promoted to administrative positions because they received school education and were able to read and write Amharic. Some were given a title in the Ethiopian Empire. The *alamos* were no exception. For instance, *Ebedegoda* Wuddo was awarded the title of *Grazmach* by Haile Selassie I in the spring of 1973.<sup>(38)</sup>

#### 4.4. Repression of belief in ego by the Derg regime

In June 1974, a joint military and police committee, Derg, was established and chaired by Major Mengistu Hailemariam. On 12 September Haile Selassie was dethroned, and a military junta was established. In March 1975, the Derg regime imposed land reforms, making all farmlands the common property of the people and nationalising large-scale private farms. The farmers were organised into a farmer’s association in units of 800 hectares of farmland, and a *qäbäle* was established as a terminal organisation of the administration of the farmer’s associations. Concurrently, lands in excess of 10 hectares were confiscated and redistributed to small farmers. As a result, the *balabbats* and *alamos* lost their lands and were slammed by the people, who said, ‘they made the people work and pay’.

Although freedom of religion was publicly guaranteed, religious activities were regulated under the Derg regime. In Bonga, the clinics managed by the Catholic Church were shut, the schools were nationalised, and the missionary activities of the church were virtually suspended. Similarly, Protestant activities were restricted, and foreign evangelists were ordered to leave the country. In addition, the *alamos* were cracked down on not only for inciting the people to rebellion but also for taking away their wealth through the tribute.

The *alamos* were oppressed, and a fierce battle broke out between them and the Derg government officials in the Kafa Zone. On 26 September 1974, *Ebedegoda* Wuddo was arrested and imprisoned in Jimma, the capital of Kafa Province (*kəflä hağär*). He was executed on 8 February 1978,<sup>(39)</sup> and his house in Bonga was burned. According to my informant, there were 574 *alamos* in Addio *wäräda* in 1974, and they were forced by the local government officials to promise to stop being an *alamo* and become ordinary ‘men’. However, half of them were killed; some were beheaded in public.<sup>(40)</sup>

In addition, there was a famous incident between an *alamo* and some students who visited Decha *wäräda* for a ‘campaign’ (*zämäca*) in 1976. The female student Meserete is most remembered in relation to the incident. The students rejected the *alamo*’s authority and conducted educational activities aimed at improving their relations with the population. They made a Manjo sit on the *alamo*’s mule to demonstrate equality among the people. This provoked the *alamo*, and the following morning the *alamo* and his followers fired a shot and set the house where the students were staying on fire, killing them.<sup>(41)</sup>

Some *alamos* fled from the Kafa Zone. For instance, relatives of the *Ebedegoda*, especially the male members, left Kafa Zone, and fled to neighbouring zones, including the Jimma Zone. In addition, *Garamanjo* was a famous *alamo* and was the most influential among those living in the Bench Maji Zone and the Na'ò living in the southern part of the Kafa Zone. One of *Garamanjo's* sons left the Kafa Zone and fled to the Bench Maji Zone in 1974–1975. He returned to the Kafa Zone in 1983–1984, and later succeeded *Garamanjo* after his father's death.<sup>(42)</sup> Under these circumstances, it was difficult to openly practise belief in *ego*, as it was suppressed, and the *alamo*, including the *Ebedegoda*, was murdered. No new *Ebedegoda* appeared after the execution of *Ebedegoda* Wuddo. The absence of an *Ebedegoda* made it impossible to receive the blessings that were needed to become an *alamo*, which prevented the appointment of future *alamos*. Thus, their numbers decreased, making it even more difficult for the *ego* tradition to survive.

In contrast, from 1974 to 1975, the government recommended the conversion of minorities such as the Manjo people in the Kafa Zone to Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity to change the relationship between the Kafa and Manjo people, because the government believed that the Kafa people were socially discriminating against the Manjo people. However, in most parts of the Kafa Zone, the Kafa people, who make up the majority of Ethiopian Orthodox Christians, were reluctant to attend worship and sermons with the Manjo in churches, and the Manjo were often locked out of the church. Thus, conversion among the Manjo people was slow, and many continued to believe in *ego* even under the Derg regime (Yoshida 2010: 148).

#### 4.5. *The Protestants gain momentum in the EPRDF*

In 1991, the EPRDF pledged democratisation and a free economy with the right to self-determination, and a provisional government was established. During the EPRDF regime, the Catholics and Protestants resumed their missionary work in the Kafa Zone, and some began to go to the *alamos* again. In the same year, Amamo Alito, the younger brother of *Ebedegoda* Wuddo, became the new *Ebedegoda* and brought back the momentum of the *ego* traditions. The tribute to the *alamo* resumed. The body of *Ebedegoda* Wuddo was dug up by his younger brother and was buried in the Mädhane Aläm Church in Shaakka, Angiyo Qolla *qäbäle*, Addio *wäräda*, in January 1992.<sup>(43)</sup>

However, the belief in *ego* was not as strong as it used to be. The emergence of a new *alamo* following the old *alamo's* death was confusing, as seen in the case of *Ebedegoda* (Figure 1). A nephew of *Ebedegoda* Wuddo, Abebe Axo, insisted that the *Do'ochi* possessed him in 1979–1980 and called himself *Ebedegoda*.<sup>(44)</sup> In addition, one of *Ebedegoda* Wuddo's sons, Asfay, also insisted that he was possessed by the *Do'ochi* on 10 May 1989.<sup>(45)</sup> Some Kafa men told me that '*Ebedegoda* Amamo was elected by the people, not by the *Do'ochi*. He acquired the status of *Ebedegoda* through money'. Thus, some say that the emergence of multiple *Ebedegodas* is 'a sign that belief in *ego* is ending'.<sup>(46)</sup> Under such circumstances, a person possessed by *ego* can become an *alamo* even without visiting the *Ebedegoda*. *Ebedegoda* Amamo passed away in 2010, and his son, Abera, became the new *Ebedegoda*.<sup>(47)</sup>

At the beginning of the EPRDF era, many Protestant churches began undertaking missionary work in the Kafa Zone. 'Equality before God' was preached, and the minorities in the Kafa society, including the Manno, Manjo and occupational groups, abandoned their belief in *ego* and converted to Protestantism. This is also because many of them think that they are despised and marginalised for embracing the *alamo's* teachings (Yoshida 2010: 149–150).

Conversion is most often triggered by illness. In many cases, people may also convert when their relatives or children die in quick succession. Many followers of *ego* traditions who converted to Protestantism went to the *alamo* before their conversion and made sacrifices, vows, and paid tributes. However, despite their repeated offerings, vows, and tributes, the *alamo* told them that their illness and worries could not be resolved. Owing to this, many suspicions against the *alamos* emerged and the people lost trust in them. Many of those who had converted to Protestantism were later cured of their illness. Additionally, the *alamo* himself and those who serve him also converted to Protestantism. For example, during the time of *Garamanjo* Wolde Belay, five of the ten people who served him converted to Protestantism in 2002–2003. A Manjo who was an *alamo* himself explained why he con-

verted to Protestantism: ‘My relatives, friends, and neighbours converted to Protestantism one after another. However, I served the *ego*, and I was the only Manjo in my village who did not convert to Protestantism. One day, my eyesight began to deteriorate and the *ego* told me, “Convert to Protestantism. If you do not convert, you will become blind.” So I converted to Protestantism’.<sup>(48)</sup> However, most *alamos* who converted to Protestantism held lower positions in the hierarchical order of the *alamo*.

The relationship between the Kafa, Manno, and Manjo people has been viewed as one of ‘social discrimination’ and a serious problem by the government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and churches. Some practices that are strongly connected with belief in *ego* have also come to be regarded as ‘harmful culture’, particularly in the case of menstruating women, who are required to stay in a menstrual hut instead of in their house.

Simultaneously, under the EPRDF’s self-determination policy, there are Kafa culture revival movements in the Kafa Zone. At the festival hosted by the Kafa Zone administrative office, the *Ebedegoda* and *alamos* are invited as cultural figures and intellectuals. Ethiopia’s national broadcast aired a video of people visiting the *Ebedegoda* on a public holiday, referring to them as part of the ‘traditional culture of the Kafa society’. The *Ebedegoda* is deemed as a keeper of the ‘traditional culture’. Therefore, the belief in *ego* has been reconfigured as part of ‘traditional culture of Kafa’ instead of the ‘traditional religion of Kafa’.

## 5. BELIEF IN *EQO* AS AN ‘OUTDATED’ CUSTOM

### 5.1. *Belief in ego as a mere façade*

Despite many Kafa people moving away from the belief in *ego*, there have been moves to strengthen the authority of the *Ebedegoda*. *Ebedegoda* Amamo, along with his sons and neighbours, cited an oral tradition that the Kafa kings and *Ebedegoda* were four brothers with the same father. Thus, the *Ebedegoda*, another name for *Ebede-taato*, belonged to the Kafa kings’ Minjo clan, and the Kafa king, another name for *Bonge-taato*, was the younger brother of *Ebedegoda*.

First, Minjillo came from the ground. Minjillo had four sons. Three of the four were *Ebede-taato*, *Gumbe-taato*, and *Bonge-taato*.<sup>(49)</sup> Minjillo told them to kill one of the brothers who was suffering from a disease. First, *Gumbe-taato* visited his brother, saw the situation, and returned. Second, *Ebede-taato* visited and treated him. Third, *Bonge-taato* visited and killed his brother. Then, the god (*Yeero*) gave the gold to *Gumbe-taato*, the *ego* to *Ebede-taato*, and the *gine bareso* (spirit of fighting) to *Bonge-taato*. *Bonge-taato* went to Bonga. He visited *Gumbe-taato* and asked him to bless ‘*ta nihochi acho ne*’ (my father’s gold).<sup>(50)</sup> Then, *Bonge-taato* visited *Ebede-taato* and asked him to bless ‘*ta niho egocho* (my father’s *ego*)’. *Bonge-taato* was positioned lower than *Gumbe-taato* and *Ebede-taato*. However, *Bonge-taato* said to himself, ‘Why are there two kings in one kingdom?’ He then tried to kill *Ebede-taato*.<sup>(51)</sup>

Kafa elders, however, deny this oral tradition, citing the saying ‘*Dupho qoco toonone. Dugo Minjo toonone* (*Dupho* is not *qoco*, *Dugo* is not *Minjo*)’. *Dupho* is a by-product formed on the upper surface of *ensete* starch, which is consumed as a staple food in the Kafa Zone when it is processed and fermented to produce *qoco*. It has impurities and is inferior in colour, taste, smell, texture, etc. and is discarded. The aforementioned statement implies that *Dugo* is different from *Minjo* and is inferior to the latter, just as *dupho* and *qoco* are different from each other. Thus, the complicated situation surrounding the *Ebedegoda* is also a factor that makes belief in *ego* doubtful.<sup>(52)</sup>

The practice of avoidance associated with belief in *ego* is soon becoming a mere façade. When the *alamo* passes by, the people are supposed to kneel down and bow their heads. This is not followed anymore. Few people say ‘*Showo moogochi qebona*’ in greetings. The *ego*-believers and the *alamos*’ wives



now eat native cabbage, which was once said to cause death. The *alamo* may also eat with someone other than his aides, the *gabbarechos*. In some cases, the deceased *alamo* is buried in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church grounds. Women on their menstrual or puerperal periods are no longer estranged from their families. Some women try to reduce the frequency of menstruation by using contraceptive pills or injections. It is feared that women who have no menstrual huts in their home but are not allowed to enter their house and are, therefore, forced to sleep next to the door or outdoors would be attacked by wild animals at night. The influence of *ego* traditions on the maintenance of social moral law is weakening, as it has come to be regarded as a 'harmful culture'.

### 5.2. *Loss of trust*

Even today, some *alamos* are practically local personages and are loved and respected by the villagers. They may give money to people in financial distress or let them live on their own land to support them. They may also fund the building or rebuilding of Ethiopian Orthodox churches and elementary schools. Until then, in villages with no churches, people had to walk for an hour or two to the neighbouring village to worship in a church. The same was true for the burial of the dead. The opening of a school in the village not only shortens children's commute time, but also helps increase the school enrolment rate. In addition, some *alamos* actively go out to farmlands and work with agricultural extension workers to increase the yield. They are both in name and reality, a 'father' to the people of the area.

However, when people talk about the *alamos*, in general, at present, they talk about how they have cars and own a hotel or restaurant rather than the power of their *ego* or their power as *alamos*. For example, in 2008, *Garamanjo* built a concrete hotel in Decha *wärāda*. People compared *Garamanjo* to a businessman who came to own a hotel by making offerings and sacrifices. An *alamo* has vast lands and the largest harvest in Addio *wärāda*. However, he was never recognised as an excellent farmer (the government names an 'excellent farmer' every year). This is because he does not actually cultivate the farmland or grow crops; it is the people who visit him who make it possible for him to do so. Some say that he builds reinforced concrete houses and buys generators and satellite antennas with his bountiful yield realised through his people's labour.

Thus, people have come to think that their cash and livestock tributes to the *alamos* and the communal labour, *madde shuuno*, enriched the *alamos* and funded the construction of Ethiopian Orthodox churches, which in turn enhanced their social and political status, and economic power. People have come to think that the *alamos* are siphoning their wealth and using it for their own benefit, and are not offering effective solutions to the people's illnesses and worries in return. Since the collapse of the Kafa Kingdom, and as the Kafa society has undergone major political, social, economic, and religious changes, people feel that belief in *ego* remains only in its old form.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The change of government drastically changed the Kafa society socially, politically, economically, and religiously. The belief in *ego* was closely associated with the political power in each era. Its nature changed since the incorporation of the Kafa Kingdom into the Ethiopian Empire and the people's conversion to Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, promoted by the Amhara officials. 'God' in the Christian context came to be regarded as divine, and the loss of the Kafa king, who was also the *Ebedegoda*, made it difficult for the people to practise their belief in *ego*. After the fall of the Kafa Kingdom, Alito, the son of *Ebedegoda* Ajjawo, returned to the Kafa Zone amidst the resistance to the Amhara. Under the new socioeconomic and political conditions, the belief in *ego* offered people a way to deal with their anxieties and worries. Some *alamos* were involved in the administration of the Kafa Zone, and some were awarded titles by Emperor Haile Selassie I. Some were educated and became modern intellectuals and local leaders in the area. Therefore, as Lewis said, it is not difficult to imagine that the *alamos*, especially the *Ebedegoda*, came to be regarded by the people as leaders in place of the



Amhara. The *alamos* were also involved in the construction of Ethiopian Orthodox churches, thus gaining popularity in the village, while simultaneously building good relationships with the Amhara people and the Ethiopian Orthodox priests. Thus, as Orent observed, the greater authority and momentum of the belief in *ego* in the 1960s was due to the role *alamos* played in society.

Under the Derg regime, the *alamos* were denied their social, political, economic, and religious status; the traditional hierarchical order of the Kafa society changed, making it difficult to talk about and practise any religion. Under the EPRDF, the belief in *ego* returned in its new form. The *Ebedegoda* and other *alamos* tried to strengthen their centrality, revive their secular authority, and maintain and strengthen their holiness by resorting to the practice of traditional avoidance and trying to differentiate themselves from others. Contrastingly, the government and NGOs have raised issues around the avoidance practices associated with the belief in *ego*, especially those based on ethnicity and gender, calling it a 'harmful culture' contrary to the current public morals. However, the *alamos* continue to insist on maintaining such avoidance. In the *ego* traditions, people from the Manno, Manjo, and occupational groups are discriminated against: they are not allowed to eat or share a space with the Kafa people, and are continuously placed in peripheral positions. The belief in *ego* was considered a 'central moral possession religion', which forced a majority of people to move away and convert to Christianity. Today, belief in *ego* is limited to the *alamos*, especially those who are possessed by an *ego* that occupies a high place in the hierarchical order. In contrast, the *alamos* possessed by a lower *ego* have converted to Protestantism. Among marginalised people, such as the Manno, Manjo, and occupational groups, the conversion from belief in *ego* to Protestantism is remarkable.

The belief in *ego* position as a 'central moral possession religion' caused it to be regarded as a 'traditional culture' of Kafa society, and for the *Ebedegoda* and *alamos* to be regarded as the keeper and intellectual of the 'traditional Kafa culture', respectively. As Kafa society has changed drastically, today, the younger generations do not know much of the former Kafa's culture and history. Thus, the belief in *ego*, which maintained the customs and culture of the Kafa Kingdom, has now come to be regarded not only as a 'traditional religion' but also as a 'traditional culture'.

In Kafa society, historically, the *alamos* acquired not only religious power but also social, political, and economic power and authority by establishing relations with other political powers. Thus, the *alamos* may have been at the mercy of history, but they have been flexible with the times, balancing secular and religious authority. However, this is not one-sided, the Kafa people's demands and expectations of their leadership role in the Kafa society in each era also propelled the *alamos*' status.

## NOTES

- (1) The Kafa Zone in the current administration does not always match the geographical extent and name of the administrative divisions from the time of the Kingdom to the present. For example, the area was called the Kafa Region (*qällad agär*) in early 20th century, the Bonga District of the Caffa Ghimira Region during the Italian rule, the Kafa District (*awraḡḡa gəzat*) of Kafa Province (*täqalay gəzat*) during the Haile Selassie regime, and the Kafa District (*awraḡḡa*) of Kafa Province (*kaflä haḡär*) during the Derg regime. However, in this paper, regardless of the names of administration divisions during these regimes, the regions will be unitedly referred to as the Kafa Zone.
- (2) *Ego* is *uqabi* and *alamo* is *qalläcä* in Amharic.
- (3) My fieldwork from 2005 to 2006 was funded by the Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research Program of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science. The research was conducted under the 'Historiographical Investigation of Ethnic Conflict in Northeast Africa' (project leader: Prof. Katsuyoshi Fukui, Kyoto University). The fieldwork was conducted from February to March 2008 under the aegis of the Global COE Program at Nagoya University: 'Hermeneutic Study and Education of Textual Configuration' (project leader: Prof. Shoichi Sato). The research conducted from 2008 to 2009 was funded by a Research Fellowship for Young Scientists from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science. I continued research in 2010 through the Shibusawa Ethnological Foundation for graduate students. The Institute of Ethiopian Studies also supported my research.

- (4) The Manjo people living in the Kafa Zone have their own clans that are different from the Kafa's. The Manjo people insisted that they constitute an ethnic group different from the Kafa and petitioned to the Ethiopian government to guarantee the 'self-determination' of the ethnic groups granted by the Ethiopian Constitution (Yoshida 2013: 4, 9–12).
- (5) The immigration of the Amhara people from northern Ethiopia to the Kafa Zone occurred in three major phases. The initial groups came (1) around the 16th century, during which the Ethiopian Orthodox Church was believed to be built in the Kafa region, (2) during Menelik's conquest of the area in the late 19th century to 1935, and (3) after the establishment of the Derg regime's resettlement policy.
- (6) According to Orent, there are two kinds of *qollo*. One is the spirit that inhabits specific rocks, trees, pathways, crossroads, streams, rivers, and hot springs. The other is a man-like creature that inhabits corpses and forest thickets in specific regions (Orent 1969: 208–209). People perform the *dejj*o ritual in places where the *qollo* is allegedly located (e.g. large rocks, trees, or fountains) and where the clans that govern the land first visited to thank the *qollo* for their harvest and to pray for the people's day-to-day safety, a good harvest of crops, and the prosperity of their descendants. The *dejj*o is generally done during Christmas (*genna*), which is the post-harvest period of *tef*.
- (7) When a person dies, he becomes the ancestral spirit of his clan (*maasbo*). If people do not show courtesy to the ancestral spirit, it gets angry and appears through bad dreams (*dooyo*). Thus, people perform the rituals of *baare qocho* and *koyite koyo*, in which they sacrifice livestock on the holidays of the Feast of the Cross (*mashukero baaroo*) and Easter (*madee kaamo*).
- (8) Kafa Zone used to have ten *wärädas* but has had 12 *wärädas* since 2018. Two districts, Goba *wäräda* and Shishinda *wäräda*, and the Wacha administrative town, were established in 2018.
- (9) Interview with a Kafa man, Bonga, 26 February and 5 March 2008.
- (10) Some examples include the new Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, Mulu Wongel Church, Mäsärätä Krəstos Church, Misgana Church, Höywät Berhan Church, Genet Church, and Hawaryat Church.
- (11) Muslims originally comprised seven clans in Kafa: Abjed, Ganno, Hadiyo, Ifragio, Qalicho, Tigro and Wasalo. Interview with a Kafa man, Tongolla *qäbäle*, Decha *wäräda*, 1 September 2008.
- (12) According to Bieber (1916: 118), the reign of Galli Ginochi was from 1675 to 1710. Grühl (1932: 178–179), on the other hand, did not mention the exact date but suggested that it was from 1650 to 1710.
- (13) Interview with a Kafa man, Tongolla *qäbäle*, Decha *wäräda*, 1 September 2008.
- (14) My informants explained that there are spirits called *maasbo* under *ego*. *Maasbo* are the 'children' of *ego* and serve as 'messengers' for *ego*. Additionally, *qacco* or *qaccecho* is the power that mediates between an *alamo* and *maasbo*.
- (15) For example, *Garamanjo* Wolde Belay had *Matabochi*, which was originally the *ego* of the Waho clan in Dekkiya. Because the Wahos started the slave trade, *Matabochi* left them and moved to *Garamanjo*. Interview with a Kafa man, Basuka *qäbäle*, Decha *wäräda*, 27 July 2008.
- (16) There are some *egos* who came from the Me'en and Ch'ara living in the southern part of the Kafa Zone. Some *egos* changed their names after coming to Kafa. For example, an *alamo* who lives in Tello *wäräda* originally lived in Yangecha in Gera *wäräda* of the Jimma Zone, Oromiya Regional State, the name of his *ego* then was *Gaaphi*. However, after he visited the Kafa Zone, the name of his *ego* became *Kafigumoochochi*. Interview with a Kafa man, Tello *wäräda*, 25 February 2009.
- (17) During my fieldwork, I collected the names of more than 40 *ego*: e.g. *Aairochi*, *Abaweno*, *Abetochi*, *Abunochi*, *Achi Gejjochi*, *Acho Amumi*, *Achomi*, *Agenochi*, *Aligocochi*, *Amarochi*, *Ashelochi*, *Axebochi*, *Dabbochi*, *Diginabochi*, *Ellebochi*, *Gadibulebochi*, *Galigumochi*, *Gamenochi*, *Garamanjochi*, *Gatanamochi*, *Gayibochi*, *Gicci Gabi*, *Ginbesochi*, *Ginebochi*, *Guderochi*, *Gumebochi*, *Guribochi*, *Hailochi*, *Karanochi*, *Maatabochi*, *Manjibochi*, *Mashamibochi*, *Marwubi*, *Mukebi*, *Qararanugusheno*, *Qideno*, *Shachiboshi*, *Shasherebochi*, *Shekana Qashochi*, *Shodde Ashelochi*, *Taatomochi*, *Yaferachi*. In general, the *alamo*'s name is the *ego*'s name followed by *naayo* or *nayeno*, which means 'followers' in Kafa language. For example, if the *ego* is *Gayibochi*, the *alamo* is called *Gayibochinaayo* or *Gayibochinayeno*. One *alamo* may have multiple *egos*. In this case, the *alamo* is called by the name of the most powerful *ego*. For example, one *alamo* who lives in the Decha *wäräda* in the south-western part of the Kafa Zone had an *ego* called *Garamanjo* and is called *Garamajonaayo* or *Garamanjonayeno*. He had eight *egos* in all: *Garamanjo*, *Maatabochi*, *Gimbesochi*, *Malenochi*, *Gayibochi*, *Ginebochi*, *Agenochi* and *Hailochi*. This indicates that the strongest *ego* possessing him is *Garamanjo*.
- (18) Only one *ego*, *Shodde Ashelochi*, could predict the future. According to oral traditions, when Kafa King Kage Sherochi expelled *Ebedegoda* Ajjawo from the Kafa Kingdom, the king also had issues with *Shodde*

- Asbelochi* who left the Kafa Kingdom in the mid-19th century.
- (19) In Kafa language, a cabbage is called *shaano*, a term that includes native cruciferous plants such as Ethiopian kale (*Brassica oleracea var. acephala*), garden cress (*Lepidium sativum*) and foreign cabbage (*Brassica oleracea var. capitata*). However, *shaano*, the native cabbage, is considered a taboo food in *ego* traditions, while the foreign cabbage is not.
  - (20) *Ebedegoda* Amamo didn't explain that honey and milk come out from the tips of all the fingers on the right or left hand or from the tip of only one finger per hand. Interview with a Kafa man, Angiyo Qolla *qābāle*, Addio *wārāda*, 7 July 2008, and interview with a Kafa woman, Addia Kaka, Addio *wārāda*, 14 July 2008. However, Lange mentioned that milk begins to drip from all five fingers of the person's right hand and honey drips from the fingers of his left hand (Lange 1982: 320). Also, one of my informants explained it differently, see note 45.
  - (21) Wednesday is the day of *Xeeyo* (lightning), Thursday is the day of *Gayibochi*, and Friday is the day of *Do'ochi*.
  - (22) In Kafa language, *maddo* means the palace or mansion of the king or landlord, and *shuuno* means labour or work. Thus, in general, *madde shuuno* is not only communal labour for *alamos*, but also for landlords and *balabbats*.
  - (23) If there is only one woman in the household, the women in the neighbouring house will prepare and serve meals and coffee.
  - (24) Orent also indicated that there are certain types of blood from women that should be avoided, such as blood from menstruation (Orent 1969: 300).
  - (25) If a person who is part of an occupational group or Manjo becomes an *alamo*, there is no problem with contact between him and the occupational group or Manjo.
  - (26) In Kafa Zone, six churches, Baha Giyorgis, Kuti Mikael, Chiri Mikael, Shapa Gabriel, Gidi Giyorgis and Washa Mikael, were built around 1530–1540. Washa Mikael Church was located in Mera from 1540 and later moved to Tokura, now in Tello *wārāda*, in 1919–1920, and then to Washa in 1927–1928. Therefore, some documents refer to Mera Mikael Church as Tokura Mikael Church. All the aforementioned churches were built by those who fled the war from the Gojjam region when King Abyssinia's territory was invaded by Ahmad Grani in the 16th century. The arks of five churches (all except Washa Mikael Church) were brought by the Amaro people, and the holy ark of Washa Mikael Church was brought by the Qoyijjo people from the district of Qonjo in the Gojjam region. The Amaro and Qoyijjo people do not practise belief in *ego*, *gollo* worship or ancestral worship.
  - (27) According to Bieber (1916: 121), the reign of Gawi Nechochi was from 1845 to 1854. On the other hand, according to Lange (1982: 187), it was from 1841 to 1843, but it was known as Gawo Šeročči.
  - (28) According to Cecchi (1886: 491), the reign of Kage Sherochi was from 1858 to 1870. However, according to Bieber (1916: 121), it was from 1854 to 1870, and according to Lange (1982: 187), from 1843 to 1868.
  - (29) Interview with a Kafa man in Angiyo Qolla *qābāle*, Addio *wārāda*, 28 September 2008. Orent indicated the episodes that triggered the conflict between King Kafa and the *Ebedegoda* (Orent 1968: 8). Orent indicated that the *Ebedegoda* was exiled to Gindo, but *Ebedegoda* Amamo told me that *Ebedegoda* Ajjawo died in what is now Gesha *wārāda* after being exiled to the place which is now in the Sheka Zone.
  - (30) According to Bieber (1916: 122), the reign of Galli Sherochi was from 1870 to 1890, but according to Lange (1982: 187), it was from 1868 to 1890.
  - (31) The genealogy of *Ebedegoda* in the figure is based on the author's interview with Kafa men, Angiyo Qolla *qābāle*, Addio *wārāda*, 29 June 2008 and Yuumayi *qābāle*, Addio *wārāda*, 4 January 2009. However, Lange indicated that Arichebo, Addiyo, Adeyo, and Ajjawo are brothers (Lange 1982: 317.)
  - (32) It is unknown exactly when Alito returned to the Kafa Zone. One of my informants told me Alito came back in 1913–1914. Interviewed with a Kafa man, Yuumayi *qābāle*, Addio *wārāda*, 4 January 2009.
  - (33) *Mālkāñña* is the title and duty of an Ethiopian Orthodox Christian. It originally meant 'measurer'. As the title of *mālkāñña* was given to the secretary of a large district, it was also given to the representative of the local government. In a broad sense, *mālkāñña* is sometimes considered synonymous with *balabbat* and *nāftāñña*. The status of *mālkāñña* was officially abolished in 1955, but its power was maintained thereafter (Abbink 2007: 1099–1100).
  - (34) Orent could never actually see the session because the Kafa people believed that if a foreigner entered the presence of an *ego*, it would kill the *alamo* (Orent 1969: 230). I was able to meet and hear from the *alamo* several times, but I could not attend or witness the session.
  - (35) According to Lange, Wuddo Alito got the *Do'ochi* and became *Ebedegoda* on May 18, 1946 (Lange 1982: 320).

- (36) Interview with a Kafa man, Yuumayi *qābāle*, Addio *wārāda*, 4 January 2009. However, another Kafa informant told me that Kidane Mehret Church in Shaakka was built in 1952–1953.
- (37) Interview with a Kafa man, Angiyo Qolla *qābāle*, Addio *wārāda*, 7 July 2008.
- (38) Interview with an Amhara woman, Addis Ababa, 25 November 2009.
- (39) Interview with a Kafa man, Angiyo Qolla *qābāle*, Addio *wārāda*, 3 July 2008.
- (40) Interview with a Kafa man, Addia Kaka, Addio *wārāda*, 7 January 2009.
- (41) Interview with an Amhara woman, Addis Ababa, 24 November 2009. Aemero reported the same incident (Aemero 2019: 37).
- (42) Abbink indicated that *Garamanjo* was killed by the Derg government in 1978 (Abbink 2005: 701).
- (43) Interview with a Kafa man, Angiyo Qolla *qābāle*, Addio *wārāda*, 3 July 2008.
- (44) Interview with a Kafa man, Shaasha *qābāle*, Addio *wārāda*, 4 January 2009. He explained that he was possessed by the *Do'ochi* when he lived in Shaakka but it was in the Derg era and he fled to the Jimma Zone. Then, when Amamo, the younger brother of *Ebedegoda* Wuddo, insisted he got the *Do'ochi* in 1991, Abebe sanctified and blessed Amamo.
- (45) Interview with a Kafa man, Yuumayi *qābāle*, Addio *wārāda*, 4 January 2009. When Asfay Wuddo got the *Do'ochi*, first, he fell sick, then he felt an ache in his hand. Then, milk dropped from the tip of the ring finger of his right hand and honey dropped from the tip of the ring finger of his left hand. He called himself *Ebededoono*, but neighbours explained that Asfay had a legitimate *Do'ochi* and *Ebedegoda* Amamo did not have it.
- (46) This is because people believe that they have one *ego* and that the *ego* will disappear. All *egos* are connected with the specific clan and place. In the case of *Ebedegoda*, because the *Do'ochi* is connected with Shaakka in Angiyo Qolla *qābāle* of Addio *wārāda*, it is said that the *Ebedegoda* who got the *Do'ochi* in another place is not legitimate. When Amamo got the *Do'ochi* in 1991, Abebe Axo and Asfay Wuddo who insisted they got the *Do'ochi* before him were not in Shaakka. Therefore, when Amamo moved to Shaakka and lived there, people accepted Amamo as *Ebedegoda*.
- (47) Interview with a Kafa man, Bonga, Gimbo *wārāda*, 5 September 2010.
- (48) Interview with a Manjo man, Amaro Atta *qābāle*, Gesha *wārāda*, 18 January 2006.
- (49) One of my informants told me that the eldest son is *Ebede-taattoo*, the second son is *Gumbe-taattoo* and the third son is *Bonge-taattoo*. Interview with a Kafa man, Angiyo Qolla *qābāle*, Addio *wārāda*, 27 September 2008. However, another informant told me that Minjillo had only three sons; the eldest son is *Gumbe-taattoo*, the second son is *Ebede-taattoo* and the third son is *Bonge-taattoo*. Interview with a Kafa man, Yuumayi *qābāle*, Addio *wārāda*, 4 January 2009.
- (50) The *Gumbe-taattoo* has a certain kind of gold granted by a god (*Yeero*). The important role of *Gumbe-taattoo* is to purify and bless people, especially Kafa kings and *alamos*, by stroking them with the gold. Lange described *Gumbe-taattoo* as Gumbaččino (Lange 1982: 308).
- (51) Interview with a Kafa man, Angiyo Qolla *qābāle*, Addio *wārāda*, 28 September 2008. Lange indicated a similar oral history about Miñילוčči's sons (Lange 1976: 8–9). However, Miñילוčči had three sons, and according to Lange, their names were Gawatanočč, Tanočč and Miñgočč. In addition, my informant, *Gumbe-taattoo*, insisted that *Gumbe-taattoo* is from the Minjo clan. Interview with a Kafa man, Angiyo Qolla *qābāle*, Addio *wārāda*, 17 July 2008.
- (52) One of my Kafa informants told me that Minjo was part of the king's family and the other members of Minjo were called Dugo. This was because if one claimed to be from Minjo, he was suspected of wanting to become a king someday. Interview with a Kafa man, Addia Kaka, Addio *wārāda*, 29 June 2008.

## A GLOSSARY OF THE Kafa Language

<i>Alamo</i>	Medium or diviner of the spirit, <i>eqo</i> .
<i>Bonge-taattoo</i>	Another name for Kafa kings. He had the political power and authority in the Kafa Kingdom.
<i>Do'ochi</i>	An <i>eqo</i> ; meaning 'very big' in Kafa language, which is located at the top of the hierarchy, above all the other <i>eqos</i> , and its host is referred to as <i>Ebedegoda</i> .
<i>Ebedegoda</i> or <i>Ebede-taattoo</i>	A spirit medium ( <i>alamo</i> ) who has <i>Do'ochi</i> and is selected from the Dugo clan of Kafa. He is called 'the good king' ( <i>De'e-taattoo</i> ) who plays the central role in belief in <i>eqo</i> . He is also called <i>Ebede-taattoo</i> .
<i>Ego</i>	The spirits that serve a high god, <i>Yeero</i> . There are many <i>eqos</i> , and each <i>eqo</i> has its own name, power, and fields of expertise. The <i>eqos</i> have a hierarchical order based on their powers.
<i>Garamanjo</i>	A spirit medium ( <i>alamo</i> ) of <i>eqos</i> , living in Decha <i>wäräda</i> in Kafa Zone and is most influential among the Bench, Na'o, Ch'ara, She and Me'en people.
<i>Yeero</i>	The god. Today, the name, <i>Yeero</i> , is also used by Christians to refer to their God.

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