

## Textual Analysis of a Poetic Verse in a Muslim Oromo Society in Jimma Area, Southwestern Ethiopia

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## Textual Analysis of a Poetic Verse in a Muslim Oromo Society in Jimma Area, Southwestern Ethiopia<sup>1)</sup>

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### INTRODUCTION

Poetic verses have long been neglected as a subject for either historical or anthropological research in Ethiopia, despite their widespread and deep roots in the Muslim society<sup>2)</sup>. The main themes recited in poetic verses, locally called *manzuma* or *qasida* (Arabic, two types of poems), revolve around the glorification of the deeds and characteristics of particular *walis* (Arabic equivalent to saints), the Prophet Muhammad and God. Although restricted in style and formula, the poetic verse provides a creative means of expressing various local concerns and anxieties of the society. This paper discusses the changing role of the religious poetic verse in a Muslim Oromo society in southwestern Ethiopia through textual analysis of a *qasida*. The *qasida* expresses the contemporary concerns and anxieties of the Muslim Oromos concerning the ongoing dispute between the “*wali* worshippers” and the “*Wahabiyas*” (folk name for the Islamic revivalist or fundamentalist movement)<sup>3)</sup>. I will discuss how the *qasida* is accepted and utilized by the Muslim Oromo people in their religious lives.

First, I will summarize the historical background and social context in which the Muslim Oromo people utilize the poetic verses. Secondly, I have attempted a textual analysis of a *qasida* in praise of Sayyid Ahmad Umar (who died in 1953), one of the most prominent *walis* venerated among the Muslim Oromo people in the Jimma area. Sayyid Ahmad Umar is one of the migrant Islamic scholars who came to Ethiopia from West Africa at the beginning of this century<sup>4)</sup>. Thirdly, a further analysis of the *qasida* is conducted, focusing on its aim and effects.

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

#### Introduction of Islam in the Jimma area

Islam in the Jimma area was officially introduced in the first half of the nineteenth century under the initiative of the monarchical rulers, who felt a strong need for a firm political ideology and a conciliatory measure to induce the settlement of the

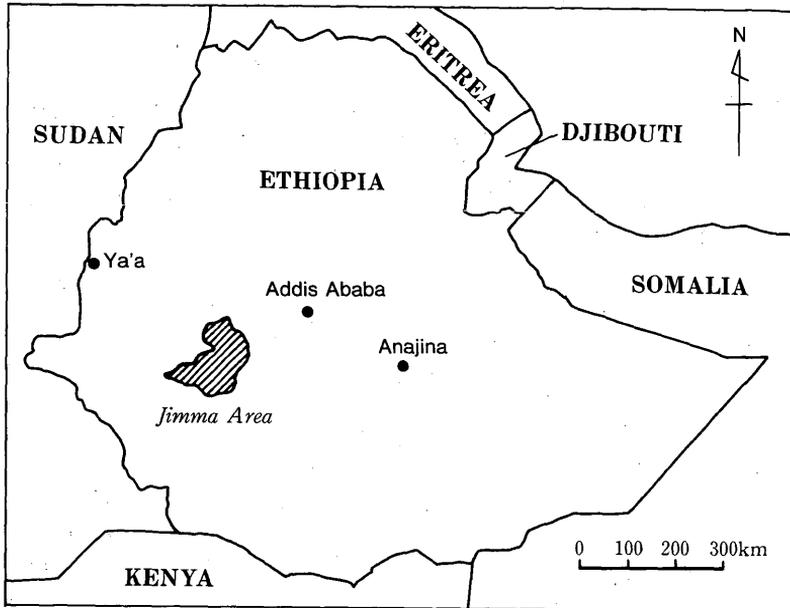


Figure 1. Jimma area and the mausoleums of Ya'a and Anajina

migrant Muslim merchants coming from the northern part of Ethiopia (Hassan 1990; Abir 1968). Along with the Muslim merchants, several Islamic scholars (collectively called *'ulama*) and *walis* migrated from northern regions of Ethiopia such as Wollo and Gondar<sup>5</sup>). These people settled inside the Jimma Oromo community and taught Islamic knowledge and daily obligatory practices to the peasants. Some of the Islamic scholars and *walis* belonged to certain *tariqas* (Ar. mystical orders) and possessed *karama* (Ar. originally meaning "miracle" in the mystic sense: the Oromo use the term to indicate a "supernatural power" that can cause miracles).

In order to spread and teach Islam in a "pagan" society<sup>6</sup>), the Islamic scholars made use of several methods adaptable to the illiterate peasant society. Poetic verse had played a significant role in the social life of the Oromos in the Jimma area, especially in the context of warfare, before the introduction of Islam. *Farsa* and *gerarsa*, or "boastful war songs" were poetic expressions boasting of the bravery of a single warrior or the unity of a tribe (Hassan 1990: 12, 139, 152). The Wollo Muslim scholars, who were also familiar with composing and reciting poetic verses in their homelands in Wollo, adopted the poetic verse as a useful medium in their proselytizing activities (Pankhurst 1994). The continuity and diversity of the two poetic genres, the traditional war songs and the religious poetic verses, must be subjected to further literary study. Nowadays, when warfare occupies only a marginal place in the social life of the Muslim Oromo people, the public composition activities of the poetic verses have survived only in the religious lives of

the Muslim Oromos<sup>7)</sup>.

### ***Wali* worship and *tariqa* activities**

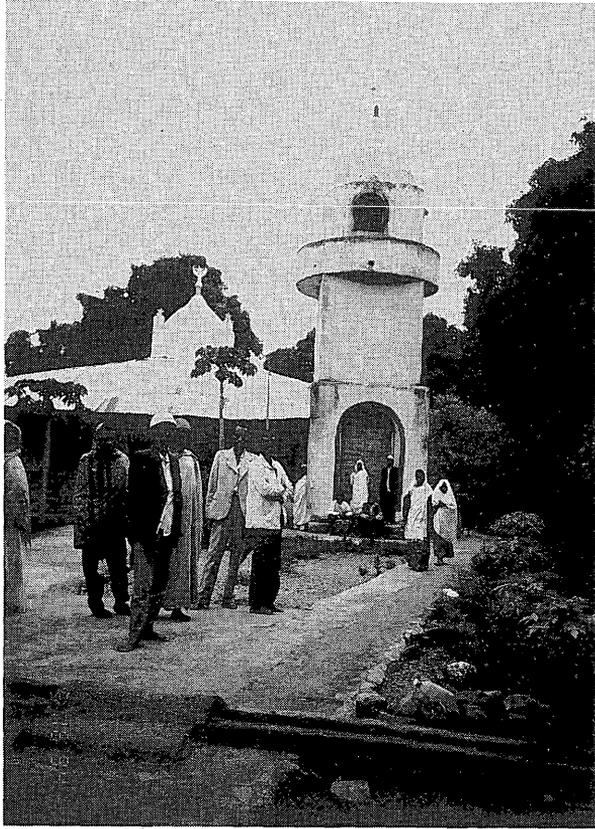
The significance of poetic verses is closely related with two religious aspects characteristic not only in the Jimma area but also in other Muslim societies in Ethiopia, i.e., *wali* worship and *tariqa*. Through these two religious activities the Muslim people inside and outside Ethiopia are interconnected with each other.

The most venerated *wali* and the one attracting the largest population of worshippers in southern Ethiopia is Shaykh Husayn of Anajina, Bale<sup>8)</sup>. Shaykh Husayn, who lived in the thirteenth century, retains worshippers mainly from the Oromo and some from the Somali, Gurage and Amhara ethnic groups. Worshippers cross the border to visit the mausoleum at Anajina in the Bale Region from Kenya and Somalia to celebrate Muslim holidays on the *Arafa*<sup>9)</sup> (folk name for the *'Id al-Adha*, the tenth day of *Dhul-Hijja* by the Islamic calendar) and on the *Zaara* (the day when Shaykh Husayn went to see the Prophet at Medina; *zaara* is a broken form of the Arabic word, *ziyara* meaning "visit," the fifteenth day of *Jumada l-Akhira* by the Islamic calendar). The worshippers of Shaykh Husayn, customarily called *gariba* (Arabic word literally meaning "peculiarity, a strange thing"), are distinguishable from other *wali* worshippers in their appearance, wearing ragged clothes, carrying Y-shaped sticks, hanging long rosaries around their necks and begging on the street. Many *garibas* are skillful in chanting poetic verses which attract the attention of pedestrians, inducing them to make offerings.

After the Oromo expansion in the sixteenth century from southern Ethiopia, one of the descendant clans of Shaykh Husayn migrated to the Jimma area. This descendant clan, called Awalini, are held in reverence in the Jimma area. The clan occupied the monarchical line of Gomma, where most of them live, until the Jimma area was incorporated into Ethiopia at the end of the nineteenth century<sup>10)</sup>. The worshippers of Shaykh Husayn have contributed much to the development and the widespread use of the poetic verses called *manzuma* in the area<sup>11)</sup>.

The Awalini clan have produced many *walis* and *shekotas* (the plural form of *shek*, the folk term of the Arabic *shaykh*; Islamic religious leaders are respectfully called in the plural form) whose mausoleums are visited annually by the local Muslim Oromos on the *Mawlid an-Nabiy* (the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad, the twelfth day of *Rabi'a l-Awwal* by the Islamic calendar). Not only Awalini but also other superior clans produced Muslim elites, who, after finishing fundamental education in *Qur'an* and Arabic under local Islamic teachers, travelled to Wollo, the intellectual center for Muslims until the beginning of this century (Hassan 1990: 196).

The fame of Sayyid Ahmad Umar, a Tijjaniya *wali* born in Borno (in the present Nigeria) in 1891, spread in the Jimma area in the 1930s. Sayyid Ahmad Umar had come to Ethiopia in the first decade of this century, and, although he lived in the western part of the Wollega Region, Sayyid Ahmad Umar attracted many worshippers who took pains to travel on foot mainly from the Jimma area



**Photo. 1.** The mausoleum of Sayyid Ahmad Umar

and some from the northern and eastern regions of Ethiopia and others even from Sudan and Yemen. After staying in the Wollega Region for about thirty years, the Sayyid moved to Gera District in the Jimma area and settled there for five years. The Sayyid encouraged his descendants to live in the Jimma area, where most of them live today. The descendants are paid great respect by the local Oromo people. In 1953, Sayyid Ahmad Umar died at Ya'a, a vast wasteland of bamboo in the Beni Shangul Region. A mausoleum was built for the Sayyid and a village of worshippers formed around the mausoleum (Photo. 1). The villagers serve the food and shelter needs of visitors who come twice a year on the *Arafa* and the *Mi'raj* (the day when the Prophet climbed up to heaven, the twenty-seventh of *Rajab* by the Islamic calendar). During their two-or three-night stay around the mausoleum, the visitors create several circles of enthusiastic *hadras* (Ar. religious meeting for mystical orders) where *qasidas* are composed and recited endlessly all through the night. The worshippers of Sayyid Ahmad Umar, although not as numerous as the *gariba*, also are good at making poetic verses called *qasida*.

There are many other *walis* and *shekotas* who contributed to the spread of



Photo. 2. A Thursday *hadra*

Islam and are venerated for spiritual powers that enabled them to solve the physical and psychological problems of the sick and poor. These people, after their deaths, are buried in forms distinctive from other ordinary Muslim tombs. Straw or wooden huts are built above the tombs, adjacent to which are built mosques or huts where people can gather for *hadra* and prayer. Either one of the descendants or a *murid* (Ar. disciple) takes care of the tomb and mosque, and takes charge in performing the weekly *hadras* and celebrating the annual *Mawlid*.

*Tariqa* activities have been consonant with *wali* worship in the Jimma area. Some of the *walis* and *shekotas* belong to one of the *tariqas* active in the area, though *tariqa* membership is not an inevitable condition for them to become an object of veneration as *wali*. Qadiriya, introduced from Wollo in the latter part of the nineteenth century, pioneered *tariqa* activities in the Jimma area<sup>12</sup>. Sammaniya and Tijjaniya followed in the first half of this century<sup>13</sup>. *Tariqa* membership, symbolically attained by receiving the *ijaza* (Ar. permission to recite the *dhikr* of the *tariqa*; *dhikr* is an Arabic word meaning “incessant repetition of certain words in remembrance of God”), is based on individual choice, though the tendency for one community to belong to one *tariqa* does exist.

#### ***Hadra* and recitation of poetic verses**

*Tariqa* activities center on *hadra* gatherings (Photo. 2). The *hadra* performance consists of six elements: the recitation of poetic and non-poetic verses, making *du'a* (Ar. collective supplication for divine grace), chewing *chat*, drinking coffee, feasting, and burning incense<sup>14</sup>. The general process of the *hadra* is a sequence of

chanting and reciting verses, the leadership of which is taken by a *shek* or *shekota* of the community. Non-poetic verses include *dhikr* and *wird* (litany) qualified for each *tariqa*. These verses, totally in Arabic, are usually memorized as they are by the members, enabling them to recite them together. *Du'a* is made in either Arabic or Oromo by either the leading *shek*, the eldest participant, or a descendant of a *wali*. Such people are believed to be qualified in making effective *du'a*. The poetic verses are recited in between the litanies, formulas and *du'a*.

In the Muslim Oromo society, there is no special class of fully professional poets as is the case with Somali poetry (Andrzejewski and Lewis 1964: 4). There is no qualification required to compose and chant poetic verses at a *hadra*. And because, unlike the non-poetic verses, poetic verses are composed in the everyday language of the Oromo, basically people with only fundamental knowledge of Arabic can compose poetic verses. Women, whose percentage of illiteracy in Arabic is higher than that of men, can also compose and recite poetic verses at the Thursday *hadras* for women. Despite the lack of qualification, the composition of the religious poetic verse needs a considerable amount of skill and knowledge. The occasional adoption of Arabic words, quotation from the *Qur'an* and other religious sources, and the glorifying account of the life histories of *walis* and the Prophet give religious overtones which make the poetic verse acceptable to the *hadra*.

Customarily, the composer recites his or her own poetic verses, but the recent spread of tape recorders and cassette tapes has brought about a division of composer and reciter. Tape recording and writing down poetic verses (either in Arabic or in Amharic) is increasingly becoming a common practice, enabling people with "good voices" to recite poetic verses composed by others. Moreover, the *hadra* can do without either a composer or reciter, substituting them with cassette tapes of recorded poetic verses.

Poetic verses can either be improvised on the spot or composed beforehand, but the reciter must not interrupt the sequence of the recitation. When the reciter has a lapse of memory or when no idea comes to mind, he is apt to repeat either the previous phrase or refrain. Therefore, as is the case with the Somalis, "most poets do not put their trust in improvisation, but spend many hours, even days, composing their works" (Andrzejewski and Lewis 1964: 45).

When one reciter gets tired or finishes his lot, another reciter takes over from him. Poetic verses are regarded as entertainment which arouses the enthusiastic atmosphere of the *hadra*. On holidays, when a crowd of worshippers and visitors stay overnight around the mausoleums, several circles of *hadra* are formed here and there. People may join whichever *hadra* seems attractive, and a competitive air pervades around the mausoleum. The poetic verses are either chanted rhythmically solely by the reciter or joined by the others in refrains. Some are even accompanied by instruments such as drums, castanets and *masinqo* (Amh. traditional one-stringed violin). Some also induce the members of the *hadra* to stand and jump up and down in the traditional way of dancing among the Oromo. *Chat* is distributed

and chewed from beginning to end, the stimulant effect of the leaves animating the atmosphere of the *hadra*. Coffee drinking and incense burning also have stimulant effects. Because of this animation, segregation between men and women is regarded necessary by religious leaders at *hadras*, a rule which is rarely observed.

*Hadra* is conceived not only as a religious occasion for remembering God and invoking divine blessing, but also as a social gathering where neighbors and friends exchange news and gossip. After the usage of *chat* had spread among the populace following the Italian occupation (1935–41), *chat* became a common habit (and occasionally an addiction) to a wide stratum of people, regardless of its religious and ritual meaning<sup>15</sup>. The cheapness of *chat* and coffee in the Jimma area enabled the people to open private *hadras* of various sizes at their own residences. Almost every day of the week is dedicated to a certain *wali*, providing people with religious justification and reasons for opening *hadras* any time they want.

1 Sunday: the day of Sayyid Nasrullah of Limmu<sup>16</sup>.

2 Tuesday: the day of Shaykh Husayn of Bale.

3 Wednesday: the day of Abdulqadir al-Jilani, and the Qadiriya *hadra*.

4 Thursday: the day of various *walis* such as the Gurage *wali*, Arkasiy and the Nigerian *wali*, Sayyid Ahmad Umar. The *hadra* for women dedicated to Fatuma, a daughter of the Prophet Muhammad is also performed on this day.

5 Friday: the day of the Tijjaniya and Sammaniya *hadra*.

6 Saturday: the day of *Sayyidna* Khadir<sup>17</sup>.

Many of my Oromo friends hold *hadras* more than once a week. For example, my assistant, Ahmad, told me that he usually holds private *hadras* on Sundays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays at his house when he has time and money. On such occasions, tape-recorded poetic verses play a big role in giving the *hadra* a religious tone and entertainment.

The recent spread of tape recorders has had several effects on the trend of the poetic verses. First, the composing practice of poetic verses is translated into marketing terms. The composing of poetic verses was inherently an improvised activity inspired by God. Some of the religious leaders consider the recording and selling of the tapes of poetic verses as reprehensible activities<sup>18</sup>. Secondly, more and more poetic verses are composed and recorded in complete form for either recreational or propagandistic purposes.

Recreational poetic verses tend to have more rhythmical and musical elements, rather than being a simple narration of historical events and religious principles. Propagandistic poetic verses tend to articulate a particular message to the public. Poetic verses with such an aim stress not the miraculous deeds of a particular *wali*, who have competitors of their own, but veneration of the Prophet and God. One aspect which both the recreational and propagandistic verses have in common is that they lack deep knowledge of both Arabic and Islamic doctrine.

This shortage of knowledge of Arabic and Islamic doctrine is a result of the stagnation in Muslim religious education that occurred during the socialist regime which lasted from 1974 to 1991. Before the socialist regime, the Jimma area had

been renowned for its high educational standard in Islam in Ethiopia, along with Dawwe in the Wollo Region. However, among the young generation of Muslim Oromos I got acquainted with in Jimma during my research, few were able to read Arabic, needless to say the *Qur'an*, despite their literacy in Amharic<sup>19</sup>). And moreover, the population of the elder generation who had been educated and trained in '*ilm* (Ar. knowledge in Islamic doctrine) and *ma'rifa* (Ar. knowledge in mystical Islam) is decreasing. In fact, Muslims with sufficient religious knowledge for composing poetic verses are scarce. When I began my research in 1992, few people were able to compose poetic verses, and the descendants of Muslim *sheks* answered my requests to chant some verses by digging out old manuscripts handwritten in Arabic by their fathers.

As I will show in the following section, the *qasida* composed by Shaykh Isa, a Tijjaniya follower of Sayyid Ahmad Umar, has both of the aspects that are typical of popular cassette tapes. It is entertainment in the sense that it is not loaded with hard Islamic doctrine and is easy to understand for people uneducated in advanced Arabic, but reasonably religious, quotations being drawn from the *Qur'an* and the *Hadith*. It is also propagandistic and political in the sense that it aims at a self-defense attack toward the *Wahabiya* from the standpoint of a *wali* worshipper. Shaykh Isa was unknown before his cassette tapes appeared in the market at Jimma. I had heard the names of Shaykh Abdurrahman, Raya Mabruka and Hajj Ali, three famous *qasida* composers, whose cassette tapes had never appeared in shops. These three *qasida* composers were contemporaries of Sayyid Ahmad Umar, and introduce various miraculous tales (*qissa*) of his life in their *qasidas*. However, because the cassette tapes that I had received from other worshippers of Sayyid Ahmad Umar were not recorded for marketing purposes, the recordings are incomplete. I chose the *qasida* composed by Shaykh Isa because of its completeness in recording and the modernity of its contents. Shaykh Isa refers to the on-going concerns shared among the *wali* worshippers, an identity which is rarely recalled, but becomes problematic when the dispute with the *Wahabiya* rises.

#### **Dispute between the *wali* worshippers and *Wahabiya***

The religious and social policies adopted by the socialist regime which lasted from 1974 until 1991, had a large impact on *wali* worship. The socialist regime claimed to be atheist, and placed both Muslim and Christian religious institutions under control (Clapham 1988: 155–156). In the Muslim context in the Jimma area, *hadra* activities and mausoleum visiting were restricted, and living religious leaders who had been venerated as *walis* were either arrested or executed<sup>20</sup>). Therefore, the tangible trauma remembered by the Muslim Oromos was one of the main obstacles I confronted in the initial phase of my research, which started in 1992. My informants suspected that I had political motivation and were afraid of being arrested for what they said.

Other social policies had an indirect influence on *wali* worship. The villagization program enforced in the peasant societies among the Jimma area

aimed to concentrate the residences of the peasants, who had been widely dispersed in the village community. Under this program, an entire village was moved to another site, inevitably abandoning the mausoleums of local *walis* and *shekotas*. Although I rarely encountered mausoleums that had been absolutely obliterated by the villagers, some of the compounds of the mausoleums received less care, becoming thickly overgrown with weeds, and huts were broken down by wind and rainfall.

The germination and growth of the *Wahabiya* in Ethiopia are connected with the world-wide spread of the Islamic revivalist or fundamentalist movement, which crept inside Ethiopian society through its connection with foreign Muslim organizations. Although there is no academic or statistical source available concerning the gradual but steady infiltration of the movement, monthly journals like *Bilal*, an Amharic journal on Islam printed in Addis Ababa, treat the debate between the two wings quite seriously, i.e., *Wahabiya* and *Sufiya* (general name for those supporting the belief in *walis* and mystical orders)<sup>21</sup>).

However, the personal motivation and social background of the individual persons homogeneously categorized as *Wahabiya* seem to vary and they rarely form an action group. In the Jimma area, *Wahabiya* is a loose local category for people sharing certain opinions and tendencies. First, this includes relatively educated young men who refuse to mingle with their fellow villagers in their religious life which centers on the enthusiastic veneration of local *walis*, *hadra* activities and the *Mawlid* ceremony. Many times during my research in the Jimma area, I heard people whisper that such a person, i.e., one who keeps a cool and detached stance toward the weekly performance of *hadra* and the annual celebration of *Mawlid*, is *Wahabiya*. Secondly, it includes relatively wealthy merchants and peasants who are rumored to be financially supported by “foreign Muslim organizations.” My Muslim Oromo informants could not give the exact names of such organizations, but mentioned being shown application forms from *Wahabiyas*, which I did not have the chance to witness. Thirdly, it includes Islamic religious leaders and wealthy merchants who have been influenced by fundamentalistic ideas upon their return from pilgrimage to Mekka.

Despite the germination of a counterforce to *wali* worship, the dispute between the two wings remained latent during the socialist regime. The transitional government, which started in 1991, adopted a liberalization policy, which brought about a religious revivalism in both the Christian and Muslim context. In the Jimma area, Islamic religious customs such as *hadra*, *Mawlid* celebration and annual mausoleum visiting gradually regained strength. This revivalism in *wali* worship encountered strong opposition from the *Wahabiyas*. This dispute intensified, and during my research I heard of several incidents of *wali* worshippers being physically attacked by *Wahabiyas*, and of local mausoleums being broken down by *Wahabiyas*. As for the *wali* worshippers, the incessant dispute with the *Wahabiya* became the central subject of concern for themselves as a whole.

The composition of the poetic verse transcribed in the following section was a

product of this central concern among the worshippers of various *walis*. The *qasida* was composed in 1414 by the Islamic calendar (from June 1993 to June 1994) at the height of the dispute taking place between the two wings. Wherever I went for research, be it the western Wollega Region, the Jimma area or the Bale Region, I encountered people complaining about the conflicts and troubles caused by the dispute, and I, as a foreigner, had to convince my informants (who were mostly *wali* worshippers) first of all that I was not a *Wahabiya*.

In the following section, I present a poetic verse composed by a Jimma *shek*, Shaykh Isa. As I have mentioned above, Shaykh Isa was an obscure composer of poetic verses who became famous only after he put five cassette tapes of *qasidas* on the market. The contents of the *qasida* deal with contemporary issues concerning the *Wahabiya* vs. *wali* worshippers dispute. The *qasida* aims a counterattack from the *wali* worshippers' side. This *qasida* helps the researcher to understand how the people conceive of the *Wahabiya* and react against them. Most of my Tijjaniya informants know of the cassette tapes composed by Shaykh Isa, and a music shop was playing this tape loudly on the streets. Thus I can easily suppose that this cassette tape is widely listened to among the Tijjaniya and other Oromo Muslims. I bought this tape at a music shop at Jimma in October 1994, and transcribed and translated it with the help of my assistant, Khadir Abba Sura. The reactions mentioned in the footnotes are based on *hadra* experiences I had with my Oromo friends, including my assistants, listening to this tape.

### TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF A *QASIDA*

The following texts are transcribed according to the *Qubee* writing system (the new Oromo orthography). Arabic, Oromo and Amharic words are distinguished by different types (for instance, Arabic: Allah, Oromo: *waaqa*, Amharic: Igziabher). Arabic and Amharic words which are conjugated in the Oromo way are also indicated in the texts.

#### Text 1

Allahumma sallin wa ala Shamsi Tayiba  
wa ala ahlihi kiraami nujaba  
ajibiy *nuu* ijtabaa

I pray to God and for Muhammad, the Prophet  
and for his family, the noble and excellent  
it is a wonder that he chose us

The *qasida* starts with this refrain, which is repeated jointly with the participants after each phrase. As the reciter sings the refrain, he strikes a little dish which makes a tinkling sound.

#### [A]

Fajri haqaa'iqi garbirran *daraare*  
*adun ba'e ife dukkana satare*

the twilight of truth has blossomed in the west,  
the sun has risen and brightened the darkness, covering  
up the darkness,

*zamanni harome waan dinqi agarre*

*kan sila qiyaaman yoo na bu'e ture*

*boddeetti azawware barakan saadaati*

the era has renewed and we have seen something incredible

in the past, the day of the Final Judgement had almost fallen upon us,

afterwards, due to the blessing of Sayyid Ahmad Umar, it turned away

[B]

*kan dur dubbatani rasuul hadiithan  
akkaatan waan hunda aakhiru zamaani  
wogga kuma tokko dhibba afur jedhani  
eega booda kana qiyaama jedhani  
kana maa shakkani qauli rasuulaati*

the Prophet had spoken in the *Hadith* long ago as such everything will be in the end of time in the year 1400, he said

after that (will come) the day of the Final Judgement how can this word of the Prophet be doubted?

[C]

*ammas booda kana dubbataniiru  
habiiba ar-rahmaani  
kunis hadiithumma dhagaha ikhwaani  
garbicha isaati jedhe indabala maulaani*

Ahmad Umar *ta'un beekamaadha inni*

*khaatima l-awliya fi'hadha zamaani  
kumaf dhibba afurif kudha afuri alaani  
jiranme ikhwaani sababa saadaati*

after that the Prophet has also spoken

this is also *Hadith*, listen my brothers God will add (years to the day of the Final Judgement) because of his slave

it is a known fact that this (slave of God) is Ahmad Umar

the last *wali* in the world<sup>22)</sup>

it is 1414 this year

we have lived, my brothers, due to Sayyid Ahmad Umar

Poetic verses composed in the Jimma area usually consist of three languages, i.e., Arabic, Oromo and Amharic. This mixture of language reflects the common usage in everyday life. This blended use of vocabulary makes the verse sound modern and familiar to the audience.

The verse is poetic in the sense that the number of the vowels is about the same and keeps the rule of end rhyming except in the last line.

This text admires the blessing transmitted from God because of the presence of the great *wali*, Sayyid Ahmad Umar who came from Borno, which is described as the "west." The "darkness" before the arrival of the Sayyid can be interpreted either in the intellectual or in the mystical sense. He was respected not only as an intellectual religious leader who led the illiterate and uneducated nominal Muslims out of the "darkness" of ignorance but also as a mystical *wali* who possessed the power to mediate *baraka* (blessing) to the local people.

The main theme of this verse is that the coming of the Final Judgement, which any Muslim in the world is apt to be concerned about, was delayed due to Sayyid Ahmad Umar, "the seal of the saints." It is, however, debatable whether the year 1400 was actually predicted to be the year that the Final Judgement would fall upon earth. The details of the exact date of the Final Judgement are covered up in the

*Hadith* and are counted as secrets held only by God. Despite this fact, the audience, which has no access to religious literature will not bother to look up in the *Hadith* to find whether this statement is correct or not, and will simply nod in consent. This was the case with my Oromo friends, and it was not until I returned to my country that I was able to realize that this statement was quite dubious. However, as long as the poetic verses are received affirmatively, the audience will not dare to suspect such statements.

## Text 2

Al-hamdulillah faaru amma inqabne  
kankeeti yaa rabbi akka naa waakanne  
ummata habiibi jedhamne waamamne

muriid at-Tijjanyi maqaa moggaafamne  
jetti shellemamne Sayyida saadaati

I thank God with unmeasurable praise  
it is yours, oh God, please don't refrain from us  
we are called the *umma* (Muslim society) of the  
Prophet Muhammad  
we have been named the disciples of Tijjani  
we have been awarded the jet plane, Sayyid Ahmad  
Umar

This phrase aims to attract the attention of God, who is believed to be the mighty giver and taker, the distributor of *baraka*. *Baraka*, an Arabic concept similar to the English "blessing," is coveted by any Muslim Oromo. In the Muslim Oromo society, any aspect in human life which is positively perceived, such as wealth, health and safety is believed to be brought about by *baraka*. Focus is concentrated on "us", the followers of Sayyid Ahmad Umar, who belong to the Tijjaniya order, which is a part of the Muslim world. The last line describes Sayyid Ahmad Umar in the analogy of a jet plane rewarded to the people, which connotes incredibility and admiration concerning the spiritual power of the *wali*.

## Text 3

taa'e taa'e aada garaako naa mura  
ennuman dhaga'u qissa kheir al-waraa

ennuman zaata(dhaata) zein al-hadra

keessa onneeko gube sadritti ol na aara  
immiman jaalalla maddikorra yaati

but, but my stomach aches and I groan  
just from listening to the historical tales of the  
goodness of mankind  
just by imagining his appearance, the beauty of the  
*hadra*  
inside, my heart is burning, my breast is smoldering up  
tears are streaming down my cheek from love

Tearjerkers, as exemplified here, are quite typical in poetic verses. My Oromo friends clicked their tongues to show sympathy and pity. The aim of the phrase is clearly to arouse sympathy among the audience, expressed as "brothers," i.e., the fellow followers of Sayyid Ahmad Umar. Instead of directly mentioning the name of the Sayyid, analogical names are devised which stimulate the imagination of the audience. Both "*kheir al-wara*" (goodness of mankind) and "*zein al-hadra*" (beauty of the *hadra*) can be translated to indicate Sayyid Ahmad Umar.

## Text 4

Sayyid AbalHassan *abba hundumaati*  
*dawwaa dhukubsata inhafu karaati*

*guddisa yatiima girdo ulfnaati*  
*maaltu waame dhabe gize cinqirratti*

*raaha ruuhikooti lazza(laddha)tti hayaati*

Sayyid Ahmad Umar<sup>23</sup>, the father of everybody  
he doesn't fail to find the medicine for the sick on his  
way

he raises orphans, he is a respectful curtain  
is there anyone who has not been answered when  
calling him in his difficulties?

he is the resting place of my soul, the sweetness of life

The description of Sayyid Ahmad Umar as a paternal protector of the weak and the helpless, such as the sick, orphans and the poor, is repeated again and again in the verse. In this phrase, Sayyid Ahmad Umar is expressed in the analogy of a curtain, a resting place, and the sweetness of life. The verb “*waame*” (called) connotes not the physical act of calling but spiritual “calling” through supplication (*du'a*).

## Text 5

Sayyid AbalHassan *rahmata akka fedha*

*rakkata gataman isaani ol jedha*  
*garin nama ajjeesse dhaqe abeet jedha*

*seequdhaan bashare an waasidha jedha*

*dunya wa la-akhira rabbitu isa fedha*

*kan sichi toobbadhu rabbi hindhiisa jedha*

*rahmata khalqidha haalasatin*

Sayyid Ahmad Umar (can adjust the distribution of)  
grace (from God) as he wishes

the hopeless (deserted) poor (go) up thanks to him  
others have killed a man and go (to the Sayyid's place  
and) ask for his help

comforting them with a smile he says “I am (your)  
guardian”

this world and that world (after death) depends upon  
God's wishes

if they vow not to repeat it any more, God will say he  
will refrain from (punishing) them

(God) distributes blessing to mankind according to  
their behaviour

Even the depressed poor and the repentful criminal are encouraged and comforted by Sayyid Ahmad Umar, who claims to be their “*waas*.” “*Waas*” is an Amharic word meaning “guarantor, bail, surety, guarantee.” What the Sayyid “guarantees” is the person's fate both in this world (*dunya*) and after his death (*aakhira*). Though he may be downtrodden for the time being, he is sure to become rich and happy in the near future and go to heaven after his death. The *wali* is believed to work as a mediator between the followers under his guardianship and God, the final decision maker in the distribution of “*rahmata*” (originally an Arabic word, *rahma*, meaning mercy, pity, compassion).

## Text 6

*kotta yaa obbola jaalalle nabiina*  
*jarri islaamuuman beekamtan yaqiina*

*gariiba muriidi wol injedhamina*

come, oh brothers, who love our Prophet  
people who follow Islam in the surely known  
(traditional) way

don't call each other *gariiba* and *muriid*

*kan nabii nuu dhaaman ga'eera alana*  
*ruuhin isarra hafte lamu maal jedhamti*

the message the Prophet left for us has been realized  
 this year  
 what is it called that is left besides the love toward the  
 Prophet inside the soul

This phrase is the beginning of the part which accuses the Islamic revivalist movement, locally called the *Wahabiya*. The main target of this movement is the *wali* worship. Shaykh Isa summons those who worship *walis* to come together and unite instead of disagreeing among themselves concerning the greatness of their own *walis*. "*Gariiba*" is the name given to the followers of the thirteenth century *wali*, Shaykh Husayn of Anajina, Bale. The word "*muriid*" denotes members of various *tariqa* (mystical order) active in the Jimma area, such as the Tijjaniya, Qadiriya and Sammaniya. The last line reproaches the stance of the *Wahabiyas* who renounce over-reverence in the Prophet. Thus, Shaykh Isa has depicted *Wahabiya* as those who "hate" the Prophet (see below, text 8).

#### Text 7

*dhagaha ikhwaani isiinittan odeessa*  
*qissadhaaf hadiitha waan qur'aana keessa*

*kara soba fakkeessine qulqulleessa*

*gaulin tokko dhufte zamana amma keessa*  
*deemti biya keessa islaama fakkaati*

listen, brothers, I will tell you  
 the tales and *hadith* which are (written) in the  
*Qur'an*<sup>24)</sup>  
 pretending to follow the false way, we will make clear  
 (the truth and the false)  
 one word (opinion group) came in the present period  
 they roam around our country pretending to be  
 Muslim

Shaykh Isa appeals to the fellow *wali* worshippers, stating that their own stance of *wali* worship is not against either the *Qur'an*, the *Hadith* or the past historical tales. These sources are supposed to be the authority for any kind of idea, decision or judgement made by a Muslim (though I have doubts about the historical tales). Thus, those who oppose the *wali* worship which is supported by authentic sources are insisted to be wrong in the doctrinal sense. Shaykh Isa goes so far as to say that such people are fake Muslims, only pretending to be Muslim. At this stage, it is noteworthy that the name *Wahabiya* is not yet mentioned and only hinted at, being treated as a female noun which connotes a sense of disdain<sup>25)</sup>.

#### Text 8

*maal fidde goftaako rabbi yaa rahmaani*  
*garin haqqi dhiise adeema soban*

*islaama fakkaati laakin zaahiraani*  
*rasuulin ankarti gaaya jibba isaani*

*tariiqaniif sunna inta'u jedhani*  
*waan intaane jarri nama gowwomsani*

God, what have you brought to us, oh the merciful  
 half (of the Muslims) quit the true way and follow the  
 false  
 they pretend to be Muslims but (only) by appearance  
 they are against the Prophet Muhammad and even hate  
 him  
 they argue that *tariqa* and *Sunna* are improper  
 they confuse the people in an incorrect way

*beekumsa ofitin qur'aan fassarani  
ofif baddee malee waan ingootu isaani*

*jarra akkana suni qauli salphina*

they interpret the *Qur'an* by their own knowledge  
they have made these mistakes by themselves, the  
Prophet did not do anything (is innocent)  
such people belong to the degraded opinion group

This phrase is a concrete description of the aspects of the *Wahabiya* with which Shaykh Isa disagrees. First, it is insisted that they are against the veneration of the Prophet, the performance of the *tariqa* and the observance of the *Sunna* (the sayings and doings of the Prophet). Secondly, they are regarded to “confuse” the illiterate Muslim who cannot but rely on the literate *sheks* to orally inform them of religious knowledge. Thirdly, the *Wahabiya* are believed to be interpreting the *Qur'an* in their own ways incorrectly. These three characteristics are the stereotyped images that the Muslim Oromo people seem to share of *Wahabiyas*, and which are frequently utilized in everyday speech.

However, it is important to note here that the people accused of being *Wahabiya* are, in fact, not a homogeneous opinion group but an ambiguous faction of people varying in their degree of opposition against such traditional religious activities as the veneration of *walis*, *tariqa* activities and *Mawlid* celebrations. Therefore, the articulation of a clear-cut opinion group unanimously criticizing *wali* worship, Prophet veneration and *tariqa* activities is an intentional manipulation by a *wali* worshipper aiming at propagandistic announcement. However, seeing that none of my Oromo friends raised any objections to the verse, I realized that they agree with the accusation of the composer reflecting on their own daily conflicts with the *Wahabiyas*.

#### Text 9

*gooftumma kan rabbi kan shariika inqabne  
erga isa amanne waa isatti insharrakne  
walaakin daliila waa tokko arganne  
kanaaf nabiichan gooftakeenya jenne  
kanatti hayaane caala hundumaati*

(speaking about) lordship, God has no partner  
thus we believe in God who has no partner  
but we have witnessed evidence (a token)  
that is why we call the Prophet our lord  
and so, we have respected (the Prophet), who is  
superior to all (human beings)

A refutation is attempted in this phrase, giving reasons why they respect and worship the Prophet. First, the composer refutes the assumption that the *wali* worshipper deifies any kind of human being other than God. Next, the “evidence” (*daliila*) is given as a justification of the superiority of the Prophet over human beings. The “evidence” (*daliila*) mentioned here is found in the *Qur'an* itself as is cited in the next two phrases.

#### Text 10

[A]

*Qur'aana keessa nuu gorse maulaani  
“wa yaa taahira kum tataahira” jechaani*

God advised us in the *Qur'an*  
“Oh purify those who are pure” (undiscovered)

*jedhe* masakkare *caalina isaani*  
*ahlin nabiicha kana hayaamani*  
 AbalHassan zeini *caala awliyaati*

quotation from the *Qur'an*  
 it proves the superiority of the Prophet  
 the family of the Prophet is also respected  
 Sayyid Ahmad Umar, the superior *wali*

## [B]

"laa tajalu du'a rasul" *jechun suni*

This saying, "Don't quit calling the Prophet" (also undiscovered)

*kan* "du'ai ba'azi kum ba'aza" *jedhamuuni*  
*kun qauli rabbiiti kan bu'e qur'aani*

(and) this (saying), "do bless one another" are cited  
 This word is God's (word) which was descended in the *Qur'an*

*keessatti hubadha akka hayaatani*

recall (the words) inside (the *Qur'an*) which (demand that you) show honour

*ulfefadha jechu caala khalqikooti*

respect my creatures who are superior (God) says

The "evidence" hinted at in the previous text is concretely cited in text A and B, quoting from the *Qur'an*. The crucial point of dispute between the Islamic revivalist and the *wali* worshipper concerning the ambiguity of worship is tactfully switched in this text to a moderate concept, "respect" (*haya* or *ulfa*).

## Text 11

*nama nama caalu maali yoo haya'ani*  
*waan balleessu inqabu bara yaa ikhwaani*  
*wol hayya'u bara baraka imaaniti*

even if they respect people superior to people  
 you must know, brothers, that there is no mistake  
 respecting one another is a religious deed which brings  
 blessing

*kitaaba ilaala yoo waan shakkitani*

if you feel any doubt (on this point), look up the sacred  
 books

*wollaalumne ajaadha akka dukkanaati*

ignorance is bad, just like darkness

Directly addressing the audience ("brothers"), the composer tries to justify the veneration shown to the Prophet on the grounds that showing respect to superior persons is a "religious deed" which brings blessing. The unique attitude of veneration shown to the Prophet is expressed in terms of the matter-of-fact social attitude of showing respect to elders or superior persons, which is generally valued among the Oromo people.

## Text 12

*namticha sunnaako dhiise bara xalaatuma*

You must know that people who have denied my  
*Sunna* are my enemies

*kun qauli rasuuli bara hadiithuma*

You must know that this word of the Prophet comes  
 from the *Hadith*

*namtichi sunna isaani dide bara kaafiruma*

You must know that people who have denied the  
*Sunna* of the Prophet are *kafir* (non-Muslim)

*wojjin intaahina eegadha akkuma*

Don't sit together with them (*Wahabiya*) and be  
 careful

*zaahiran waan haqqi dubbattu fakkaati*

They appear as if they are telling the truth

Based on the *Hadith*, this phrase radically insists that the *Wahabiya* stance, which “denies the *Sunna*,” is “anti-Muslim.” Similar to the accusation made by the composer that the *Wahabiya* “hates” the Prophet in text 8, this statement suggesting that the *Wahabiya* “denies the *Sunna*” is also an intentional articulation. *Sunna* is recognized to be one of the most important authorities in the Muslim society along with the *Qur'an* and the *Hadith*, and thus I doubt that there are any *Wahabiya*, however radical they may be, who articulately deny the *Sunna*. Addressing the audience, the composer gives a warning not even to “sit together” with the *Wahabiyas* on the grounds that the ignorance and innocence of the illiterate *wali* worshipper can be easily defeated by the eloquence of the *Wahabiyas*.

## Text 13

*yoo waan aarifoota rabbi sana ankartu*  
*yoo waan ahli rasuul amiin tinneeffattu*

*jennata keessattu makaana inargattu*  
*rabba l-izza bara ingalateeffatu*

*kan jarri itti galtu mana azaabaati*

if you disobey the intellectuals of God  
if you underestimate the family of the honourable  
Prophet  
you will not get a place in heaven (after your death)  
you must know that these people don't thank the lofty  
God  
these people will surely enter hell (after their death)

The warning presented in text 12 is followed by a threat stating of the possibility of going to hell after death, if any Muslim should degrade either *walis* or the Prophet.

## Text 14

*yoo kella cufanne kibbitti ingalamu*

*cabsani galudha bari indandaamu*  
*rasuul otu injirre rabbumtu inbaramu*

*galatuma jennanille akka jaallatamu*

*maali dhamaafamu jarra Wahabiyaati*

if the gate is shut you cannot enter the compound (of  
heaven)  
you must know that breaking inside is not possible  
if the Prophet did not exist, God would not have been  
known  
if they simply showed gratitude in order to be liked (by  
others)  
why do they, the *Wahabiyas* struggle (in vain)?

The contents of this text repeat the previous one, stressing the improbability of the *Wahabiyas* entering heaven after their death. The significance of this text is that the word *Wahabiya* is used for the first time. From here on, the accusation will become straight forward, bringing the verse to a climax.

## Text 15

*jarri Wahabiya achi odeeffamtu*  
*jarri jibba nabiiti nama daneeffattu*  
*maal sirri Medina of keessa inariyatu*

*dullan hadra rabbi jarratti azammatu*

the *Wahabiya* people are chatting over there  
they are summoning people by hatred of the Prophet  
why doesn't the truth of Medina (the Prophet) drive  
them away by itself?  
(I wish) the club of the *walis* (those who surround God)

*jarratti abokatu kakawwe qudra*

would beat them up  
(I wish) the lightning of the omnipotence (God) would hit them

This phrase goes as far as to curse the *Wahabiyas*, as is apparent in the last three lines. This aspect escalates in the following phrases. The curse is meant to be spiritual despite the physical image of the “club” and “lightning.” God, the Prophet and *walis* are believed to be able to exert both blessing and destructive influences upon living creatures.

#### Text 16

*jarra sunna nabii sana ankaranu*

those people who stand against the *Sunna* of the Prophet

*aalima miskiinaaf jaahila bitanu*

those who buy off the poor Islamic scholars and the ignorant people

*jarra tariiqadhaaf Mawliida jibbanu*

those who hate the *tariqa* (mystical order) and (celebrating) the *Mawlid* (the birthday of the Prophet)

*rabba l-izzan qoode jarratti adallanu*

(I wish) the lofty God would pick them out and shut them out

*jarri agubatanu jahannamasatti*

(I wish) these people would be burned in hell

Because *Wahabiyas* are more often found among relatively wealthy people in the Jimma area, they are believed to gather followers among the poor Muslim scholars and illiterate Muslim peasants in need of financial support through bribes.

#### Text 17

*yaa obbolaako adara kotta isiin gorsina*

oh my brothers, please come, we will give you advice

*sunna nabiiha gadi illakkisina*

don't quit the *Sunna* of the Prophet

*salli ala n-nabii sana ingaffalina*

don't stop blessing the Prophet

*aduwwoota wajjin aakhiran inbadina*

don't spoil your whereabouts after your death

*akki inbitamina hori badiisaati*

don't be conquered by money which leads you the wrong way

This phrase consists of advice and warnings addressed to “brothers,” those fellow *wali* worshippers confused and misdirected by the eloquence and bribery of the *Wahabiya*.

#### Text 18

*waan rasuuli nuu dhaaman dhagaha*

brothers, listen to what the Prophet left for us as a message

*ikhwaani*

when I disappear from this visible world

*gaafa an injirre zaahira kanaani*

first the *Hadiith* second the *Qur'an* and third

*hadiitha qur'aana ammo sadaffaani*

ask the *ashraf* people, said (the Prophet)

*jarra ashrafoota gaafadha jedhani*

those who have blind minds have rejected these three

*kanaafa morman kan jarri`aqli jaama*

sources

This phrase insists that the Prophet left a will to the Muslim society to follow the three sources (the *Qur'an*, the *Hadith* and the descendants of the Prophet) after his “disappearance” from this visible world. It is a shared belief among the *wali* worshippers that people who achieve charismatic power in the visible world will not “die” in the same sense as ordinary human beings<sup>26</sup>). Concerning the *ashraf* people, I was surprised to find out that many of my Muslim Oromo friends accepted this statement presuming the *ashraf* to have authority equivalent to the *Qur'an* and the *Hadith*<sup>27</sup>).

## Text 19

*jarri Wahabiya kan jedhaman suni  
qabri zeyyerunisi bid'a jedhani  
kani awliyootafa kan rasuul amiin  
akka nama bira bar du'a inse'ini*

*dubbate qur'aani kan awliya isaati*

the people called *Wahabiya*  
they say that visiting tombs is *bid'a* (a heretical deed)  
(the tombs of) the *walis'* and the Prophet's  
don't think these people die like other (ordinary)  
human beings  
it is mentioned in the *Qur'an* about the *walis*

This phrase claims that the practice of visiting the tombs of *walis* is not *bid'a* (a heretical act) because such people as the Prophet and *walis* are not “dead” but just have “disappeared” from this visible world. They are believed to be existing and keeping an eye on Muslim believers in the invisible world of *batin* (an Arabic word meaning “hidden”).

## Text 20

*habiibin gaaf tokko rabbin gaafatani  
jarra anbiyoota samaitti argani  
kanko boota eessa yaa rabbi jennan  
rabbi akkana jedhe bar michu isaatin  
Mediina si ka'eera amma qiyaamatti*

the Prophet once asked God  
(when) he saw the prophets in heaven  
where is my place, oh God  
God said this to his favorite  
I have placed you in Medina until the day of the Final  
Judgement

This phrase claims that after his “disappearance” (or death), the Prophet was not given a place in heaven like the other prophets. He was told to continue staying in Medina, for reasons mentioned in the next phrase.

## Text 21

*kheiri ummataati ati achi ta'uni  
yoos rahmanni rooba ummata sababa  
keetini  
immasakkarama ga bar jireenyi isaani  
erga rabbi akkana jedhe isaanini  
jarri nabiichan du'adha jettani  
maali insodattanu rabbi kan keessani  
nafsini sheitani sin galche boo'atti*

it is good for you to stay in Medina  
it is then that mercy will rain on the *umma* (Muslim  
society) because of you  
it proves the existence of the Prophet  
so, God said as such  
those who say that the Prophet is dead  
why don't you fear God  
your desire and satan have plunged you into a gorge

Thanks to the Prophet's "presence" in Medina, although invisible, God never ceases to pour his blessing into this world.

### AIM AND EFFECT OF THE *QASIDA*

In this paper, I have presented only half of the whole *qasida*, which lasts for more than an hour. The extraction of the phrases has been done deliberately, omitting repetitive phrases and choosing only representative ones. The verse can be divided into four parts.

- 1) Glorification (text: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)
- 2) Appeal for consolidation (text: 6, 7, 8, 9)
- 3) Authenticity of worshipping the Prophet and *walis* (text: 10, 11, 12, 18, 19)
- 4) Warning and accusation (text: 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 20, 21)

The purpose of this poetic verse is expressed in this quadruple structure. The composer appeals to his fellow *wali* worshippers to consolidate and strengthen their belief in *walis* and the Prophet, first by glorifying them, secondly by proving the authenticity of the worshipping, and thirdly by accusing the *Wahabiyas* and warning *wali* worshippers not to join them.

#### Aim of the *qasida*

The dispute taking place in the Muslim Oromo society between the *wali* worshippers and the *Wahabiyas* is described unilaterally from the viewpoint of the *wali* worshipper throughout the poetic verse, thus providing a propagandistic overtone. The unilateral description enables the *wali* worshippers to articulate a stereotyped image of the *Wahabiya* as a homogeneous opinion group. This stereotyped image is unconsciously shared among the Muslim Oromo people in the Jimma area and frequently utilized in everyday speech. Articulation of such stereotyped images in poetic verses that are repeatedly recited or listened to in cassette tapes not only consolidates such vague images but can even brand the images on the listeners' minds.

In sociological terms, neither the *Wahabiyas* nor the *wali* worshippers are homogeneous opinion groups. However, the composer utilizes homogeneity in order to formulate a dualistic disposition setting one against the other. What aspect or assumption of the *Wahabiyas* does the composer attack? First, the composer attacks the *Wahabiya* stance toward the Prophet. The composer accuses the *Wahabiyas* of not respecting the Prophet (text 8, 13, 15, 17) on the grounds that the *Wahabiyas* claim the Prophet to be dead (text 19, 20, 21), and play down the celebration of the *Mawlid* ceremony (text 16) and reject the *Sunna* (text 12, 17). Secondly, the composer attacks the *Wahabiya* stance toward the *walis* and *tariqa* activities (text 16). The *Wahabiyas* are accused of regarding the practice of visiting the tombs of *walis* and the Prophet as being a heretical act on the grounds that these "superior" people do not die but only "disappear" from this world (text 19, 20, 21).

The *wali* worshipper, in order to prove such assumptions of the *Wahabiyas* to

be unauthentic, attempts an argument by quoting from the *Qur'an*, *Hadith* and the *Sunna*, the three authoritative Islamic sources (text 10, 11, 12, 18, 19). However, the audience cannot learn whether the quotation is correct or not unless he has access to the written sources. As I have commented in text 1, 7 and 18, I doubt that the quotations were made strictly from written sources but rather from oral information. In a Muslim society where the illiterate mass depends on a literate few for their theological information, information can be distorted in the process of oral transmission. But the point here is not whether the contents of the poetic verses are theologically valid or not, but rather, the fact that the audience accepts the statement without question. Secondly, the *wali* worshipper insists that the *Wahabiya* are morally condemnable on the grounds that they try to bribe and confuse the poor Muslim scholars and illiterate Muslim peasants (text 16, 17), and also because they do not respect such superior people as the Prophet (text 10, 11, 13). The crucial question of "how to respect" the Prophet and *wali* is omitted here in order not to confuse the audience (text 10). The validity of the veneration expressed to the *wali* and the Prophet through the practice of "mausoleum visiting" and the elaborate celebration of *Mawlid* has been a subject of endless and heated debate in the Middle East and other Islamic countries ever since the time of Ibn Taymiya (who died in 1328) (Ohtsuka 1995: 122). Thus, the composer evades this labyrinth of complicated debate and suffices himself to state that the three authoritative sources, *Qur'an*, *Hadith* and *Sunna* say to "respect" the Prophet and his families. The folk term indicating "respect (*haya*, *ulfa*)" shown to the Prophet is also used to express ordinary "respect" shown to elders, guests and *walis* (text 9, 10, 11).

In purely logical terms, the statement of the *wali* worshipper concerning the "respect" shown to the Prophet and the *wali* is imperfect in the sense that the crucial question of "how to respect" is ignored. Whether the enthusiastically celebrated *Mawlid* is an authoritative method for showing respect to the Prophet is not questioned in the *qasida*. Nor is this question raised among the *wali* worshippers in everyday speech. This omission in logical structure of the statement on the part of the *wali* worshipper becomes apparent only through debate conducted with the *Wahabiyas*. The same thing can be applied to *walis* and *tariqas*. Whether the practice of mausoleum visiting and the *tariqa* activities are authentic methods of showing respect to *walis* is not questioned. Moreover, it is significant to note that the authenticity of *wali* worship is argued on the same level as that of the Prophet, the validity of the latter being easier to prove than that of the former. This logical jump is tactically utilized for refuting the *Wahabiyas*, and thus, contributing to the formation of a dualistic opposition between the *wali* worshippers and the *Wahabiyas*.

### **Social effects of the *qasida***

The *qasida* has a number of effects on the audience in the process of recitation and listening (via cassette tape).

The tape-recorded *qasida* is more often played at *hadrās* in the presence of an illiterate populace, rather than amidst a group of *ʿulama*. Inlaying Arabic words in the *qasida*, quoting from the *Qurʿan*, *Hadith* and *Sunna*, the *qasida* works as a vehicle for orally transmitting religious knowledge to people who have no access to written sources because of their illiteracy in Arabic. Under the new government policy, elementary religious educational centers in towns and village *madrāsas* (*Qurʿan* schools) are beginning to revive their activities. In the Jimma area, there are also a few Muslim scholars (one with the title of *mufti*) who have survived the socialist regime. These people are gradually becoming a center of Islamic education for young men. However, their sphere of influence is still restricted and for most of the Muslim populace, oral transmission is the only way of gaining access to religious knowledge. Under such conditions, the *qasida* can influence the Muslim populace in their formation of religious knowledge and their view point of society. Although *Wahabiya* remains as a vaguely shared social category, the irreparable dichotomy of *Wahabiya* and *wali* worshipper can be branded upon the minds of the illiterate majority through the announcement of its characteristics and the points of assertion through the *qasida*.

The *qasida* also provides emotional reassurance to the illiterate Muslim audience, who are annoyed, disturbed and puzzled in everyday life by the incessant troubles caused by people with the *Wahabiya* stance. When I participated in the annual visits conducted to the mausoleums of both Shaykh Husayn at Anajina and Sayyid Ahmad Umar at Yaʿa, I encountered numerous visitors who were complaining of having been disturbed by *Wahabiyas* on their way to the mausoleums<sup>28</sup>). The *Wahabiya* problem is becoming a common nuisance for the Muslim populace in everyday life. Thus, the *qasida*, through self-defensive attacks on the *Wahabiya*, can become an apparatus for emotional ventilation for such people.

## CONCLUSION

When I first started my fieldwork in the Jimma area, I was told by a chief religious leader that *wali* worship and *tariqa* activity are "old culture" and have disappeared. I gradually learned that this opinion was only one of the two opponent wings, and that *wali* worship is still practiced in the area, although not in the matter-of-course way of earlier times. The *Wahabiya* movement, which has gained strength only in the last twenty years, has forced *wali* worship to debate its authenticity, which had been taken for granted since Islam entered the area in the nineteenth century. By serving the psychological needs of those Muslim Oromos who are continually threatened by political instability, poverty and death, *wali* worship has retained its impetus in spite of the confrontation with such opponent factions.

However, it is also true that the existence of *wali* worship has been jeopardized over the past twenty years for other reasons. The seventeen years of the socialist regime downplayed Islamic education along with other religious institutions, and

closed down many of the *madrasas*. Religious gatherings and mausoleum visiting were also circumscribed, and some of the popular *walis* who had been gathering many followers were executed. Under such a social and political situation, *wali* worship was confronted with the problem of continuity. After the socialist regime collapsed in May 1991, an atmosphere of religious revivalism arose among both Christians and Muslims. However, the young Muslim generation born and raised during the last regime were unfamiliar with Islamic knowledge, needless to say Arabic. This young generation longed for religious media easily accessible without the knowledge of Arabic and hard Islamic doctrine. Poetic verses, recorded onto cassette tapes and chanted in the everyday language, could be cheaply purchased in the area<sup>29</sup>), and were enjoyable to listen to for recreational purposes.

Under such a social trend, the poetic verses have assumed a new characteristic and mission. The propagandistic appeal for the formation of a common front against the *Wahabiyas* became necessary. Poetic verse, a medium shared generally among the *wali* worshippers who were divided by what *tariqa* they belonged to and whom they worshipped, provided a means of expression for the *wali* worshippers as a whole. Far from being homogeneous opinion groups in the sociological sense, the two opponents came to have a stereotyped image due to the poetic verses. The promoters of this trend are the followers or descendants of certain *walis*, who are the beneficiaries and thus in charge of reproducing the ideology of *wali* worship. Their targets are the younger Muslim generation and the poor Muslim scholars. The former, illiterate in Arabic and lacking Islamic knowledge, can easily be convinced by the eloquence of the *Wahabiyas*. The latter, who are potential reproducers of the ideology of *wali* worship, can also be attracted by the wealth the *Wahabiya* are connected with.

#### NOTES

- 1) This paper is based on anthropological research conducted in southwest Ethiopia from September 1992 to March 1995. The research was supported financially by a project titled "Comparative Studies on Agricultural and Pastoral Societies in Northeast Africa" (project leader: Professor Katsuyoshi Fukui of Kyoto University) which was mainly funded by a Grant-in-Aid for the Scientific Research of the Japanese Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture. The research was also made possible by the administrative support of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies at Addis Ababa University. I would like to express my special thanks to Professor Katsuyoshi Fukui and Professor Bahru Zewde, Director of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies. I am also grateful to Professor Teruo Sekimoto, my supervisor at the University of Tokyo, and Mr Kazuo Ohtsuka of Tokyo Metropolitan University for reading and commenting on this paper. Lastly I would like to thank my assistant, Mr Khadir Abba Sura for helping me with the transcription and translation of the *qasida*.
- 2) See A. Pankhurst (1994) and A. Mammo (1987). In spite of the scarcity of either historical or anthropological studies on Islamic poetic verses in Ethiopia, there are a number of studies on poetic verses in other Muslim societies. See Andrzejewski and

- Lewis (1964) on Somali poetry, and L. Abu-Lughod (1986) on poetry composed by women in Egypt. In the Christian society in Ethiopia, priests (*dabteras*) and wandering minstrels (*azmaris*) are known for their professional skills in the composition and recitation of poetry. See Finnegan (1977) and Levine (1965).
- 3) *Wahabiya* derives its name from the *Wahhabi* movement led by the Sa'ud family in the eighteenth century in the Arabian Peninsula. The *Wahhabi* doctrine, which criticizes mausoleum visiting practices and *Sufi* activities, is still adopted as official doctrine by the contemporary Saudi Arabian government.
  - 4) I am preparing a doctoral thesis concerning the life history of Sayyid Ahmad Umar and the religious complex of Sayyid Ahmad Umar worship.
  - 5) The persecution of the Muslim population conducted in the second half of the nineteenth century by Emperors Tewodros II and Yohannes IV in northern Ethiopia obliged many Muslim scholars to flee their homeland. Many of them migrated south to the Gibe States where the monarchical rulers had started giving support to the educational activities of Muslim scholars living in the area. See Gemedda (1993).
  - 6) I adopted the word "pagan" for the sake of convenience. The Oromo society has maintained a traditional religious system centering on the *Waqa* (a word meaning either sky or the Supreme Being). See Bartels (1983).
  - 7) The composition and singing of political themes and love songs have been absorbed into the musical industries. Neither political nor love songs are composed among the ordinary populace. On the contrary, the religious verses have remained largely in the hands of the public, and only recently have been adopted by the cassette tape industry.
  - 8) A number of articles, though fragmentary, have been published on the subject of the veneration of Shaykh Husayn of Anajina, Bale. See Andrzejewski (1972, 1974, 1975), Braukamper (1989), Setegn (1973).
  - 9) *Arafa* comes from Arafat, the name of a mountain and its adjacent plain located east of Mekka, where the Mekka pilgrims spend the ninth day of *Dhul-Hijja* (Wehr 1976: 606).
  - 10) Gomma is one of the five Gibe Oromo states formed in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The five Gibe Oromo states are Jimma, Limmu, Gomma, Guma and Gera. Hassan most probably has misunderstood the importance of the Awalini clan in Gomma, which he confuses with the word "*awliya*" (the plural form of *wali*) (Hassan 1990: 109, 155). The hegemony which the Awalini clan enjoyed in Gomma in both the political and religious fields is rooted in the worship of Shaykh Husayn of Anajina, Bale.
  - 11) According to Wehr (1976), *manzuma* is didactic poetry and *qasida* is an ancient Arabic poetic form having, as a rule, a rigid tripartite structure. In the Jimma area, people customarily use *manzuma* as the general word for Islamic poetic verses and *qasida* only for poetic verses in praise of Sayyid Ahmad Umar.
  - 12) Qadiriya is a *tariqa* founded in the twelfth century by 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani at Baghdad.
  - 13) Sammaniya is a *tariqa* founded in the eighteenth century by Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Karim as-Sammani in Egypt. Tijjaniya is a *tariqa* founded in the eighteenth century by Ahmad b. Muhammad b. al-Mukhtar at-Tijjani in the Maghrib. Both *tariqas* were introduced to the Jimma area via Sudan after the Mahdi movement.
  - 14) *Chat* (*Catha edulis*) is a mild stimulant plant, the leaves of which are chewed for religious purposes. See Hill (1965).
  - 15) In the Jimma area, the usage of *chat* is spreading among the young and old, rich and poor, men and women, and both Muslim and Christian. This increasing usage of *chat* is interpreted in various ways by the local people. Some interpret the phenomenon as a

- symptom of social corruption, while others see it as good sign for a better future.
- 16) On the worship of Sayyid Nasrullah of Limmu, see Hassan (1990: 154).
  - 17) *Sayyidna* means "our *Sayyid*" (*Sayyid* is a reverant form for referring to a chief Muslim religious leader). *Sayyidna* Khadir is locally believed to be a guardian figure able to disguise himself as any kind of creature except a dog or a woman.
  - 18) The *hadras* in which I participated when I visited the annual *Zaara* celebration in November 1993 at Anajina, Bale, were interrupted several times by religious leaders trying to stop people from tape recording the poetic verses.
  - 19) The contribution of the socialist regime to increasing the number of schools and literacy (in Amharic) is shown in the *National Atlas of Ethiopia* (1988: 28–31).
  - 20) Among the *walis* executed were three grandsons of Sayyid Ahmad Umar, i.e., Sayyid Mahmud, Sayyid Yasin and Sayyid Ma'awiya, who were famous for their spiritual powers in performing miracles (*karama*). These *walis* were thronged by visitors and followers before their arrests, which aroused the suspicion of government officials.
  - 21) *Bilal*, the third seasonal volume edited in 1994.
  - 22) Ahmad at-Tijjani, the founder of the Tijjaniya order, is frequently called "the seal of the *walis*" by the Tijjaniya members. Sayyid Ahmad Umar is believed to have had charismatic power almost equivalent to that of the Tijjaniya founder.
  - 23) Hassan is the eldest son of Sayyid Ahmad Umar. Thus, *Abal Hassan* means "the father of Hassan."
  - 24) In this context, *hadith* denotes not the *Hadith* (the written collection of narratives relating the deeds and utterances of the Prophet and his companions) but "tales" in general similar to *qissa*.
  - 25) "*dhufte*" is translated "she came." Similarly, "*deemti*" is translated as "she goes," and "*fakkaati*" as "she looks like."
  - 26) It is believed that they still exist in the *ma'ana* (or *batin* which means "hidden" in Arabic) world.
  - 27) *Ashraf* is the plural form of *sharif*, which is a general name or title given to the descendants of the Prophet. Some of the *walis* and *shekotas* venerated in the Jimma area are believed to belong to the *ashraf*.
  - 28) At Anajina, the believers of Shaykh Husayn expressed their anxieties and troubles with the *Wahabiya* through the *hikma* (Ar. originally meaning "wisdom, sagacity"), a ritual form of expressing and announcing individual troubles in the *hadra* gathering. After each *hikma*, the participants of the *hadra* perform the *du'a* for the individual.
  - 29) It costs ten *birr* (one US dollar equals to about six *birr* in 1995) to record a cassette tape.

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