

A Preliminary Study of the Practices of Personal Naming in Konso

Ongaye Oda Orkaydo

This article presents the personal naming practices in Konso, a Cushitic-speaking people in southwest Ethiopia. Personal naming in Konso can be formal or informal. Formal personal names are given during a ceremony called *sookata*, while informal names are given either before or after the *sookata* ceremony. This article argues that the Konso have family names in their naming practice. This article analyses the typology of personal names in Konso and shows an intrinsic interplay between poetry, songs and personal names. The unitary state policies of the previous regimes and the proliferation of religions have resulted in trends in which people give Amharic or religious names to their children or replace indigenous Konso personal names either by Amharic or religious names. The new trends of changing indigenous names into Amharic and/or religious (mainly biblical) names compromise the knowledge and role of the Konso language as an expression of culture and an identity marker.

1. Introduction¹

Naming children formal names among the Konso, a Cushitic people living in southwest Ethiopia about 600 kms from the capital Addis Ababa, is the primary responsibility of midwives – *xaaysattoowwaa*² – and a group of three young boys who fetch fresh mud near a well. Of course, a child is given its informal name – *maxxa a pooddaa* ‘baby food’s name’ – immediately after birth. Such names are basically given by a midwife together with the child’s grandmother. Giving a formal name to a child in Konso is not the private business of a family but rather something that requires a ceremonial event, locally called *sookata*³ ‘exit’, in which relatives, and neighbours take part. The *sookata* ceremony is conducted three months after the birth of the baby. Giving a child a name in a ceremonial event is not unique to Konso. Madubuike (1994, cited in Zelalem 2003) reports that the ceremonial event of naming a child is common in many African countries (see also Agyekum 2006:209 for Akan). Once a child is given a formal name in Konso, that name becomes a permanent identification in the community and in social interactions.

Scholars who have written about personal naming practices in Ethiopia claim that one of the unique features of Ethiopian languages and cultures is the absence of family names (Zelalem 2003:182, Aregga 2010:122 note 3). However, this claim does not hold true for Konso. In Konso, family names exist in that the names of founding fathers (those who build residential compounds for their families)

¹ This article is based on a seminar presentation given at the University of Turin on 10/02/2016 and on my personal experiences. I thank the University of Turin for granting me a three month scholarship during which the presentation of the paper and the writing of this article are made possible. I would also like to thank Dilla University for granting me a leave of study for the scholarship period. Lastly, the participants of the seminar, Professor Tosco and Dr. Asebe Regassa deserve my gratitude for their comments. Whatever error remains is, however, mine.

² In this article, I use the Konso orthographic symbols whenever I feel necessary to write a Konso word or expression. For a better understanding, these symbols should be kept in mind: b, d, j and q are bilabial, alveolar, palatal and uvular implosives, respectively; x is a uvular fricative; ny is a palatal nasal; sh is a palato-alveolar fricative. All consonants and vowels may occur long. Geminate consonants and long vowels are shown by repeating the symbols that represent their counterpart single sound. I use the Konso orthography in order to assist Konso natives who happen to read this article.

³ The performance of the *sookata* ceremony is very important not only for giving a formal name for the baby but also for marking the baby’s full integration into the community. Put differently, if for some reasons the baby dies after the *sookata* ceremony, it receives the grievance and is buried in the family cemetery.

are used as family names. For example, my grandfather is the founding father of the compound I was born into. Everybody in my village identifies the compound as *Orxayto's*, not as *Ota's*. So, I am readily identified as *Onkaye Orxayto* rather than *Onkaye Ota*. In Konso tradition, grandchildren may not know their founding great/grandfathers in person but by name they know their family names. This implies that a father's name is optional when he is not the founding father. Family names are very important particularly in the identification of a certain member of the community when there are more individuals with identical personal names but different names of founding fathers. They are also very important in connecting lineages within and outside of one's village. In a context in which two or more women share identical personal names, they can be identified with their paternal founding father or that of their husbands. However, in written documents, they always retain the founding father of their original family. So, it is only the impact of the northern tradition that is influencing to change the tradition of the Konso family names by making people limit their lineage to only grandfathers.

As pointed out above, the use of family names in Konso is different from the western practice. There is, however, at least an exception: one of the clan chiefs, *Kala*,⁴ whose current head of the family is *Kassaanynye*, has adapted himself into the western tradition and introduces himself as *Kala Kassaanynye* even to Ethiopian and foreign tourists and researchers. This is quite bizarre in Konso tradition. He could introduce himself simply as *Kala* or *Kassaanynye Kala*. As a clan chief who claims to respect and restore the declining traditional cultural practices and values of Konso, he should have maintained the order and tradition of personal naming of the Konso society.

The Konso are a patrilineal society as can be easily understood from the lineage: a child counts his/her ancestors by his/her father's lineage. Women keep their own names when they get married. Family names do not precede the first name as identification tags as used in the western world. This sometimes creates inconveniences when not only the Konso but also Ethiopians in general go abroad (see also Zelalem 2003:182). Poetry and songs do play a very significant role in connecting clan membership and kin relationships across the Konso land, and, thus, have an impact on personal naming. This is discussed in detail in Section 4.

The objective of this article is to provide a preliminary analysis of the practices of personal naming in Konso, as there is so far no such study on Konso anthroponomy. Data for this article are only based on my personal knowledge of the names of people in my village and those villages I am very much familiar with around the Faashe area of the Konso land. Other names come from people I have met from elementary school up to present. Data on the dynamics of name changes come from my own observations and from the reports I got from friends and people who changed their names. Since I do not have some crucial epirical data, particularly in the domain of name changing practices, this article does not claim to give a full account of the practices and dynamics of personal naming in Konso.

The organization of the article is as follows: after this introduction, I discuss about ethnic groups that are neighbours to the Konso; I also discuss about the livelihoods and social organisations of the Konso, and briefly discuss their basic belief systems. In Section three, I present the practices of personal naming in Konso. In Section four, I treat the dynamics of personal naming with respect to

⁴ *Kala* is a chief of the *Keertitta* clan in the Karatte area.

the influences of the feudal system, religion and modern education. In Section five, I discuss the role of poetry and songs in personal naming. In Section six, I present some basic issues that need further studies in the practices of personal naming in Konso and some surrounding communities.

2. The Konso: An overview

2.1. The Konso and their neighbouring ethnic groups

The Konso are a Cushitic-speaking people living in southwest Ethiopia. According to recent counts, there are about 300,000 speakers of the language. Most of the Konso live in the Konso *wereda* (district), which is part of the recently established Segen Area Peoples' Zone (see on the bottom right of the following map) in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region (SNNPR).

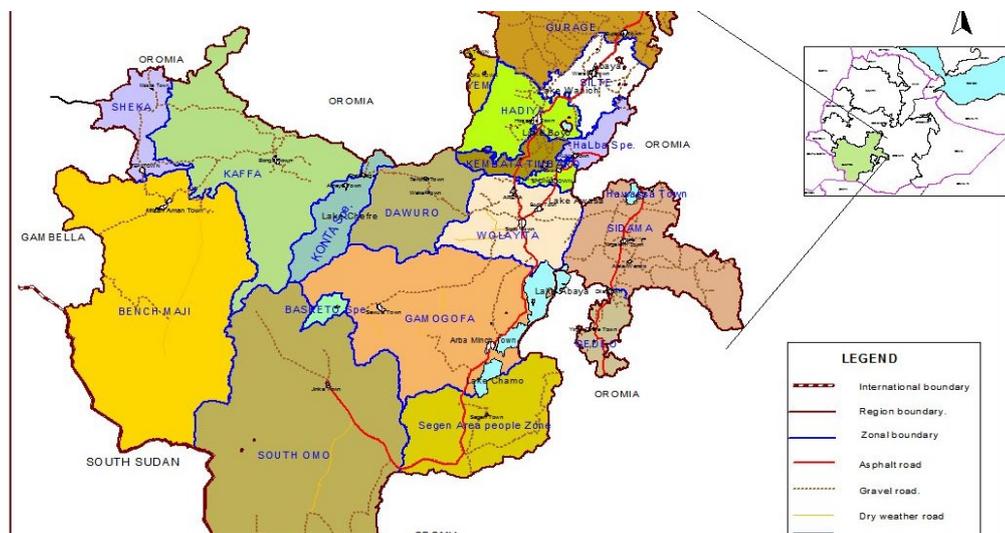


Figure 1: Map of Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region

The Konso predominantly live in villages built on hilltops. Some scholars characterize the Konso villages as towns (Hallpike 1972, Watson 1998). The villages are surrounded by stonewalls with entrances. Furthermore, each village has a forest surrounding the stonewalls. The forests contain mainly fire retardant trees, such as different species of cactus. People rush to the forests to cut the branches of these trees whenever there is a fire hazard. The forests are also used as a place to defecate, with separate locations for men and women. Villagers are not allowed to cut trees from the forests for their personal uses. Similarly, although to collect firewood from the forests is not usually allowed, old women from poor families are permitted to collect dry and fallen branches of trees.

The Konso are bordered by the Dirasha in the north, the Burji in the east, the Kore in the north east, the Ale (Gawwada) in the west and the Borana Oromo in the south (see also Figure 2). Some of these ethnic groups share personal naming practices with the Konso (Mauro Tosco's personal communication on Gawwada, for example).

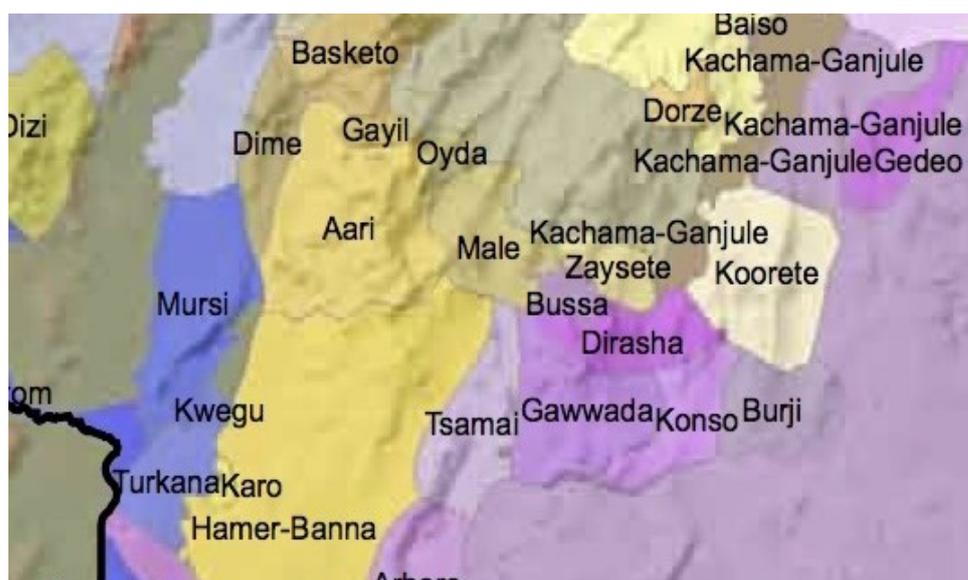


Figure 2: The Konso and their neighbours

2.2. Social organisations

Socially, the Konso are organized into two classes based on livelihood strategies: the *etanta* and the *xawdaa*.⁵ The former is made up of ‘farmers’ who hold a high social profile, while the latter consists of people who are engaged in non-farming activities such as weaving, blacksmithing, butchery, tannery and so on. In the past, it was strictly forbidden for *etanta* men to marry from the *xawdaa*. However, in the last two or three decades people from the *etanta* class have become more relaxed about the restriction of marriage with the *Xawdaa* class, and as a result we can nowadays find married people from both social classes. Religion and education seem to have played a significant role in the neutralization of the differences between the two social classes.

The Konso are also organized into nine exogamous clans⁶ (see also Shako 2004; Watson 1998). Except the *Keertitta* clan, which has two clan chiefs, the other clans have one chief each. The number of members may vary from clan to clan but the status of chiefs remains equal. Clan chiefs are not allowed to marry from the territory they administer nor are they allowed to make final decisions alone on social matters.

2.3. Traditional belief systems

The Konso believe in the existence of a supernatural power which they call *Waaqa*. *Waaqa* is traditionally seen as the creator of the universe and everything in it (but not in the sense of the one who did that in six days; see also Shako 2004). Furthermore, *Waaqa* is perceived as the one who responds to good acts and conduct. For example, for the Konso rain is the urine of *Waaqa*, which he provides for proper social conduct but withholds it for unjust social behaviours; he is a provider of well-being, justice and morality. *Waaqa* is also perceived as feminine, not in the reproductive biological sense but rather in the same sense a mother provides her child with its basic necessities.

⁶ The nine Konso clans are: *Keertitta*, *Arkaamayta*, *Sawdatta*, *Paasaanta*, *Ishalayta*, *Tookmaleeta*, *Tikissayta*, *Eelayta* and *Mahaleeta*. I belong to the *Keertitta* clan, whose chief is *Quufa*, in Kenaa area.

According to Konso tradition, Waaqa belongs to the Arkaamayta clan (see also Shako 2004:154). I do not know how this association was made. Shako (2004) in his excellent article mentions this association as well but does not explain the cultural basis of that linkage, either. This obviously calls for further ethnographic research.

The Konso believe in the existence of life after death but only in the form of ghosts. They call spirits *kaariyyaa*. The Konso believe that the ghosts behave/act very much like living human beings: they herd cattle, cultivate fields, fetch water, sing songs (particularly in the nights), sit under tree shades to conduct serious discussions, decide whether to kill a certain human being or not, make cries when interrupted by humans as a sign of unwelcome, punish wrongdoers, etc.

Traditionally, there are witchdoctors called *sowaayaa* (singular: *sowaayta*). These people are consulted for wealth and wellbeing. People do not directly use the term *sowaayta* when they go to consult or come from consulting them. Rather, they use *keraa a waaqa* 'thief of God'. This connotation comes from the assumption that it is only *Waaqa* 'God' who has the monopoly of knowledge and wisdom for healing and giving well-being to humans, and that some people are born with the talent to steal from Him bits of that knowledge and wisdom.

Apart from seeking justice from *Waaqa*, the Konso also believe in swearing (locally *xaxaa*) and spell (locally *haddaa*). These are carried out in what the Konso call *pora a duka'ta* 'place of truth'. Swearing and spell are methods used to solved disputes but always as last resorts because disputes are primarily settled between the disputing parties through the involvement of wise old men. Sometimes the disputing parties may refuse to come to terms despite all the efforts of the mediators. It is at this point that the *xaxaa* and *haddaa* options are sought. In the case of swearing, sacred spaces are used to make the parties swear, while in the case casting spell, the accuser goes to certain families believed to have the power to kill wrong doers, their family members or close relatives. Once swearing is performed or the accuser goes for *haddaa*, family members of the disputing parties do not greet each other, do not eat together, do not enter each other's compound, etc. This continues until someone dies from either of the disputing individuals' family or their close relatives. A disputing party who dies first or loses a family member or relative is held as guilty, and the other innocent. This is followed by the ritual of cleansing: the guilty party is requested to ask the innocent party for repentance and forgiveness. In the case of spell, the innocent party informs elders where he made the spell so that they go and inform the guilty party to go for cleansing. The cleansing is most often done immediately, because it is believed that any refusal and resistance to cleanse the family will result in additional deaths of other family members.

2.4. Livelihood

The Konso are predominantly settled agrarians whose primary source of livelihood is agriculture. They produce sorghum, maize, wheat, barley, and different types of beans. In addition, they rear animals such as cattle, sheep and goats. Beekeeping is also another livelihood source. Trade within and outside of Konso, which was/is primarily the livelihood strategy of non-farmers, is also a source of living for many people currently from the farmers' class.

The Konso are known for various traditional aspects of their life. First of all, they are known for building stonewalls locally called *kawwatta* as part of their indigenous environmental management system, which is dynamic, innovative, drought- and pest-resistant and adaptive to varied micro-

environments (see also Shako 2004). The stonewalls are useful for preventing the soil from erosion, as most of the ground is mountainous. Moreover, since the climate is arid and semi-arid, the stonewalls enable the land to maintain soil fertility through keeping the moisture of the soil and holding the rain water.

The Konso are also known for erecting wooden anthropomorphic statues locally called *waakkaa*. Of course, not everyone is entitled to this. Clan chiefs and those people who kill enemies during war and those who kill animals such as lions and leopards deserve them. The practice has significantly declined in the past few decades because of various factors, among which religion and modernity stand primary factors. Furthermore, as a consequence of looting, the number of *waakkaa* present in the land has now come to a record low and they have almost disappeared, although quite a lot of efforts are being made to preserve the existing ones.

The Konso have had their Cultural Landscape registered as a world heritage in 2011 by UNESCO. The inscription of the Konso cultural landscape is viewed by the Konso as an opportunity to restore the declining cultural practices and values, and raise self-esteem and identity in the face of competing challenges. The inscription is annually celebrated in order to promote as well as maintain the continuity of the culture and self-identity.

3. Personal naming in Konso

As mentioned in the introduction, personal names in Konso can be informal or formal. Informal names are divided into two: *maxxa a pooddaa* ‘baby food’s name’ and *maxxa a xela* ‘age-mate’s name’. The baby-food names are given mainly by grandmothers and midwives. Not everyone has a baby food name. For example, I do not have such a name nor I have ever heard of having one. Baby food names can be retained even after the acquisition of formal names. For instance, my second younger brother’s such a name is *Siikka* while his formal name is *Oytipa*. In my village, most people still address him with the baby-food name rather than with the formal name.

The other informal naming system is that of *maxxa a xelaa* ‘name of age-mates’. Age-mates give such informal names after one has already acquired a formal name. Like the baby food names, not everyone has an age-mate name. Age-mate names may or may not have meanings. For example, my grandfather’s age-mate name is *Kuukko*, which does not have a meaning. *Xalpo*, who has as his formal name *Payyana*, is another example. However, some age-mate names have meanings and may reflect the behavior or personality of the bearer. For example, the name *Midildilo*, from the ideophone *midil* ‘to slip through,’ is given to someone who has a shifty or slippery personality; another example is *Tultanqale* ‘slaughter from the back’ which is formed from the noun *tulta* ‘back’, the instrumental suffix *-n* and the verb root *qal-* ‘to slaughter’, and refers to someone who gets information from friends and uses that information to hurt them. Another example is *Orano* which is derived from the noun *orana* ‘spear, war’, and is given to someone who causes troubles and creates conflicts among people or villages. Some age-mate names may express body size or complexion. Body size names express whether the name bearer is physically big, tiny, short, tall (the whole body or neck), etc, and the body complexion names reflect whether the name bearer has a shiny or ashy skin texture. Illustrative examples are provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample informal names showing body size or complexion

Name	Body size/complexion	Source of meaning
Arpo	huge	<i>arpa</i> 'elephant'
Uqqino	tiny	<i>uqqinaa</i> 'a piece of grain'
Shoosha	tall	<i>shoosha</i> informal name for snake
Tiike	long neck	<i>tiikita</i> 'hornbill'
Shiire	short	<i>shiiritta</i> 'very short person or animal'
Fulluuqqa	ashy	<i>fulluuqaa</i> 'smashed and dried <i>pakaannaa</i> , root crop sp.'
Liilo	shiny	<i>liiliyaa</i> 'to be shiny, sweaty'

As mentioned in the introduction, formal names are given during the *sookata* ceremony by consultation between the child's grandmother, the midwives and a group of three young boys called *xala a kanynyatta* 'mud guys'. Formal personal names in Konso can be associated with various aspect of life. Being an agrarian society, the Konso distinguish seasons and farming periods. People who are born during a certain season or farming period can be named after that season or farming period as illustrated in (1).

- (1) Ponayya (f) <pona 'dry season; summer'>
 Katano (m) <katana 'rainy season'>
 Hakayya (f) <hakayta 'second sprout period'>
 Aylito (f) <aylaa 'sowing'>

Some personal names indicate events which coincide with the birth of the children. Such events may be pleasant or unpleasant, and include such events as hunting, war, grievance/mourning, etc as illustrated in (2).

- (2) Kutano (m) <kutanaa 'hunting'>
 Orano (m) <orana 'war, spear'>
 Pooyya (f) <pooyta 'grievance, weeping, crying, mourning'>

Months are very important in Konso cosmology, as well as farming activities. In the Konso calendar, a year has twelve months, and January is the first month of the year. The Konso identify two types of crops: those that can sprout for a second time and those that cannot. Moreover, they identify grain crops and root crops. The grain crops are further categorised into those that ripen fast and those that take more time to ripen. These identifications of the various types of crops – both grain and root crops – have to do with living strategies (the Konso employ a multicultural rather monocultural farming system). Crops are sowed during the first rains after the harvest of the second sprouts. These rains come in January and that is why January is the first month of the year. Although not commonly, some people are named after the names of months (3).

- (3) Oypa (m) 'January'
 Murano (m) 'March'

The Konso divide a day (twenty-four hours) into seven time divisions/periods. Watson (1998, cited in Shako 2004:153) reports about this kind of time division of the day in Konso as 'being concerned not merely with the measurement of time but with grasping intellectually and regulating the experience of duration.' If, for example, we take the morning time as a starter into the day time and move into the night, we get the seven time divisions given in (4a). The Konso have different names of meals which roughly correspond to the day times mentioned below. The meals are: *pasaassaa* for morning meal, *qudaaditta* for late morning meal, *piifaa* for midday meal, *qoyana* for late afternoon and evening meal, and *etuta* for after evening meal. Interestingly, people can be given names based on the time divisions of the day, reflecting the birth time of the name bearers (4b).

- (4) a. teykantaa 'morning'
 quadaada 'late morning'
 kuyya'ta 'midday'
 kallaptaa 'late afternoon'
 kalaakala 'evening'⁷
 halkeetta 'night'
 paraaminaa 'dawn, daybreak'
- b. Teyko (f)
 Qudaado (m)
 Kuyyawu (m)
 Kallappa (f)
 Kalkalo (m)⁸
 Halkeette (m)
 Parito (f)

Granddaughters can be named after their grandmothers whether she is a founding grandmother or not. I know, for instance, a girl named after her great grandmother. The name of the granddaughter is *Xasoote Sikilla*, and the names of her grandmother and great grandmother are *Kosayya* and *Xasoote*, respectively. In most cases, the names of the founding grandmothers are not known if there is a great gap in the genealogy. For instance, I know the name of my grandmother,⁹ who is a co-founder of the compound I was born into. However, I do not know the name of my (great) great grandmother, who was a co-founder of the family my great grandfather had been born into. I only know the name of the founding great grandfather: *Kalsho*. Because of the family names, it is

⁷ *Kalaakala* has a variant form *kalaakalaysi*. The term for midnight is *otumalaa*.

⁸ The name *Kalkalo* also exists in personal names of Borana and Gedeo as *Galgalo*. I have no information if this name among the Borana and Gedeo indicates the duration of day time as it does in Konso, and this is worth checking in future studies.

⁹ The name of my grandmother is *Katanna*. She was very instrumental in making me who I am today: she was someone who always blessed me and supported me morally and materially.

often easy for grandchildren not to know the names of their (great) great grandfathers. Clan chiefs basically form the final founding fathers in the clan genealogies.

It is forbidden for people, whether they are members of the clan or not, to take names after clan chiefs.

Grandsons are not allowed to be named after their grandfather. However, firstborn grandsons can be addressed by the names of their founding fathers because they are automatically entitled to inheriting¹⁰ the properties of their founding fathers. Females are not allowed to inheriting the properties of their parents, nor do they take a share even if they are firstborns.¹¹ A male child is very important in Konso society and not having one is seen as a disgrace to a family, because this is linked to the extinction (*qitanta*) of the family line.

That granddaughters can take their names after the name of their grandmothers, and that firstborn sons can be addressed by the names of their founding grandfathers is very important because it serves as a linkage between two generations – that of the grandparents and that of the grandchildren – and perpetuate the names of ancestors. This practice also has the power to bring the grandparents and grandchildren socially closer and psychologically more connected to each other. People can be named after place names, as in (5). Although I do not know why people are given names after far away places such as *Xoyra* ‘Burji’ or *Yaapaldo* (Yavello, a town about 80 kilo metres south of Konso), I know some people who had their name after the place names they were born in, particularly in clinics and hospitals situated in the areas. The first two names below are such names.

- (5) Karatto (m) <Karatte>
 Jiraato (m)/Jiraatta (f) <Dirashe>
 Xoyriyya (m) <Burji>
 Yaapaldo (m) <Yavello>

A week has seven days in Konso, and people can be named after the names of the days of a week, as in (6). Giving names based on the day of birth is not unique to Konso. Agyekum (2006:213) also reports a very similar practice among the Akan in Ghana where they locally call such naming practice *kradin*, which, according to him, literally means ‘souls name’.

- (6) Palawwa (m) ‘Saturday’
 Lankayya (m) ‘Tuesday’
 Saanpato (m) ‘Sunday’

Personal names can also be derived from animal names. Such fauna names have no association with the attributes of the animals, and the motivations for giving such names need further investigation. Moreover, most of such names are names used in children stories, and they are predominantly male names. Illustrative examples are in (7).

¹⁰ Second born sons are given some startup shares from the properties of their fathers.

¹¹ I strongly believe that girls should be entitled to taking a share of their parents’ properties in Konso society.

(7)	Oraayya (m)	<oraayta ‘hyena’>
	Kumaanna (m)	<kumaanta ‘antelope’>
	Kelto (m)	<keltayta ‘baboon’>
	Tapayya (m)	<tapayta ‘rat’>
	Karmaa/o (m)	<karmaa ‘lion’>
	Arpo (m)	<arpa ‘elephant’>
	Harre (m)	<harreeta ‘donkey’>
	Sakaaro (m) ¹²	<sakaaritta ‘dikdik’>
	Qayranna (f) ¹³	<qayranta ‘leopard’>
	Maako (m)	<maakaa ‘snake’>

As settled agrarians, the Konso identify different types of fauna. This identification of fauna is linked to farming because there are certain bird types that consume crops on the field. Some birds are used for food (e.g. *kulila* ‘guinea fowl’ and *koskorta* ‘partridge’), and some others for different purposes (e.g. *kushsheeta* ‘ostrich’ for its feathers and its eggshells). Thus, the knowledge of birds is very important in Konso society. Illustrative personal names derived from the names of birds are in (8).

(8)	Koskorra (f)	<koskorta ‘partridge’>
	Qurrupayya (m)	<qurrupayta ‘crown’>
	Qayate (f)	<qaya’ta ‘paradise bird’>
	Kushsheeta (f)	<kushsheeta ‘ostrich’>
	Koylaate (m) ¹⁴	<koylaata (an unidentified bird sp.)>
	Naplo (m)	<naplatta (an unidentified bird sp.)>
	Kulilla (f)	<kulila ‘guinea fowl’>

Flora names are also given to children. The names derived from trees and plants are not many, as far as I know. The existing examples of flora names are given after the names of strong trees in the land, implying the inspiration of the family for the child to be strong and famous:

(9)	Kolalta (m)	‘acacia sp.’
	Sapanta (m)	‘acacia sp.’
	Qassatto (m)	from <i>qassatta</i> ‘a bush plant with strong thorns’

In Konso, female names can be derived from male names mostly by geminating the last consonant of the male name. In this kind of names, male names have the final vowel -o or -e, while female names have final -a, -o, or -e. It is not allowed to both male and female siblings to bear such

¹² There is also a variant name *Sakaarra* which I heard around the Karatte area but not sure if it is a female name. The person with this name is male.

¹³ *Qayranna* (f) has a masculine form: *Qayranto* (m)

¹⁴ *Koylayte* (m) has a female counter name: *Koylayya* (f).

names within a family. The derivation of female names from male names is also reported for Akan (Agyekum 2006:217).

Table 2: Female names derived from male names

Male name	Derived female name	Male name	Derived female name
Kallapo	Kallappa	Kutano	Kutanna
Roopo	Rooppa	Katano	Katanna
Jiraato	Jiraatta	Kappino	Kappinna
Urmale	Urmalla	Pooyaa	Pooyya
Xalaale	Xalaalla	Oraapo	Oraappa
Kayaapo	Kayaappa	Kurraaŋfo	Kurraatte
kalfo	Kalisso	kammaŋfo	Kammatte

Many Konso personal names do not have meanings or show associations to seasons, events, fuana, flora, etc. For example, my name does not have a meaning. Such names may be exclusively male names, as in (10a), or female names, as in (10b), and do not allow the derivation of female or male names from male or female names, respectively. Maybe, such names are given after names of popular individuals somewhere in the Konso land, present or past, and may be borrowed from neighbouring communities. For example, somebody in my village is named *Kittaampo* which is not a Konso name but that now I realize it is a common Dirashe name for a younger son (Wondwosen 2007:57). The name *Kurraatte* which is a very common female name in Konso, is also found in Gawwada (Tosco, unpublished Gawwada dictionary).

- (10) a. Onkaye (m)
 Kappoole (m)
 Kuntare (m)
 Simmoole (m)
 Kaalmale (m)
 Anto (m)
- b. Kanassa (f)
 Orke (f)
 Siraatta (f)
 Kujaajja (f)
 Oyaassa (f)
 Kanfe (f)

There are also two names which show hierarchy in birth: *Kusse*¹⁵ and *Lammitta*. The first name is given only to a second born son showing that at least there is one elder brother for the name bearer. The name *kusse* is derived from the verb root *kuss-* ‘to scoop’, and shows that the parents have more than one son. *Lammitta* is a name given to the first born son of a second wife. The name itself comes from the word *lammitteeta* ‘second wife’. There are two further terms worth mentioning along these lines: *qarta* and *qussaqqunaanaa*. The first is a general term for firstborn son, and the second term is for a last born child. *Qarta* can be used as an honorific form of addressing a first born sibling or senior and first born males within a clan. In Konso tradition, it is forbidden for younger siblings to address their elder siblings by their names. There is a special honorific term for addressing senior siblings: *aatte* which comes from *aattaa* meaning an elder sibling.

A child who is born through a pregnancy that lasted more than nine months may get a name *Kayre* or *Kayritte*. There are also names for gratitude (e.g., *Kalato* from the noun *kalataa* ‘thank, gratitude’), and survival (e.g., *Dinoote* from the verb root *din-* ‘to survive, be saved’).

As mentioned in the preceding section, the Konso believe in the existence of life after death in the form of ghosts. They also believe that such ghosts have the power to kill people. Thus, if the first baby boy dies before the birth of the next baby boy, the following baby boy is given a female name in order to prevent him from death. In other words, the giving of a female name to a baby boy is based on the belief that a female name would not be attractive to the ghosts who ‘killed the first male sibling’, and as a result enhance the chances of the baby boy to stay.

In the first column of Table 3, I provide the given names of males with female names I am familiar with, and in the second column their names together with their fathers’ names. In braces, I use the letter “f” after the given names to show that the name is a feminine name.

Table 3: Examples of males with female names

Kunnaassa (f)	Kunnaassa Pooya
Kahanna (f)	Kahanna Payyana
Kallappa (f)	Kallappa Kenpo

As a rule, there is an agreement relationship between masculine and feminine names in the grammar, so that masculine names take a third person masculine gender agreement on the verb while feminine names take feminine gender agreement. Interestingly, however, female names given to males do not show feminine gender agreement on the verb. Rather, masculinity is maintained in the grammar as it is also embedded in the knowledge of the parents and the community. In the following illustrative sentential examples, we take two of the female names given to males (see Table 3), and see how they can be assigned two separate gender agreements on the verb: one for feminine (11a, 12a), and the other for masculine (11b, 12b).

¹⁵ *Kusse* has variants such as *Kussiyya* or *Kussitto*.

- (11) a. Kahanna tikupa ikalti
Kahanna tika-opa i=kal-t-i
 Kahanna home-to 3=return.home-3F-PF
 ‘Kahanna returned home.’
- b. Kahanna tikupa ikalay
Kahanna tika-opa i=kal-ay
 Kahanna home-to 3=return.home-PF[3M]
 ‘Kahanna returned home.’
- (12) a. Kallappa hellaa sessaa qapta
Kallappa hellaa sessa=i qap-t-a
 Kallappa children three=3 have-3F-IPF.PRES
 ‘Kallappa has three children.’
- b. Kallappa hellaa sessaa qapa
Kallappa hellaa sessa=i qapa
 Kallappa children three=3 have-IPF.PRES
 ‘Kallappa has three children.’

4. Poetry, songs and personal naming

There is a high interaction between poetry, songs and personal naming in Konso. Poetry in Konso is primarily part of the oral literature. Written poems are mainly found among church songs, first published in a volume about a decade ago. Poetry is very important in Konso tradition because it is used not only to express the size of one’s clan, beauty of nature, strength of lineage associations within and outside of one’s village, but also to transfer that piece of social knowledge to young people through songs. Poetry in Konso is attained through alliteration. Konso shares this feature of alliteration with other Cushitic languages such as Somali (Korra and Mous; Tosco personal communication). The alliteration in Konso poetry involves the initial vowel of words or the onset and nucleus of the syllable (CV), while the coda of a syllable does not play any role. This shows that Konso is an alliterating language rather than a rhyming language (see also Katamba1989:155). The length of vowels in the nuclei does not prohibit the formation of alliteration. In the illustrative poetry in (13), the alliteration is formed with *he-*. The poem is about the health effects of early marriage and conveys a message for girls not to get married early. On the other hand, there is also another poem (not presented here) that advises girls not to wait too long for marriage.

- (13) *Helluman hemamti* ‘[She] got married very early’
Addaan heteltelti ‘Got her chicks swollen’
Ildaanaa pooyta heenti ‘With her eyes about to cry’

As pointed out above, the alliteration in Konso poetry is achieved by preserving the same initial vowel of words or the onset and nucleus of the syllable (CV). However, we also find some consonants

that share the same place of articulation and/or belong to the same manner of articulation, and which may substitute each other in alliteration. These sounds are given in (14):

- (14) r and l
n and ny
r and n
n and l
d and j
s and sh

Moreover, Konso traditional songs are sung by two lead singers: *dawaampayta* ‘one who sings’ and *oorshaampayta* ‘one who returns’. The *dawaampayta* begins the song, and very soon the *oorshaampayta* follows. Together they finish the refrain. Then, the refrain is sung by the others. Korra and Mous correctly point out that the number of lines in Konso songs may vary from song to song and that songs have no fixed length and may go on indefinitely.

Although I do not have any empirical data, I suspect that as communal and team work intensified among the Konso members within villages, people began to recite the names of their kins within and outside of their villages. In the course of time, the development of alliteration in songs and oral poetry extended its influence into personal naming. The alliteration in personal naming minimally takes place between the child and father, as in (15a), between grandchild, father and grandfather, as in (15b), or still between grandchild and founding grandfather, as in (15c).

- (15) a. Anto Arkaato Kantoole
Kaallitta Kattalle Purrayyo
Oraase Olle Parishaa
- b. Onkaye Ota Orxayto
Kawweessa Kantaje Kaadido
Armaaso Anto Arkaato
Kappoole Kaytoora Kassito
- c. Shiire Okkaaso Oltisha Shirto
Haaraya Kaashalaa Toorayto Purrayyo Haddayya

Many personal names show no alliteration, as in the illustrative examples in (16).

- (16) Kalkalo Poorre Dalta
Kuntare Oltisha Qudaado
Halkeeyyo Jilo Minde Pakke

5. Personal naming and the feudal system, modern education and religion

5.1. The “feudal” system and naming practices

Konso became part of the modern Ethiopian state in the late 19th century with the conquest of Minilik’s army (see also Shako 2004). The Konso name for Amhara is *Qawweeta*¹⁶. However, it may be extended to people from varied ethnic backgrounds who speak to the Konso only in Amharic, and behave and act like one group connected by a common language (i.e., Amharic).

According to Amborn (1984, cited in Shako 2004:52), the Konso and the northern arrivals never integrated, thereby hardly enabling the Konso to adopt a northern culture. Part of that can also be attributed to the fact that the Imperial representatives, despite portraying an Amhara identity, spoke both Amharic and Afaan Oromo, the closest Cushitic language to Konso. By then, the Konso considered Afaan Oromo the lingua franca outside of Konso. The linguistic closeness between Konso and Afaan Oromo and the Konso opinion that Afaan Oromo was a lingua franca enabled Amharic to have little or no linguistic impact on the social function of Konso at the earlier stages.

However, the Imperial system had some impact on personal naming in the early stages. The first thing the newcomers did was changing the Konso name of one of the clan chiefs. When the feudal lords arrived, they changed the name of the son of the then head of the *Kala* family, *Jiraato*, into *Dawit*, the Amharic version of the biblical name *David* (see also Shako 2004:149). *Jiraato*’s father’s name was *Xaayyoote*. A few other existing names have Amharic semantics but adapted to Konso phonology, as can be seen from the examples in (17).

(17)	<i>Konso name</i>	<i>Amharic name</i>	
	Koorkise	Giorgis	‘George’
	Lussukkati	Leulseged	‘Prince-worship’
	Taajane	Dejene	‘My-defender’
	Fitiraari	Fitawrari	‘Front-fighter’

The dominance of the Amhara culture and language which began with the feudal system and intensified by the military regime in the subsequent periods had a huge impact on the names and personal naming practices of almost all nationalities in the country. Konso is no exception. The cultural dominance, for example, has resulted in the development of low self-esteem, whereby one’s indigenous language and cultural practices and values are perceived as low and backward, thus compromising one’s ethnic identity makers. This low self-esteem has an influence on naming, too. Some of the manifestations can be seen in the act of some people who modify their indigenous Konso names and make them sound as Amhara names on account of sound resemblance, as shown in (18). This trend and practice is also reported in Aari (Yntiso 2010:192). Some of these modifications are carried on by the name bearers deliberately, and others by non-Konso speakers intentionally or mistakenly.

¹⁶The root of the word *qawweeta* is not clear yet.

(18)	Konso name	Amharanised name	
	Teykane (m)	Dəgg nəh	‘You-are-generous’
	Kurraashsho (m)	Gurrachchəw	‘Their-boast’
	Turruufaa (m)	Tirrufat	‘Legacy’
	Xoora (m)	Korra	‘Became-proud’
	Kaarmeeto (m)	Gərəməw	‘He-was-surprised’
	Kanfe (f)	Kinfe	‘My-wing’
	Ferte (m)	Fərədə	‘He-passed-verdict’

5.2. Modern education and naming

Education in Konso began in the early 1960s. In spite of formal language teaching at schools and informal exposure to the language, the spread of Amharic was very slow by then. It remained an elite language used and spoken in towns, classrooms, offices, courtrooms, and the churches. But as time passed, the younger generation and some parents felt that modern education in Amharic led to new and better economic opportunities. Then, Amharic began to be seen as a means to an end, if not as an end in itself. In fact, one cannot deny the contributions of modern education to Konso society. For example, it has enabled educated people to make a better living through employment as well as through running modern businesses. Moreover, it has enabled not only boys but also girls to go to school, especially in the last two decades. At the same time, it has also brought negative impacts both on the culture and language. The general attitude of the Konso people, particularly young educated people, towards Amharic may be explained in terms of value judgments that people have about the language and their motivation to learn it. It is observable very clearly that some educated individuals tend to view Konso culture and language as backward and irrelevant. So, speaking in Amharic rather than in Konso, or eating *enjera* instead of the local *damaa* food, and drinking bottled beer and other alcoholic drinks instead of the well-known local drink *jaqaa*, is seen as a sign of being modern or civilized.

The effect of Amharic on Konso is not only seen in the communicative aspects of the language as an expression of social function and identity marker. It is a common-place practice now to hear code-mixing (Konso-Amharic, and sometimes Konso-Amharic-English) and code-shifting (from Konso to Amharic). The other effect is seen in phonology. In the Konso phoneme inventory, there is no distinction between voiced and voiceless plosives and fricatives and voiceless plosives and fricatives only are phonemic. Amharic, on the other hand, has voice distinction in plosives and fricatives, and it seems to me that the voiced plosives occur more frequently than their counterpart voiceless plosives. In the same vein, like many Cushitic languages, the low central vowel /a/ is the most frequently occurring vowel. For Amharic, the central vowel is the most frequently occurring vowel. The other phonological difference between the two languages lies in the categories of ejectives and implosives. Konso, unlike Amharic, does not have ejectives at all. On the other hand it has a series of four voiced implosives /b, d, j, g/. Since Amharic has ejectives and does not have implosives, the implosives are changed to plosives and ejectives when writing Konso words in Amharic. Furthermore, Amharic does not have the uvular fricative /x/ of Konso. This sound is always written as *k* in Amharic. The phonological changes in these sounds are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Konso phonemes substituted by Amharic phonemes when Konso words are writing in Amharic

Konso phoneme	Amharic phoneme	Konso name	Konso name as written in Amharic
ḅ	b	Sarba	Sarba
d'	d	ḍarpo	Darbo
f	č'/ḍʒ	Kantaḥe; farso	Gəndəč'e, Jarso
g'	k'	ḡudaado	K'udado
x	k	Xalale	Kalale

Amharic does not have long vowels. Moreover, although it shows a distinction between geminate and non-geminate consonants, the writing system does not show this variation even if it brings change in meaning. Thus, the impact of Amharic on Konso personal naming involves these variations. In the following table, the names in the first column are Konso names, while those in the second column show how they are written in school. The names provided here are some of the names I am familiar with.

Table 5: Konso names adjusted to Amharic phonology

Konso	Amharic
Kallapo	Gələbo
Onkaye	Ongaye
Kantaje	Gəndəc'ə
Kuntare	Gundare
Teykanto	Dəyganto
Orxayto	Orkaydo
Kappino	Gəbino
Kantoole	Gəndole

It becomes obvious that one of the most common mistakes Konso natives make when speaking in Amharic is using voiceless sounds instead of voiced ones, and the use of the low central vowel instead of the mid central vowel. It is also interesting to notice that sometimes Konso native speaker tend to generalize voicing and end up producing voiced sounds instead of voiceless counterparts when speaking Amharic.

Apart from the impact of Amharic on the communicative and phonological aspects of Konso, a very frustrating trend at the moment is changing Konso names completely into new Amharic names mainly during the regional examination period. Put differently, it is basically a primary school trend: students retain their Konso names until grade seven, but when they fill out a form for a regional examination in grade eight, they change their Konso names completely with new Amharic names without informing their parents. It also seems to me that parents do not mind the new names even

upon learning the new name of their child. One example that I can mention as a proof is a name I am very familiar with. He is my nephew – the son of my aunt. The Konso name is *Kaamasaa Kassallo* which he maintained until grade seven. When he was filling out a form for the grade eight regional examination, he changed the name to *Gebremedin Kassallo*, which I became aware of only when he went to the university.

I also know of one case where a primary school student changed his name from Konso to a Muslim name when filling out the registration form for grade eight regional examination. His Konso name was *Ullupa* and his changed and official name became *Mustafa*.

Many schooled people and those in and around towns give Amhara names to their children. Basically, this seems to derive from a belief that this practice is equivalent to holding a high social class and is a symbol of modernity. Further ethnographic study should of course be done in order to properly understand why this is currently happening despite local, regional and federal governments' efforts to foster ethnic groups' culture.

5.3. Religion and personal naming

The practices of modern religions in Konso are phenomena of a little more than half a century. As we shall see in some detail below, there are three modern religions in Konso at present. The first one introduced to the land is Orthodox Christianity, which was brought in the late 19th century following the conquest of the Minilik II's army. This was followed by the arrival of the Evangelical church of Makane Yesus, founded by the Norwegian Lutheran Mission. Islam follows the Evangelical Christian dominion in arrival. A full description and analysis of the asymmetrical relationship between the Konso tradition and the practices of Orthodox and evangelical churches is presented by Shako (2004).

5.3.1. Orthodox Christianity

The Orthodox Church was the first Christian organization to arrive in Konso. It followed the conquest of Minilik II. Shako (2004: 160) reports the asymmetrical relationship between the local people and the church as follows:

The Church itself grabbed a significant proportion of land and developed a landlord-and-tenant relationship with the native people. Its clergy and deacons derived their earnings from the non-Christian Konso using the force of the newly promulgated laws. These factors and arbitrary tithe collections eventually turned out to be a barrier between the Church and the indigenous people.

Shako also adds that in the subsequent years, the church revised its segregationist and exploitative policy by embracing the local people as members of the church. In his words:

It [the Church] nullified its previous exclusive policy of Christianity and invited the local people to join it in conversion (2004:160).

Shako states that 'its [the church's] approach to the running of the Church schools sounded to the local people more like a form of enslavement of their children. An infestation of scabies, the very common contagious disease associated with schooling at the time, compelled many students to run away. The styles of punishment were also so brutal as to be repulsive for the population' (2004:160).

The Orthodox Christian church has a handful churches, and was not as active or aggressive with traditional practices as the charismatic evangelical Christian sects discussed below. Most of the members of the Orthodox Christian church are non-farmers, although the number of converts from the farmers' class is on the rise (see also Shako 2004:166).

The Orthodox Christian church preserves local names for grownups who join the religion, but obliges new members to acquire Amharic Christian names during baptism. The following are some of the common names given to the new converts.

- (19) Teklemariam 'Plant of Mary'
 Gebremariam 'Servant of Mary'
 Gebrekristos 'Servant of Christ'
 Teklehaymanot 'Plant of religion'

5.3.2. Protestant (Evangelical) Christianity and personal naming

Protestant Christianity came to Konso through the Norwegian Lutheran Mission in 1954 (Shako 2004:163), and established the first sect, called Mekane Yesus. Initially, it was mild with culture and traditional values. As it attracted several Konso converts, and in the subsequent years enabled the church to have Konso native priests, it assumed a higher position than orthodox Christianity.

Things began to change drastically in the late 1990s. The mild tradition of the Mekane Yesus began to morph into conservative and revivalist/charismatic tendencies. The priests and the majority of church members in the rural areas adhered to the conservative category, while most of the schooled and young school students joined the latter. In the course of time, the internal struggle spread into the rural parishes and congregations. Finally, the Mekane Yesus church split in two, one retaining the old name and the other adopting a new name, *Akale Yesus* 'Body of Jesus'. Part of the struggle can be attributed to desires for power and creating or maintaining access to self-seeking opportunities (see also Shako 2004:162).

The charismatic movement was, and still is, aggressive and intolerant with cultural practices and values. Satan/devil receives a big space in prayers; hell and doomsday are pronounced high. Speaking in tongue is also a very common phenomenon. Currently, several Evangelical Christian sects have emerged, such as Mekane Yesus, Akale Yesus, Kale Hiwot, Muluwengel, etc. Each church struggles to win a larger congregation. This at times brings conflict between the various denominations, as there is a tendency to criticise each other in order to win members from the other denominations or to maintain the members from fleeing to the other denominations. For a better understanding of the impacts of the missionaries on Konso culture, see Shako (2004).

In the Christian tradition, names are given to children during baptism. And current trends of naming children born to Christian parents show that most of the names are picked from the Bible. The New Testament was translated into Konso some years ago, and the Old Testament is under way. Most preaching is conducted in Konso, especially in the villages. Yet, when children are given

Christian names, the biblical names of the Amharic versions of the Hebrew names are used, as can be seen from the following illustrative examples.

(20)	P'aulos ¹⁷	'Paul'
	Samuel	'Samuel'
	Matewos	'Matthew'
	Yohannis	'John'
	Dawit	'David'
	Selemon	'Solomon'
	Luk'as	'Luke'

It is also interesting to observe that church members may informally rename each other with biblical names. The preference for the Biblical names against the Konso names seems to derive from the assumption that the former are holier.

5.3.3. Islam and personal naming

It seems that the Konso had some contact with Muslims in the past, as is apparent not from religious practice but from some Islamic names adapted to Konso. Two names that I am aware of in this respect are *Useena*, *Apte* and *Siraje* which correspond to the muslim names *Hussein*, *Abdi* and *Siraj*, respectively. The people carrying these names and whom I know have never practiced Muslim religious duties.

The early Muslims were traders from Borana and settled in Konso town. They were very few in number, spoke Oromo and traded mainly between Karatte (then *Bak'awle*) and Yavello towns. Following the great Ethiopian famine in the 1980s, some Muslim migrants arrived from Wollo. They were based in the town of Karatte, and primarily involved in business. They did not push their religion into the community. It was only recently that they established one mosque in Karatte. In the last decade, there are reports that a few Konso natives converted to Islam. It is very likely that the Muslim community will grow in Konso in the coming years, as intense trade is currently carried on between Konso, Burji and Borana (most of the traders from the last two groups are Muslim). Presently, there is no religious competition between Muslims and the Christian sects, although competition is high between the Christian sects. However, the trade interaction as well as the high mobility and the settlement of outsiders in Karatte town may eventually develop into some sort of religious competition between the different Christian denominations and Muslims.

As I said before, only a few Konso converts to Islam are reported. And since the converts are grownups, and it would be interesting to know if they have changed their Konso names to Muslim names or not. Moreover, I have no data if the converts have children and have given Muslim names rather than Konso names to them.

¹⁷Symbols followed by a stroke (') represent ejective stops.

6. Future research issues

At the beginning of this paper, I mentioned that the data I provide here are based on my lived experiences as well as on observations and some information I received from friends during informal discussions. I also pointed out that the analyses in the preceding sections are by no means conclusive and final, and call for further investigation into a lot of research issues which are at stake. Thus, I devote this section to pointing out the issues that need to be investigated in the future in order to get a fuller picture of the practices and dynamics of personal naming in Konso.

The first point is that from experience in the area, I know that some people changed their names and/or their fathers' names through court ruling. This kind of practice around the capital Addis Ababa is also reported by Aregga (2010). The changes take two directions. The first one is that people give up their indigenous names and acquire Amharic names through court ruling. The change can involve the first name only or both the first and the father's name. The second direction is the opposite: due to ethnic identity awareness, people who had Amharic names give up their Amharic names and acquire ethnic names through court ruling. A third dimension is changing indigenous names to religious names. I do not know whether people in Konso have already begun changing their names either way through judiciary means.

Another issue is getting first-hand information as to why people who have changed their names before sitting for the regional examination did so. Before doing that, in fact, document analysis is very relevant, and this will involve collecting pre- and post-name change data from the school registries. In a parallel way, the reaction of the school teachers and directors on the reasons or factors that trigger students to change their names needs investigation.

In Konso tradition, midwives together with the '*mud team*' had, and probably still have in some places, the privilege to determine the assignment of formal names. However, since the proliferation of religions and health-posts in Konso, the role of midwives significantly reduced not only in assisting child delivery but also in the naming practices. The *sookata* 'exit' tradition is being replaced by baptism, and child delivery by health-post workers. So, the reaction of midwives needs investigation.

There are also facts that can be predicted about name changing while sitting for regional examination with regard to gender and regional distributions. Historically, girls and first born sons were not encouraged to attend school. For girls, the simple reason was, and perhaps largely still is, that it is not worth investing in girls because they would take the benefits of schooling to their husbands. With first born sons, schooling is discouraged because they are inheritors and the ones primarily responsible for taking care of their parents when they will get old. Thus, first born sons are not allowed to settle far away. These reasons gave far better opportunities to go to school for second born sons. However, as time went on, and people began to observe the benefits of education, parents began to relax about sending their first born sons to school. This was slowly followed by allowing girls to go to school. Although one can make some guess about boys changing their Konso names to Amharic more than girls, we need empirical data to make scientific conclusions.

It is most likely the case that the closer people are to towns, the higher the degree of name changes from Konso to Amharic. This needs in-depth ethnographic study in order to fully understand why people change their names, what perception they have about their Konso names and culture, etc.

As mentioned in the preceding section, Evangelical Christians give names to children during baptism. I personally do not know if parents or the priest or chooses and gives the name during baptism.

Most of the Konso converts to Orthodox Christian religion are adults/grownups. It is still unknown to me whether native Konso members of the Orthodox Church are already giving their children born after conversion Orthodox Christian names, and if the same is done for children born before conversion. I further do not know the names grownup females are given after conversion to Orthodox Christianity.

Sound alteration in personal naming is also very common among Omotic-speaking peoples such as the Gamo and Gofa (personal observation) and Cushitic-speaking Gawwada (Mauro Tosco; personal communication). This shows that this feature has some kind of geographical distribution; contact concerning this point needs further investigation. Moreover, the use of alteration in poetry and songs among other neighboring nationalities needs a parallel study.

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Ongaye Oda Orkaydo, PhD, is an assistant professor of Linguistics at the Institute of Indigenous Studies in Dilla University, Ethiopia. He is a full time researcher at the institute but has teaching obligations in the Department of English Language and Literature. He offers Linguistics courses for undergraduate and graduate students, and supervises students for their MA theses. He has carried out research activities on Konso (his mother tongue), K'abeena and T'ambaro, all Cushitic languages. His research interests include, but are not limited to, grammar writing for little studied languages especially Cushitic and Omotic languages, mother tongue education (from planning to implementation and evaluation), language documentation, language and environment, and dictionary making.