



Exploring the Belief in Resurrection of the Me'enit Ethnic Group in Ethiopia

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Abstract

This study examines the resurrection myth among the Me'enit ethnic group in southwestern Ethiopia. It examines their belief in a place called Mouu, which was created by the deity Tuma and where people live on after death. The study aims to deepen our understanding of the Me'enit cultural and spiritual worldview by examining the origin and persistence of their belief in resurrection. The methodology involves a combination of primary and secondary data collection and analysis. Primary data was collected through interviews, focus group discussions and participant observation within the Me'enit community, while secondary sources were analyzed for additional context. The data was thoroughly analyzed using narrative theory to identify themes and patterns. The findings shed light on the unique resurrection beliefs and practices of the Me'enit, emphasizing the ongoing presence of the resurrection myth and the importance of Mouu in their belief system. This study contributes to the understanding of the Me'enit ethnic group and their myth and offers insights into their beliefs and practices related to resurrection.

Keywords: Me'enit Ethnic Group, Resurrection Myth, Narrative Theory, Mouu, Tuma

1. Introduction

Ethiopia is a country known for its rich cultural diversity and more than 80 ethnic groups, each with its own traditions, beliefs and way of life. Among these different groups include the Me'enit ethnic group, an indigenous community living in south-western Ethiopia. The Me'enit have their own myth that distinguishes them from others and contributes to the vivid picture of ethnic diversity in Ethiopia.¹

The Me'enit ethnic group is a vibrant community with its own culture, language and social structure. Living mainly in the Me'eni Goldia and Me'eni Shasha districts and in smaller groups in Gura Ferda and neighboring areas, the Me'enit share a common culture, a language known as Meenit, as well as their beliefs and values. Their language, which belongs to the Surmese language family within the Nilo-Saharan language group, is closely related to other languages spoken by neighboring ethnic groups such as the Mursi, Surma, Zilimamo, Balu Mursi, Muguji and Kawagu.² The ethnic group operates within a decentralized political structure led and administered by various tribal leaders. As there is no strong central command, more than sixty clans exist within the community, each led by nobles or clan leaders. These nobles, together with orators (Kalchas) and clan elders, play an important role in leading, disciplining and advising the community.³

In Me'enit mythology, the deity Tuma, also known as Yeri, occupies an important place as the creator of the universe, the earth and the Me'enit people themselves. The community uses both names interchangeably to refer to this deity, reflecting their deep spiritual beliefs⁴. The Me'enit people face various challenges. These include issues of land rights, limited access to education and healthcare, encroachment by neighboring communities and the impact of environmental changes on their traditional way of life. However, the Me'enit people have shown great resilience when it comes to preserving their myth, maintaining oral traditions and adapting to the changing world around them.

¹ Abate Andualem, "Traditional Conflict Resolution in Me'enite Ethnicity." (Addis Ababa University, 2012).

² John Abbink, "An Ethno-Historical Perspective on Me'en Territorial Organization (Southwest Ethiopia)," *Anthropos*, 1992, 351-64; Andualem, "Traditional Conflict Resolution in Me'enite Ethnicity."

³ Abbink, "An Ethno-Historical Perspective on Me'en Territorial Organization (Southwest Ethiopia)."

⁴ A Hiwot, "Mourning System in the Me'enite Nation" (Addis Ababa University, 2012).

Like every civilization, the Me'enit ethnic group has its own stories that are passed down through generations. The fact that there are not many studies on mythology in Ethiopia is one of the reasons that motivated me to do this study. The second reason is that during the research for my thesis (MA), I became familiar with the ethnic group's belief in the resurrection myth, and the narrative of Mount Mouu, in which the life of the Me'enit continues after death, inspired me to learn more about it. The inner pressure I felt when I heard about a Mr. Mayoni who returned from Mouu after death is my third motivation.

The subject of myth has been extensively researched by scholars from various disciplines, each contributing their own perspective. Anthropologists, folklorists, psychologists and literary scholars, among others, have looked at the origins and meaning of the term "myth" in their respective fields. According to the word "myth" comes from the Greek term *mythos*, which means "word" or "story."⁵ However, the term myth is interpreted differently by different disciplines and scholars. For believers, anthropologists, folklorists, psychologists and literary critics alike, myths serve as a means of answering timeless and cyclical questions about life, the origin of the world and the meaning of existence.⁶ contends that myths narrate the feats, sacrifices, and miracles performed by individuals or spiritual entities, offering solutions to societal challenges, while suggests that most myths revolve around powerful beings, both divine and human, who possess extraordinary energy and abilities beyond those of ordinary individuals.⁷

This study examines the resurrection myth of the Me'enit ethnic group in Ethiopia using a qualitative research design and an ethnographic approach. Participants are selected through purposive sampling and key informants, ensuring informed consent. Data collection methods include in-depth interviews, participant observation and document analysis. Thematic analysis and constant comparison used for data analysis. The aim of the study is to gain insights into the Me'enit's belief in resurrection myth. The study is divided into the sections introduction, myth concept and literature review, theoretical framework, resurrection analysis and conclusion. Ethical considerations and limitations are also addressed.

⁵ Leeming (2005)

⁶ Campbell (2008)

⁷ Bryant (2010)

2. Myth as a Concept

Several conclusions have been drawn about myth. It lacks an independent, conventional and widespread derivation. According to ⁸, the myth is a sacred text that has been passed down orally and preserved for generations. He continues, “Myths are passed orally from generation to generation and/or preserved in sacred collections or literature believed to have originated from one or more deities,” and he goes on to explain that a myth is a long-lived oral narrative in which people ask and answer universal and enduring questions about their nature, identity, and origins while passing on their beliefs, ideas, and philosophical views. According to Bascom’s definition, myths are stories that a culture tells and believes to have taken place in the past.⁹ According to ¹⁰ and ¹¹, these stories, supposedly performed or spoken, are ways of interpreting and seeing the world metaphorically, much like poetry.

Myths play a decisive role in shaping cultural values and influence the behavior of people in a society. They contribute to the formation of a nation’s identity and promote connections and interactions between people. These cultural values, rooted in myths, can be personal and individual as well as ethnic and national. By conveying personal and social meaning, myths help individuals maintain a sense of connection with their culture.¹² According to¹³, Myths are traditional tales that are passed down orally within a culture. They explain natural phenomena, historical events and the origin of the world and often contain supernatural and symbolic elements. Although they are not always based on fact, myths are of cultural and religious significance and shape beliefs, values and rituals. They provide a framework for understanding human experiences, social norms and existential conundrums. Myths reflect an individual’s beliefs, interpretations of life’s interactions, understanding of eternal questions, origins and worldview.¹⁴

⁸ Leeming (2005)

⁹ William Bascom, “The Forms of Folklore: Prose Narratives,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 78, no. 307 (1965): 4.

¹⁰ Cobley (2015)

¹¹ Murray et al. (2014)

¹² Timothy J Brown, “Deconstructing the Dialectical Tensions in” *The Horse Whisperer*: How Myths Represent Competing Cultural Values,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 38, no. 2 (2004): 276.

¹³ Bayileyegn (1999)

¹⁴ Hiwot, “Mourning System in the Me’enite Nation.”

Types of Myth: Experts in the field have divided myth into numerous categories according to their respective views. Both ¹⁵ and ¹⁶ have presented their own classifications. ¹⁷ argues that it makes more sense to focus on the contextual narrative of myths than to try to categorize their forms and nature. Categorization brings its own challenges and distorts the global perception of the field. According to Finnegan's theory, it is essential to consider the coherence of narrative time, place and sequence within the broader context of a myth. It is important to recognize that myths can overlap and sometimes coexist. ¹⁸, for his part, divides myth types into four main categories. He categorizes these four myths as those having to do with animals, creation, death, or the underworld and heroes, ¹⁹ suggests that most myths revolve around powerful beings, both divine and human, who possess extraordinary energy and abilities beyond those of ordinary individuals provided comprehensive and thorough categories of myths. He labeled them "commentary on the myth of nature," "myth of resurrection after death," "myth of heroes," "myth of spirituality," "myth of resurrection," "myth of change," "myth of modern earth," "myth of kings and martyrs," "myth of the messiah," "myth of remembering and forgetting," "myth of modern society," "myth of protection and destiny," "myth of time.

Myth of Resurrection: The myth of resurrection is a widespread belief in all cultures and religions. It states that after death, the soul is reborn in a new body or form and the cycle of birth, death and rebirth continues. Each life offers opportunities for spiritual growth and learning. Resurrection is often associated with the concept of karma, where past actions influence present circumstances. This myth offers insights into the meaning of life, the nature of the soul and the interconnectedness of all living beings.²⁰ If it is not possible, it acknowledges without question that time is a journey that will never end. The creation myths of Islam and Christianity both assert that man and the cosmos emerged from the same source, God. They proclaim both their starting point and their ending point. The interaction of the entire universe, including the planet and all its

¹⁵ Vitaliano (1968)

¹⁶ Leeming (2005)

¹⁷ Finnegan (2012, 126)

¹⁸ Ellwood (2008)

¹⁹ Peyton (1969)

²⁰ Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.

inhabitants, eventually leads to a known place. Man will either go to heaven or to the lake of fire. This illustrates how time is linear and makes it clear that humanity will move on to a new place after this world. The following narrative explains how human sin is responsible for the demise of the Sidama ethnic group in Ethiopia.

In the story, Magano, tired from his journey, enters a house and asks for water. The lady of the house mistakenly gave him milk. Magano refused to drink it, as he only wanted water. As he continued his journey, he visited the house of Hamasho and asked the snake for water. The wise woman of Hamasho recognized Magano. He gave them water, knowing that she understood his preference. According to legend, Magano ordered that the serpent's son should not die from the effects of the water. This belief led the Sidama ethnic group to believe that snakes only die when they are killed. They believe that snakes shed their skin and reappear young to stay alive forever. "Hamasho Mutano" means eternal youth and life for snakes.²¹

The Sidama ethnic group believes that snakes live forever if they are not killed. This belief reflects their understanding of time as simple and infinite. The story suggests the existence of an earthly life after death, with birth and death intertwined throughout history. While death signifies the end of linear time for most people, there is a widespread hope in mythologies for a continuation of life after death, as exemplified by the initiates of Eleusis.²² Similarly, people have different ideas and interpretations of death, resurrection and the beginning of a new life. The Field of Reeds, which was a perfected version of the Egypt they knew, was the place where the Egyptians aspired to be reincarnated to begin a new life.²³

According to the belief of the Guarayu Indians, some people believe that after death the soul has the opportunity to start a new life in a certain place. To reach Tamoi, the ancestral home in the west, the spirits must choose between a wide and easy or a narrow and dangerous path. The soul must endure trials and challenges before reaching the ancestral home. It is said that the soul is rejuvenated and becomes young again when it takes a bath in the bathtub in

²¹ Betana and Hoteso, *Sidama Peoples and Culture* (Addis Ababa: Bole Printing House, 1991), 15.

²² B Nigusse, "Socio-Cultural History of Me'nenit, 1898 -1991," in *Presented at an Annual Conference Organized by Mizan Tepi University.*, 2005.

²³ Abbink, "An Ethno-Historical Perspective on Me'en Territorial Organization (Southwest Ethiopia)."

its grandparents' house. In the West, the soul can once again experience life, love, laughter and hunting.²⁴ The soul of the deceased visits the village of Mouu, which, according to the Me'enit who took part in this study, is the abode of the ancestors. In the belief system of the second group, there is no other world than the one known and believed. When individuals interact with the universe, they undergo physical changes and can take on the appearance of different species. Due to the concept of resurrection, time is seen as circular or spherical. Regardless of the starting point or destination, the cycle always leads to a new beginning. Unlike Islam and Christianity, Hinduism considers time to be circular or spherical. Hindu teaching assumes that time exists in this world and not in a heavenly realm or a crematorium. The judgment of people who are believed to live on after death is based on their deeds in life. If someone has led a virtuous life, they can be reborn as a benevolent animal.²⁵

In certain social groups in Ethiopia, the belief that the soul of the deceased lives on in a new body, such as that of a cow or a bull, prevails. This understanding of eternity is referred to as circular or spherical. According to Bayileyegn Tasew, who describes the beliefs of the Agnwa/Agniwak ethnic groups in the Gambella region, the soul of the deceased merges with the nearby river. To initiate a new life cycle, this mortal spirit is reborn as an animal, for example as a cow or bull²⁶

Review of Related Literature:

This review of related literature aims to explore the demographics of the Me'enit ethnic group and examine relevant studies pertaining to their community.

Overview of the Ethnic Group: The Me'enit people culture is strongly influenced by the natural beauty of their surroundings, which consist of hills, forests and river valleys. Agriculture, which consists of subsistence farming and livestock breeding, plays an important role in their way of life. They organize themselves into clans and lineages, and their religious beliefs are rooted in animism. Both men and women practice body art, such as scarification and beadwork. The Me'enit face challenges in terms of land rights, education and healthcare, but they committed in preserving their myth. Meenit Goldia is named after a stone

²⁴ Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.

²⁵ Andualem, "Traditional Conflict Resolution in Me'enite Ethnicity."

²⁶ Bayileyegn, "Tales of Agniwa."

called “Golo,” while Meenit Shasha derives its name from a mountain that looks like white ash in the rainy season.²⁷

The district of Meenit Shasha covers an area of 277,100 hectares and has two climate types. The population amounts to a total of 151,489 people. They have their own centralized administration and only participate to a limited extent in foreign policy. The society consists of over sixty clans, each headed by nobles or clan leaders. Three types of marriage are practiced: the gamen marriage, the karen gurabet (abduction marriage) and the kenseye (inheritance marriage). Marriage is highly valued in Meenite society, and the preservation of a girl’s chastity is important. Polygamy is permitted if the man can afford the dowry. The mourning rituals vary depending on the age, gender and social status of the deceased. For adults, the cattle are trampled with stones and the meat is eaten by the mourners. The number of cattle trampled depends on the daughters of the deceased. The body is placed in a coffin wrapped in cattle hide and buried. Customs may vary from community to community.²⁸

The Menite people cultivated distinctive naming customs associated with various social events, such as naming a child after a guest. The naming traditions also extend to funerals and travel-related occasions. They worship the deity Tuma or Yeri as the creator of all things. While the traditional religious institutions known as Kalcha administration are still relevant, Protestantism is becoming more prevalent in some areas. It’s important to realize that naming and religious beliefs may vary over time and between different subgroups within the Menite nation.²⁹

Previous Studies: There are no in-depth studies on the ethnic mythology of the Me’enit that I could find. I have been unable to locate any studies that examine the various types, subdivisions, characteristics, and benefits of myths. However, studies of the many cultures and histories of the Me’enit nation/ethnicity have been conducted. They are mentioned below in chronological order of publication.

Hiwot Aberu’s dissertation titled “The Traditional Mourning Ceremonial of the Me’enit Nationality” was submitted to the Faculty of Ethiopian Languages and Literature at Addis Ababa University in 2012 to fulfill the requirements for the

²⁷ John Abbink, “Me’en Ritual, Medicinal and Other Plants: A Contribution to South-West Ethiopian Ethno-Botany,” *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 26, no. 2 (1993): 1-21.

²⁸ Andualem, “Traditional Conflict Resolution in Me’enite Ethnicity.”

²⁹ John Abbink, “Ritual and Environment: The Mosit Ceremony of the Ethiopian Me’en People,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 25, no. 2 (1995): 163-90.

Master's degree. Hiwot Aberu's thesis is primarily concerned with the mourning rituals of the Me'enit nationality and addresses the funeral rites performed in the community when a person passes away. Another study conducted on the ethnic group is my study. I also submitted a master's thesis "Traditional Conflict Resolution System in Me'enit Ethnicity" to the Faculty of Ethiopian Languages and Literature at Addis Ababa University in 2012. The main objective of the study is to show the traditional method of Me'enit ethnicity for conflict resolution. The study presented the main categories of conflicts in the country, the traditional institutions for dispute resolution, the system of killing and reconciliation and the meaning and concept behind these activities.

John Abbink has done a lot of research on the Me'enit people. He studied "The Last Ceremony: Burial among the Me'en in Southwestern Ethiopia" (1990), material culture (1992), traditional religion (1993) and the Mosit" festival (1995).

"The Ethno-history Me'enit Ethnic Group, South Nation's Nationalities and Peoples, Regional Government" by Zerihun Doda is another study on the Me'enit ethnic group.³⁰ Zerihun's study included political, cultural, social, historical and religious aspects as justifications and introductions. It covered the entire range of topics, from the prehistoric origins of the ethnic group to the era of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Front (E.P.R.D.F.). The description provides a balanced summary of the political, cultural, social, historical and religious dimensions of the path of the ethnic group from its early beginnings to the E.P.R.D.F. era.

Niguse Belay's study titled "Sociocultural History of Me'nenit, 1898-1991" was published in 2005 and presented at the annual conference of Mizan Tepi University. It serves as a complementary study.³¹ The study examines the socio-cultural development of the Me'enit ethnic group from the invasion by Emperor Menelik II in 1898 to the fall of the Derg military dictatorship in 1991, emphasizing the close relationship between the tribe and animals, especially the use of cattle for social affairs such as marriage and blood restitution.

Overall, previous research on different ethnic groups has focused on various aspects including language, religion, marriage, burial customs and social

³⁰ D Zerihun, "The Ethno-History Me'enit Ethnic Group, South Ethnic Group Nationalities and Peoples, Regional Government." (Institute of Language, Culture and History Research, Department of History and Heritages, 2008).

³¹ Nigusse, "Socio-Cultural History of Me'nenit, 1898 -1991."

issues. While some studies cover similar topics such as religion, the history of the ethnic group, and the traditional legal system, this study stands out for its comprehensive examination of the cultural dependence of the Me'enit ethnic group.

3. Theoretical Framework

The origins of narrative theory can be traced back to classical Greece, in particular to the contributions of Aristotle. However, significant conceptual developments did not occur until the 20th century. Russian folklore research has played a crucial role in the further development of narrative theory, with structural-functional works emphasizing the contributions of Russian folklorists. The narrative theory of Lévi-Strauss has been used to analyze the form and structure of myths, such as the story of Oedipus the King. Modern studies of narrative theory emphasize four main features: temporality, rationality, singularity and connectivity. Temporality is about telling events in chronological order, while rationality examines the organization of ideas and cause-effect relationships. Singularity explains how narratives progress from beginning to end with a coherent chain of ideas. Temporality and rationality are the most commonly used features in storytelling. This theory is relevant to the study of myths because myths are predominantly transmitted through narratives that have their own temporality, reason, singularity and connection.³²

4. Resurrection myth of the Me'enit ethnic group

The aim of this study is to comprehensively understand the Me'enit ethnic group's belief in resurrection myth in Ethiopia. By exploring their unique beliefs and practices, the cultural, spiritual and historical aspects of this community illuminated. Drawing on literature, scholarly works, ethnographic accounts and oral narratives, the study contributes to the knowledge of the Me'enit belief system and its influence on their identity and way of life. It offers valuable insights into the Me'enit view of resurrection and its meaning within their cultural and religious framework.

Death and birth are integral parts of the human life cycle and are experienced by all people. Different cultures and beliefs have different views on what happens

³² Cobley, *Narrative*.

after death and in the afterlife. The Me'enit ethnic group also has different views on resurrection and the beginning of life after death. The departure from this world varies according to age and social status, with individuals having actual and constant interactions with others throughout their lives.

The funeral ceremonies within the ethnic group of the Me'enit differ according to the age and personality of the deceased. There are also differences in the rituals before and after death. The degree of familiarity, charitable donations, popularity with children and the reputation of the deceased all have an effect on the liveliness of the funeral ceremony. Me'enit customs dictate that funeral rituals vary according to the social status and personality of the deceased, with differences observed for children, young people, commoners, the elderly, nobles and religious leaders. The passing of a clan chief or religious leader is associated with special customs that sometimes result in relatives having to relocate. Conversely, an ordinary person may be buried in their own home.³³

At the funeral of a prominent person, several cows, bulls and calves are offered as tribute in the tradition of this ethnic group. When a well-known person, especially one with offspring, dies, the spouses of their children bring cattle to honor their memory. These cattle are either stoned or slaughtered on the day of the funeral.³⁴ According to Mr. Berhanu, cattle are stoned on the forehead on the day of burial for two reasons.

In stoning, a cow is struck on the forehead with a stone while two people hold its horn and ear. Another person, holding a stone in each hand, gives the cow a single blow to the center of the forehead, killing the calf, bull or ox instantly. Alternatively, some slaughter the cow by cutting its neck with a sharp knife immediately after the stone strike. This method of stoning is used at funerals and inheritances. In certain situations, such as when a woman confesses to having engaged in inappropriate sexual acts with a man who is not her husband, the elders intervene to prevent her husband from harming her. The person with whom she had the affair is contacted and questioned. It is believed that you can find out the truth by examining the blood in the intestines of a sheep or a goat, because it is said that you can feel the truth in your stomach. Intestinal blood readers determine the truth. The suspect buys a sheep or goat that is not sexually

³³ Bachuma interview with Mr. Bedlu, November 2018.

³⁴ Bachuma interview with Mr. Birhanu, November 2018.

mature at the market. In cases of sexual assault, the cow is beaten on the forehead with sticks, not stones. In the tradition of this ethnic group, a stone wall stands for death at funerals, while stones symbolize life and trees symbolize life in sexual acts. The final step is the execution of a hereditary marriage by stoning with a stone.

The ethnic group believes that life continues in some form after death. They believe that the deceased takes with him what he needs for the next life when he leaves this one. It is believed that animals accompany the deceased and make life easier for them. In the past, it was customary to bury a person's belongings, their livestock and sometimes even a servant if they were a knight. According to Mr. Boni, the practice of killing and stoning livestock during burial serves two purposes. Firstly, the meat of the animals is used to feed the mourners who come from far and wide on the day of the funeral. Secondly, it is believed that the deceased will also benefit from the cattle in the afterlife.³⁵

In their belief system, it is assumed that the deceased goes on a journey. To facilitate this journey, the family prepares milk and awaits the soul's departure, which is believed to occur when the patient's condition becomes critical. The family members then pour milk on the lips of the deceased so that it can enter the body. This practice is related to their understanding of resurrection. When someone has died, his brothers, children or other family members pour fresh milk into his mouth. The milk serves as food for the traveler. To prevent the milk from running out and to ensure that the food remains intact during the journey to the afterlife, the body is turned upside down. This position protects against dehydration and injury. In some areas, people are still buried wrapped in cowhide, although this practice is becoming less common in the highlands.³⁶

According to the beliefs of this ethnic group, elderly people who are close to death are taken from their home and placed in a new hut where they await their demise. A new exit door is created in the house through which the deceased can leave the house and go to the funeral. Awoke Foroshwa, a prominent traditional religious figure from Goma Kebele, is an example of this belief. The Me'enits, who we refer to ourselves as, believe that the lingering spirit of an elderly person can have negative effects on others if they do not die on time. Therefore, we avoid using the same entrance through which the person entered while alive, as it

³⁵ Interview with Gura Ferda, November 2018.

³⁶ Bachuma interview with Mr. Bedlu, November 2018.

symbolizes the gate of the living. Instead, the deceased is led to their new home, which is represented by the new door. If the unexpected death occurs before the new cottage is completed, we wait three months before entering the new house. The funeral takes place on the same grounds.³⁷

The ethnic group believes that after the burial of a person, a hut is erected at the burial site where the bereaved live for three months. During this time, they consume food and liquids intended for the spirit of the deceased. This custom is meant to protect the deceased from beings that could consume them and ensure their successful transition to the next phase of existence. Wayech Jasha explains the reasons for throwing away the offered food. After a person dies, we build a house on their grave where the body remains for up to three months. We protect it from those who would disturb the bodies and the “kamsut” On these occasions, food and drink are poured on the grave site to nourish the spirit of the deceased, prevent their anger, protect the living relatives from disturbance and allow them to travel safely to their final resting place. This journey allows them to join their ancestors and ensures that they are not plagued by hunger and thirst along the way.³⁸

Awoke Foroshwa, a well-known sorcerer in Duma, Me’enit Goldia and the surrounding regions, is a prominent figure. Traditional religious leaders, including Awoke Foroshwa, use the pronoun “we” The ethnic group believes in the existence of creatures called “Kamsut” that dig up and consume corpses. If the corpse is left unattended, the Kamsut remove it and consume it secretly at night in the cemetery. After three months, however, the Kamsut no longer want the corpse and believe that the person has passed on to their new home. They therefore destroy the hut and plant a tree in the same place, e.g. a “warka” or another type of tree.

Another long-standing tradition of the ethnic group is that the family members of a deceased nobleman move from the neighborhood. When an elderly nobleman dies, the heirs clear the entire property and build a new house elsewhere. After the hut that stood on the grave site for three months is destroyed, a warka tree is planted as a memorial. The planting of warka trees is still common today.³⁹

³⁷ Interview, November 2018, Bachuma.

³⁸ Interview with Bachuma, November 2018.

³⁹ AkoForoshwa, November 2018, Bachuma.

The belief in life after death is widespread among the Me'enit ethnic group. While the exact location is unknown to many, it is generally known as "Kola" due to oral traditions. According to these traditions, Kola is considered the realm of resurrection for the deceased, where they begin a new life. It is believed that in this new life, people continue to pursue various activities in the physical world in which they once lived. Mr. Sela, a revered figure known as the King of the Monkeys, explained this belief during our conversation at Chebera Kebele. He explained that when a person dies, he descends to earth and it is believed that he descends to Kola to undertake tasks such as growing sorghum and plowing.⁴⁰ We believe that a person continues to live on a farm after death. Tuma had already made plans for us to get there. Tuma has created a place where the deceased will stay after their passing.⁴¹

According to Mr. Shalta Taye, a former resident of Gersha Tena, there is a belief that a person's spirit resides in a special place on earth after death called "Kalwa" The person is buried in Me'enit, but it is believed that their soul remains on earth instead of going to paradise. They are known as "Kalwa" or "Kalwat" and live on in a place designated for them, where they function as they did when they were alive. When someone dies, they are buried in a cowhide because it is believed that they can use it. According to Mr. Boni, the place where the dead live is called "Mouu" and is the place where the Me'enit gather after death for their next life.⁴²

According to Mr. Boni, confirmed by Mr. Moroch, it is customary among the Me'enit tribe to bury the dead facing east, which symbolizes the direction of life after death. In Me'enit Goldia and the surrounding region, a deceased person is buried facing Mouu. In the Me'enit, the deceased is laid face east at the edge of the main road, and it is assumed that he will immediately go to the Kola, i.e. to Mouu.⁴³

According to Mr. Birhanu Worku, "Mouu" is the place where tribal members spend their lives after death. It is said to be located in the Gura Ferda region, near the Me'enit Shasha neighborhood. Mr. Boni also confirms that Mouu is located in Gura Ferda, a remote and difficult mountainous region surrounded by forests.

⁴⁰ Chebera, Sela, February 2019.

⁴¹ Interview, February 2019.

⁴² Interview May 2019, Mizan Aman.

⁴³ Interview, November, 2018, Bachuma.

It is believed that many members of the Me'etit tribe live there, secluded from the outside world. There is a widespread belief among the Me'etit that Mouu is the place where life after death exists and was prepared by the god Tuma. It is considered a treacherous and mysterious place where people die as soon as they enter. The area offers a beautiful view and is rich in coffee leaves, which, if you pick them up instead of throwing them away, make you unaware of your surroundings.⁴⁴

Mr. Sholwa, a native of Gura Ferda who knows Mouu from afar, supports Mr. Boni's idea by pointing out the horror and amazing perspective of Mouu. "Although I was there, I was not actually near the mountain. It was far away when I discovered it. You cannot just leave the area. It's the place of the afterlife. It's a haunted place."⁴⁵ The undiscovered inhabitants of the Mouu region do not want their native vegetation to be damaged. Any of the farmers who live nearby who come to the site unexpectedly and by chance in search of goats, or who arrive and leave the site by some other chance, are not allowed to cut from the local vegetation. Anyone who unintentionally removes a leaf from the area must replace it. Otherwise, it is believed that there is a force that makes it wander around in the same place all night and all day.

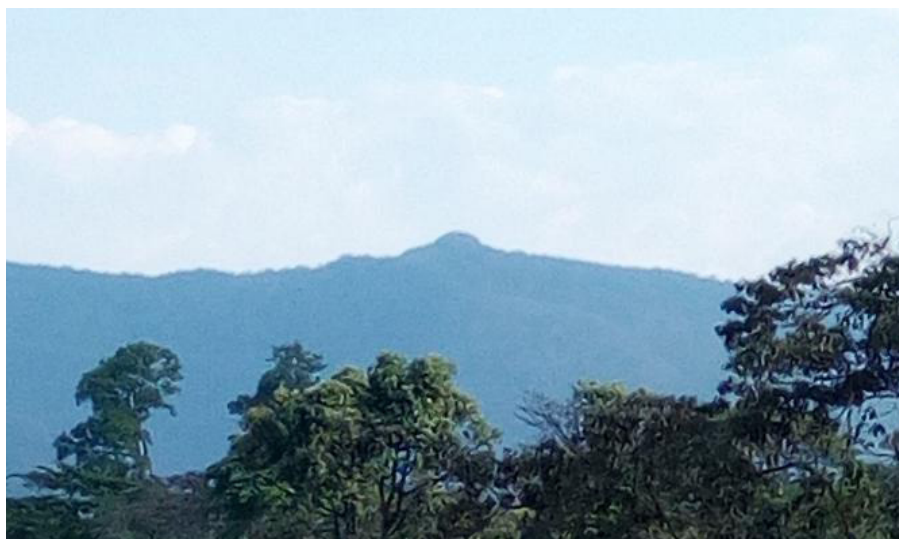


Figure 1. A partial view of Mount Mouu (Photo by Mr. Boni Hayech)

⁴⁴ Boni-, May 2019, Mizan Aman.

⁴⁵ Interview, May 2019 Gura Ferda.

Mr. Sholwa once described the situation of a person who cut down a tree and built a road nearby. “He cut down a tree and threw it away, when once someone came to that spot and wandered around. The locals got angry. The man ended up spending the night there because he couldn’t return to his hamlet due to the rough terrain and the road.”⁴⁶ The people hiding in the area say to the person wandering around, “You leave the leaf you cut here and go back in peace,” Mr. Boni explains that the hidden people give advice to a person who appears unexpectedly in Mouu.⁴⁷ As the Me’enit tribe is scattered over several regions, it is assumed that the journey of the deceased to Mouu will be arduous and strenuous. A citizen of the town of Bachuma in the Me’enit district of Goldia, Mr. Birhanu Worku, has this to say.

It is believed that if a person wakes up after we have prepared to bury him as dead, after we have stoned/slaughtered a cow for him and wept for the deceased, or if he returns from death and the road is far from him and he cannot overcome the thorns and thistles, he has returned because we have not nourished him properly.⁴⁸ At the age of 70, Mr. Mayoni returned alive to “Mouu” and saw that the people of his ethnic group continued to live there after their demise, confirming the reality of this place and the existence of life. Mr. Mayoni claims to have seen life after death and lives in Balduna village, Kutu 03 Kebele, in Gura Ferda district. He said, “I was traveling. I visited this place where our ancestors live after death after I died. I was dead and then I woke up.”⁴⁹

The resurrection of Mr. Mayoni has led people to believe that he has returned from the dead. Mr. Boni in particular has regarded him as a personal friend since his resurrection. The people in his neighborhood also share the belief that Mr. Mayoni has survived death and returned to life. They express their own feelings about his passing and subsequent return. Since his resurrection, Mr. Boni has had several close encounters with Mr. Mayoni.

⁴⁶ Interview May 2011 Gura Ferda.

⁴⁷ Interview, November, 2018, Gura Ferda.

⁴⁸ Birhanu, Bachuma, November 12, 2018.

⁴⁹ Gura Ferda, Mr. Mayoni, May 2019.



Figure 2. *Mr. Mayoni, May 2019 (Photo by Mr. Boni Hayech)*

According to Mr. Sholwa, he witnessed the resurrection of Mr. Mayoni and his subsequent life in Mouu after death. Initially, Mr. Mayoni was believed to have passed away and preparations were made for his burial while his family members mourned his loss. However, to everyone's surprise, Mr. Mayoni suddenly woke up, started breathing and opened his eyes. Ms. Gibzini also mentions that some locals see Mr. Mayoni's resurrection as defiance of death, while others consider him lucky that he was given a second chance by Tuma to fulfill his destiny. Clearly, Mr. Mayoni's return to life has made a great impression on the community.⁵⁰

According to the belief of the ethnic group, the deceased are in a place called Mouu, which is prepared by the god Tuma. Mr. Mayoni provides evidence that the deceased actually live in Mouu and interact with the people they knew while alive, including their biological mother, friends and relatives. Mr. Mayoni claims

⁵⁰ Interview, 2019, Gura Ferda.

to have met his two deceased brothers and later met his mother, who appeared exactly as he remembered her. He mentions that there are many people in Mouu who inquire about his relatives in the living world.⁵¹

Mr. Mayoni explains the place called Mouu, which the tribesmen believe to be the place of resurrection after death and where they spent a day. Mr. Mayoni claims that he rose from the dead five years ago and wants to be buried. His explanation follows. You can tell from the surroundings that this is our home. The way of life is unchanged. There are no differences. Every day a farmer goes about his work, just like everyone else in our world. At night, however, the flesh that everyone wears is shed and reduced to bone. The bone alone does it.⁵²

Mr. Mayoni believes that the key to his resurrection lies in the mistake of not giving him the right food immediately after his death. He claims that there is no difference between this world and the afterlife when it comes to food and drink, but the visitors are served millet porridge as a meal. Mayoni was forced to return to the earthly world because his mother had mistakenly given him corn porridge. On the second day, his mother served him millet porridge again at breakfast, unwittingly repeating her mistake. While eating, Mayoni was startled by a loud noise and the ground shook. An ominous black figure materialized and blamed the food for his return, causing the whole area to shake. The next thing he knew, Mayoni was in an unknown location, and to this day he is still puzzled as to how he got there.⁵³

5. Conclusions

This study provides an in-depth examination of the resurrection myth within the Me'enit ethnic group and sheds light on their belief in death and the afterlife. The research shows that the Me'enit community prepares food for the deceased to support them on their journey to the next life. The funerals are conducted with the Mouu in mind, which represents the realm of life after death. The study suggests that the deceased rise and move towards their own face before reuniting with previous generations at their final resting place. The widespread belief in resurrection, especially in the higher Mouu region, suggests that the deceased live on there. Analysis of Mr. Mayoni's story of returning to

⁵¹ Interview, May 2019, Gura Ferda.

⁵² Gura Ferda, Mr. Mayoni, May 2019.

⁵³ Interview, May 2019, Gura Ferda.

life and engaging in familiar interactions suggests that his experiences in Mouu with other deceased, including his mother, played a key role in his return. Overall, this study provides valuable insights into the beliefs and rituals of the Me'enit ethnic group in relation to resurrection and enriches our understanding of their cultural and spiritual practices.

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