

**A PHILOSOPHICAL EXAMINATION OF THE BAZA/KUNAMA TRADITIONAL BELIEF PRACTICES AS A RESPONSE TO THE OPPRESSIVE BIASES**

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**Abstract:** Understanding genuine traditional belief practices is essential as they encapsulate a specific society's core integrity and essence. Exploring these practices provides a strong framework, serving as a powerful antidote to counter any oppressive biases. The Baza people's belief practices have often been misunderstood, resulting in misinterpretation and misrepresentation that jeopardise their distinct identity. A major challenge is the scarcity of first and documentation from the Indigenous community about their cultural conviction, which hinders progress and contributes to their apparent historical obliteration. The author's primary objective is to provide a comprehensive analysis of Baza's cultural belief practices, aiming to correct misconceptions and stereotypes. The study's objectives encompass exploring traditional belief practices, delineating foreigners' views and perceptions on them, and examining the entrenched biases, aiming to reconstruct genuine belief practices. To achieve this, the author employed philosophical analysis and arguments, which are essential from a philosophical perspective. The study aimed to investigate how foreign missionaries perceived Kunama's traditional beliefs that pose potential dangers to their cultural survival, highlighting the necessity of the study's findings. The author seeks to shed light on the impact of these claims on Kunama's cultural beliefs, intending to raise awareness and provide insights to help preserve their cultural heritage.

**Keywords:** Baza/Kunama, Belief, Oppressive, Practices, Religion, Stereotypes.

## **INTRODUCTION**

It is irrefutable that efforts have been made to change the true story of Baza's traditional values and belief practices, either deliberately or unaware. On account of Baza's persistent effort to preserve their traditional value and belief practices, they face mounting pressure from every angle of social life. These challenges recurrently resurface from religious propagandists and politicians, encompassing a considerable number of missionaries, scholars, and influential individuals who have different intentions. That is why addressing this issue and analysing through the lens of varied foreign and scholars' interpretations is important. Our inquiry explores how this belief has been perceived over time, stretching from informal and customary understanding to contemporary academic interpretation. Considering the complex and multifaceted nature of religion and the concept of a supreme being, we will make an effort to offer a contemporary outlook on this subject matter.

## **MEANING OF GOD, RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY**

The human world is an incredibly diverse place. It consists of various cultures and religious beliefs, including but not limited to Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and Traditional beliefs. Even within a single religion, there can be variations. However, in all this fascinating diversity, there is a universal common struggle to achieve; that is ultimately to pursue divinity or God. Despite these captivating differences, navigating these distinctions can be challenging. Aristotle's philosophy suggests that religious disparities are accidental, and they are merely contingent elements that exist in being, not out of necessity. As such, they are only secondary modes of being that can change and are subject to flux.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Barnes ed., *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation, Vol. 2* (United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1619.

Religious issues are still just as sensitive in our current world as they were in antiquity. The term 'religion' is attributed to different types of beliefs, but all aim to serve the same divinity. These beliefs mostly address social psychology and cultural activity, rather than focusing on the true essence of religious belief tenets. Religious principles are founded on the love of God and neighbour. Their spirit is constructive and unifying, regardless of the variety of beliefs, because our differences are just incidental and the ultimate goal is one truth.

Throughout history, the Arabs, Western scholars and other experts have held negative opinions about traditional African beliefs. Unfortunately, in their quest to study these beliefs, many authors have presented biased and unreliable findings. Regardless of the credibility of their findings, their conclusion has conceptual belief in social life, which often disrespects and belittles the culture under investigation. This means, the culture is exposed to ridicule and contempt that resuscitates the feeling of unworthiness. The cultural beliefs and practices of the Kunama people are among African traditional beliefs that have been subject to widespread misunderstanding and misconceptions. Despite attempts by scholars to study their history, anthropology, and geo-ethnology, many incomplete and inconsistent narratives have emerged. This has led to superficial claims that do not accurately reflect the complexity of this culture and its beliefs.<sup>2</sup>

The research foundation of Kunama's traditional belief is based on the works of various scholars dating back to the 10<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Some of the notable researchers include Ibn-Hawqal, Werner Munzinger, Alberto Pollera, Carlo Conti Rossini, Padre Anselmo da Ponzzone, and Gianni Dorè. Recently, a native researcher named Padre Vittorio Antutu conducted an extensive study, but unfortunately, his work has not been published yet. The manuscripts of these authors will be the primary focus of this study. It is crucial to note that little attention was given to the philosophical interventions despite their significant findings. Thus, before addressing these issues, it is imperative to begin with a brief history:

After Christianity was introduced to the ancient city of Axum in northern Ethiopia in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD,<sup>3</sup> the Axumite kingdom completely collapsed around the 10<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Kunama (Baza) and other tribes in the surrounding areas were subjected to wars, persecution, looting, and slavery by the Arabs and petty kingdoms of Abyssinians among themselves, leading to immense suffering. This situation persisted until the colonial powers arrived in the region.<sup>4</sup> In the past, but not excluded even today, certain tribes who had adopted Christianity or Islam viewed those who did not follow either religion as 'aremen' or (كافر) 'kafir'. The term *aremen*, derived from Abyssinian language, was used to describe Pagan groups who were seen as lacking faith, cruel, and barbaric. *Kafir*, an Arabic word, referred to those who were faithless, unbelieving, and considered infidels. Unfortunately, the Kunama (Baza) people were among those who were unfairly stereotyped and labelled with these derogatory terms. The following information below contains aspects of these criticisms, as it asserts that:

Christians and Muslims frequently despise followers of Ethiopian traditional religion as "unbelievers", "idolaters" or "pagans" (Amh. አረማዊ, *arāmani*, Arab. *kafir*; for the Christian Orthodox view on traditional R. s. also *Arwe*; *Däsk*; Demons). Likewise, traditional R. are subsumed under terms like "superstition", "sorcery" or "magic". With a similarly one-sided view, based on cultural evolutionism, scholars categorized a great variety of different religions under superordinate concepts, like "primitive religion", "Animism" or "natural religion". The term "Animism", which today is sometimes used in the context of African religions as a neutral term, reflects an outdated 19<sup>th</sup>-cent.<sup>5</sup>

The concept of faith in God, religion or spirituality has always been a fascinating topic for philosophical inquiry. It raises many intriguing questions, such as 'How can one be certain of the existence of a divine and the immortality of the human soul?'<sup>6</sup> 'What is the nature of God's influence in the universe?' 'What is God's ultimate purpose for

<sup>2</sup> Vittorio Antutu, "Breve Storia dei Baaza o Kunama, Eritrea: Bazen Alias Kunama" (Savona 31 maggio 2009), 2.

<sup>3</sup> Theodore Natsoulas, "Byzantine Empire," in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica Vol. 1. A-C.*, ed. Siegbert Uhlig (Germany: Otto Harrasswitz KG, Wiesbaden, 2003), 657.

<sup>4</sup> Jon G. Abbink, "War(s)," in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica Vol. 4. O-X.*, ed. Siegbert Uhlig (Germany: Otto Harrasswitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden, 2010), 1139-1140.

<sup>5</sup> Dirk Bustorf, "Traditional religions," in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica Vol. 4. O-X.*, ed. Siegbert Uhlig (Germany: Otto Harrasswitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden, 2010), 361.

<sup>6</sup> Battista Mondin, *Philosophical Anthropology, Man: An Impossible Project?* (Rome: Urbaniana University Press, 1885), 263-265.

humanity?’ ‘How does God discern between good and evil?’ ‘Is God all-powerful, benevolent, and all-knowing?’ ‘Is God detached or actively involved in the affairs of humanity?’<sup>7</sup> These questions and many others have puzzled humans since ancient times to this moment, yet they remain unanswered fully, and elusive when attempted.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, it is essential to remember that considering another person’s perception of God or faith as wrong or inferior to one’s own is to relinquish the virtue of humility.<sup>9</sup> As the wise words of Christ remind us, “Do not judge, or you too will be judged.” Having rejoiced in the Holy Spirit, Jesus said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth because you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and revealed them to infants” (Luke 10:21 [New International Version]).

When comparing modern religions to traditional beliefs in God, we anticipate that societies subscribing to new religions will exemplify the optimum qualities of good conduct, ethics, inclusivity, and overall human welfare, as these are fundamental values in many religions. These religious values encompass sagacity, inner liberty, and, above all, love for God and fellow human beings.<sup>10</sup> As one browses the works of C. P. Varkey, he finds similar arguments that states:

For the same reason, religious practices and beliefs, properly understood and practised, can lead one to genuine spirituality... Similarly proper use of religious gestures maintains and strengthen in the person the religious values... The danger is that these external gestures can become just mechanical, devoid of any desire of expressing or capturing these values. Then these gestures, instead of becoming a means to an end, become an end in themselves. The result is that the spirit or values are lost. Those who behave in this way begin to think that they are indeed religious, just because they are very faithful to all the observances. They become thus self-righteous and judgemental.<sup>11</sup>

It is unfortunate that, sometimes religious institutions can become susceptible to human emotions and politics, resulting in the misuse of the name of God. Regrettably, this trend continues to persist. Observably, individuals who adhere to traditional beliefs tend to be more committed to their traditional values and beliefs, displaying greater reverence for human life than some of those who follow modern religions. This observation is supported by historical evidence, as societies that embrace modern religions may exhibit more hostile, dishonest, and self-centred behaviours,<sup>12</sup> which are in direct contradiction to the principles of a genuine belief in the highest power, God. Some Kunama and Naara individuals who have converted to Christianity, Islam or other religions also display these negative traits.

Presumptions are often made regarding the inclination towards Paganism or Animism among the Kunama and Naara communities in Eritrea, not only in the context of regular social interactions, but also in religious and political propaganda. These propagations manifested themselves in the form of jesting remarks or written declarations from individuals from all walks of life, even those with high levels of education and social personnel. Looking back to history, there have been and often been notable attempts to exert influence over various societies, applying various strategies directly or indirectly.<sup>13</sup> These strategies encompass ideological influences and sometimes violent military interventions. Having analysed the documents written by individuals from foreign backgrounds, and alongside those written by local inhabitants who are alien to the region, we confront a diverse array of claims, rebuttals and different perspectives. Each document reflects unique experiences and viewpoints. Hence, with a discerning eye, there is a need to uncover the underlying genuine of their presentations. The author endeavours to bridge the gap caused by these misinterpretations of these societies. The objective is to correct the false narratives propagated by certain religious and political goons, attempting to reconstruct society’s genuine belief practices.

<sup>7</sup> Kwame Gyekye, “The Problem of Evil: An Akan Perspective,” in *African Philosophy: An Anthology*, edited by Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (USA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1998), 468-469.

<sup>8</sup> Mondin, *Philosophical Anthropology*, 263-265.

<sup>9</sup> Zera Yacob, “God, Faith, and the Nature of Knowledge,” in *African Philosophy: An Anthology*, Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze ed. (USA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1998), 457-458.

<sup>10</sup> C. P. Varkey, *Be Human be Holly* (Mumbai: St. Pauls, 58/23rd Road, TPS III, Bandra, 2020), 24.

<sup>11</sup> Varkey, *Be Human be Holly*, 20.

<sup>12</sup> Varkey, *Be Human be Holly*, 18-20.

<sup>13</sup> Tewelde Beyene, *The Gash Barka Area Between the 19th and 20th cent. and the Beginnings of the Catholic Evangelization Among the Kunama* (Asmara: Franciscan Printing Press, 2013), 6 -9.

## VIEWS ON AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

Extensive research has been conducted on the Kunama people, with a specific focus on the fields of anthropology and ethnology, yielding valuable insights. Their cultural values and traditional belief practices, including their understanding of God, hold significant importance.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, research on these aspects has had an adverse effect on their professional pursuits. Historical accounts reveal that Arab and European missionaries have apparently dismantled the indigenous religions of the peoples they encounter, replacing them with their own religious beliefs and world views.<sup>15</sup> Despite their success in eliminating culture and traditional beliefs and converting people to their religion, there are still those who insist on promoting and attempting to convert individuals who have already professed their faith. This creates a never-ending cycle of proselytising, which can be frustrating for those who have already made their religious choices. It is a reminder that even when beliefs are challenged and changed, there will always be those who seek to sway others to their own perspective.

Over the centuries, African traditional beliefs and practices have been the subject of much debate, often associated with derogatory terms such as Paganism, Animism, idolatry, and fetishism among others.<sup>16</sup> However, in modern times, there is a growing need for a more comprehensive and nuanced analysis of the terminologies and philosophical concepts surrounding these beliefs. It is worth noting that contemporary discourse now commonly employs terms such as 'African traditional religion' and 'indigenous African religion' to refer to these beliefs. These traditional beliefs are steeped in rich cultural and spiritual practices that have been passed down from generation to generation. They represent diverse beliefs, rituals, and customs that are deeply interconnected with the natural world and the spiritual realm. African traditional religion is characterised by a belief in a supreme being or creator, for some, alongside a pantheon of lesser deities, spirits, and ancestors who are venerated and respected.<sup>17</sup> Recently, there has been a renewed interest in traditional beliefs and practices, as they are seen as an important part of African heritage and identity. Despite accepting modern religions, many Africans are still turning to these beliefs as a way of reconnecting with their cultural roots and finding meaning and purpose in their lives. As such, it is crucial to understand and appreciate African traditional religion and its significance in contemporary times.

## WERNER MUNZINGER AND THE BAZA RELIGION

Werner Munzinger was born in Switzerland in 1832. He was the son of a famous Swiss Finance Minister. Munzinger first settled in Egypt, later becoming the French Consul at Port Massawa in Eritrea. Eventually, he switched to becoming an explorer and an ethnographic researcher of northeastern Africa,<sup>18</sup> specifically the Horn of Africa. According to him, the Kunama concept of God is vague. Their beliefs regarding God are somewhat ambiguous, which leads to a sense of detachment from human existence. They do not possess any strong feelings of reverence or aversion towards divinities. Munzinger seems to assert his profound knowledge of God (a rationalist concept) by stating, that "...*Ma questo concetto e vago, perché non si collega colla Vita dell'uomo, il quale non sente ne bene ne male da queste divinità*,"<sup>19</sup> translated to [but this concept is vague, because it is not connected with the life of human, who feels neither good nor evil from this divinity.] He suggests that the Baza people exhibit a neutral stance toward God. Nevertheless, his assessment lacks the depth of spirituality and the concept of God. He risks misrepresenting the diverse perspectives that shape the human concept of God and spirituality. Moreover, for some, the idea of the divine is not perceived in terms of feelings of good or evil. This is because human feelings are complex and distinct. The feeling of emotions can be conflicting. For instance, an individual may feel awe, reverence and gratitude towards God and, at the same time, be overwhelmed by fear, resentment and doubt about God's existence. In this complexity of emotional responses, it is ambivalent when one contemplates the presence of a higher power.

The scholar who studied Baza's traditional beliefs continues to suggest that this unclear notion of God was not influenced by the monotheistic cultures of their neighbouring communities. However, he does acknowledge that the

<sup>14</sup> Antutu, "Breve Storia dei Baaza o Kunama, Eritrea," 2.

<sup>15</sup> Kwaku Ayim Atta-Asiedu, "African Traditional Religions in Transition: The Influence of Modernism and Globalization on African Indigenous Faiths," accessed December 16, 2023,

<sup>16</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (New York: Anchor Books Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1969), 13.

<sup>17</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2-6.

<sup>18</sup> Wolbert G.C. Smidt, "An Orientalist and Ethnographer-Turned-Politician in the Ethiopian-Egyptian Borderlands," 106, accessed January 16, 2024,

<sup>19</sup> Werner Munzinger, *Studi Sull'Africa Orientale* (Roma: Voghera Carlo, Tipografo delle LL. MM. Il Re e la Regina, 1890), 390.

idea of God is an innate feature of human nature. To argue against these claims: Baza's history is tied to the ancient Axumite civilisation, where Christianity was first introduced in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD.<sup>20</sup> Élisée Reclus produces this evidence in the following remarks: "The Kunama, established in the country since time immemorial, claim to be immigrants of Abyssinian origin, and the Abyssinians themselves look upon them as descendants of the ancient Aksumites."<sup>21</sup> In Abyssinian chronicles, in the years between 850 B.C. and 9<sup>th</sup> A.D., three Ethiopian Kings bore the name of Bazen, and their successors still reigned at the first appearance of Christianity.<sup>22</sup> In addition to this, Wolfgang Hahn securely reveals that King Kaleb, who ruled Aksum around 520 A.D., comes from the clan of Bazen who ruled Aksum approximately 7 years B.C. and 10 years A.D. Al Yakubi, one of the Arab historians, also mentioned the kingdom of Bazin; one of the Axumite Kingdoms in 8<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.,<sup>23</sup> having the vast territory including Massawa (historical port city) stretched to Alodia/Alwa (medieval Nubian kingdom) presently in Sudan. In this era, Nubia was already Christianised.<sup>24</sup> After carefully considering all these available sources, it is clear that these people must have been influenced by ancient Christianity. Munzinger, who lacked access to this historical information, arrived at his scepticism and conclusion, relying solely on the absence of ruined Churches and religious celebrations as proof evidence that Christianity or Islam did not influence these people.

Munzinger describes the religious beliefs and practices of this particular group of people, stating "*Questi popoli non hanno Dei, né idoli, né chiese, né culto; non hanno giorni festivi nel senso nostro, non hanno ne preghiere, né rivelazioni,*"<sup>25</sup> translated to [these people do not have gods, idols, churches, or cult; They do not have feast days, prayers, or revelations like ours.] The phrase "*nel senso nostro,*" which translates to 'like ours or according to our senses is worth noting.' This phrase suggests a comparative viewpoint encompassing one-sided perspective. It reveals their misrepresentation of the fundamental essence of monotheism. He inadvertently reveals their own perspective, which leans towards polytheism. To be a monotheist does not necessarily require feast days, prayers, or revelations like Munzinger attempted to convey. This is a typical great challenge to understand other religions, including traditional religions, through one's own culture and religious lens.

On the issue of amulets and charms, Munzinger states that "*Quanto meno di religione hanno questi popoli, tanto più si abbandonano a superstizioni,*"<sup>26</sup> translated to [The less religion they have, the more they indulge in superstitions.] They have a strong faith in charms and amulets made of roots that are believed to possess some supernatural power. Such charms are worn around their necks and arms, as they believe they can protect them from illnesses and enemy attacks. The amulet known as *hegiab* was described by both Christian and Muslim priests. It is usually sewn into leather straps and worn on their bodies. This kind of superstition is very common in West Africa and is also prevalent among Abyssinian Christians and Muslims. This indicates that they do not believe in spirits and spells.<sup>27</sup> Munzinger attempted to distinguish religious practices from cultural practices. In the Baza community, religious beliefs heavily influence cultural rituals, and cultural traditions embody spiritual significance. Elements of daily life, such as customs and ceremonies, are related to religious practices. This complex entanglement is why Munzinger found it impossible to distinguish between the two effectively. Finally, he diminishes the complexity of traditional religion, reducing centuries of tradition and spiritual experience to trivial rituals and baseless fears. This, he concluded "*Quanto meno di religione hanno questi popoli, tanto più si abbandonano a superstizioni.*"<sup>28</sup>

Munzinger further asserts that, the Kunama and Naara religions place significant importance on showing the utmost reverence for the elderly members of their societies. Simply being old, handicapped, dumb, or visually

<sup>20</sup> Natsoulas, "Byzantine Empire," in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica Vol. 1. A-C*, 657.

<sup>21</sup> Élisée Reclus, *The Earth and its Inhabitants: The Universal Geography*, ed. by A. H. Keane, B.A. vol. x. North-East Africa (London: S. J. Virtue and Co., Limited, 294, City Road), 229-230.

<sup>22</sup> Alberto Pollera, *I Baria e I Kunama* (Roma: Presso la Reale Società Geografica, Via del Plebiscito, 1913), 13.

<sup>23</sup> Gianni Dorè, "Kunama ethnography," In *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica Vol. 3. H-N* ed., Siegbert Uhlig (Germany: Otto Harrasswitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden, 2007), 454.

<sup>24</sup> Karola Zibelius-Chen – Gianfranco Fiaccadori, "Nubia" In *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica Vol. 5. Y – Z* ed. Alessandro Bausi in cooperation with Siegbert Uhlig (Germany: Otto Harrassowitz KG, Wiesbaden, 2014), 467-469.

<sup>25</sup> Munzinger, *Studi Sull'Africa Orientale*, 390.

<sup>26</sup> Munzinger, *Studi Sull'Africa Orientale*, 391.

<sup>27</sup> Munzinger, *Studi Sull'Africa Orientale*, 391.

<sup>28</sup> Munzinger, *Studi Sull'Africa Orientale*, 391.

impaired is enough to earn respect and honour from their communities.<sup>29</sup> It is not clear how Munzinger aligned religion with veneration, reverence, respect and honour to these physically challenged entities. Anyway, he continues to say, those who fail to treat such individuals with the proper respect are believed to invite a dreadful curse upon themselves. It is widely believed that the veneration of the elderly is crucial for cultivating authentic intimacy, unity, and harmony within these communities. These societies view the elderly as the repository of knowledge, wisdom, and experience, and as such, they are highly esteemed and looked up to. The elderly are often consulted on important matters, and their opinions are highly valued and respected. In these societies, the elderly play a vital role in shaping their communities' cultural and social fabric.<sup>30</sup>

## ALBERTO POLLERA AND BAZA'S RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

Alberto Pollera "Was an Italian colonial officer and amateur anthropologist"<sup>31</sup> who devoted a significant portion of his adult life to Eritrea and Ethiopia. His influential role in the founding of Barentu town, which later became the capital city of Nara and Kunama, and his colonial administration of the entire region allowed him to immerse himself in the study and documentation of the culture and history of the local communities. His deep commitment to understanding and preserving the region's heritage made a lasting impact on understanding its cultural richness.<sup>32</sup> Religion is a complex and multi-dimensional concept that can be interpreted in various ways depending on an individual's beliefs, cultural background, and personal experiences. For some, religion represents a way of worshipping a higher power through prescribed rituals and practices. Others view it as a means of connecting with the divine through introspection, meditation, or prayer, while some, it represents an emotional aspect of their personal beliefs about the supernatural, whereas others associate it with morality and ethical values. In essence, the true meaning of religion is subjective and largely depends on one's interpretation and understanding of it.<sup>33</sup> For instance, Alberto Pollera's interpretation of religion seems focused solely on its worship aspect, which may differ from the beliefs and practices of others.

Pollera's concept of religion appears to be limited to the practice of routine worship, which is a common aspect of modern-day religion. However, James Frazer's definition of religion "Consists of two elements, a theoretical and a practical, namely a belief in powers higher than man and an attempt to propitiate or please them."<sup>34</sup> He argues that "Belief clearly comes first, since we must believe in the existence of a divine being before we can attempt to please him. But unless the belief leads to a corresponding practice, it is not a religion but merely a theology; in the language of St. James, 'faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.'"<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, Nathan Söderblom "Argued that the essential element in religion is neither formal belief nor organised worship but a response to the 'tabu-holy.'"<sup>36</sup> What is this response to the 'tabu-holy'? As per the argument put forth, the essence of religion cannot be reduced to formal beliefs or organized worship. Instead, it is the response to the 'tabu-holy' that defines religion. The phrase 'tabu-holy' refers to things that are considered sacred or forbidden within a particular culture or society. The response to such taboos and sacred objects can take various forms, such as rituals, prayer, or devotion. Therefore, religion is not just a set of beliefs or practices but a complex and dynamic relationship between individuals or communal and the sacred.

Pollera seemingly conducted a comprehensive study on the religious beliefs of the Kunama and Naara communities. His findings suggest that these tribes recognise a supreme being named *Anna*, who is believed to have created everything and exists above all else. Interestingly, there is no physical depiction of this divine entity, leading to the absence of a tangible form in the minds of these communities. It appears that the form of God is of little

<sup>29</sup> "La religione dei Barea e dei Kunama propriamente consiste in una grande venerazione per la Vecchiaia. L'essere vecchio, inabile, canuto o cieco, basta presso questi popoli per imporre rispetto." Munzinger, *Studi Sull'Africa Orientale*, 392.

<sup>30</sup> Munzinger, *Studi Sull'Africa Orientale*, 392-393.

<sup>31</sup> Antonio Romiti, "Pollera, Alberto," in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica Vol. 4. O-X.*, edited by Siegbert Uhlig, Baye Yimam, Donald Crummey, Gideon Goldenberg, Paolo Marassini, Merid Wolde Aregay and Ewald Wanger (Germany: Otto Harrasswitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden, 2010), 168.

<sup>32</sup> Antonio Romiti, "Pollera, Alberto," In *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica Vol. 4. O-X.*, 168.

<sup>33</sup> René Latourelle and Rino Fisichella eds., *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1990), 819.

<sup>34</sup> James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study of Magic and Religion* (London: The Floating Press, 2009), 125.

<sup>35</sup> Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 125.

<sup>36</sup> Latourelle eds., *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, 821.

importance to them, and they have never felt the need to question it.<sup>37</sup> Pollera believes that the Kunama and Naara tribes do not believe in the existence of evil as an entity on Earth. Rather, they believe that human beings create it.<sup>38</sup> However, Pollera's stance on the concept of evil and how it aligns with these tribes' beliefs is not entirely clear. Further clarification is needed to understand better the nuances of their respective views on this topic.

As God is perceived as a supreme being, an omniscient entity who governs everything and is absolutely good, they know nothing about it but believe that this entity never harms anyone. According to Kunama theology and philosophy, God is considered to possess complete knowledge and absolute goodness. In contrast to some Western beliefs about the disturbing problem between God's omniscience and the existence of evil, Kunama theorists do not seem to have these qualities of God irreconcilable with the existence of evil, maintaining that the presence of evil is not contradictory to God's omniscience and benevolence, asserting that, "Rather, they locate the source of the problem of evil elsewhere than in the logic of the relationships between the attributes of God and the fact of the existence of evil."<sup>39</sup>

The mystery of evil is a highly intricate problem in the realms of theology, philosophy and morality. When examining this matter in relation to God, it can sometimes lead to Atheism. There exist two forms of evil: moral evil, which stems from the free will of human beings and is considered a wrongdoing akin to sin and an affront to God, and natural evil, such as natural disasters that cause anguish and suffering. The most perplexing question related to these evils is why an all-powerful and benevolent God allows their existence. Theology endeavours to respond to this inquiry in various ways, but not all of them may be entirely satisfactory. One hypothesis suggests that God allows evil to occur to prevent a greater evil or to bring about a greater good.<sup>40</sup>

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz posits that we inhabit the most optimal world conceivable. Regrettably, our limited comprehension makes us perceive the world as unfavourable or bad. Only when we attain comprehensive knowledge will we perceive the world in its supreme state, devoid of malevolence or evil. Given our restricted knowledge, we cannot fully comprehend the suffering in this world.<sup>41</sup> Saint Augustine of Hippo espouses the notion that evil results from the absence or deprivation of good caused by individuals' misuse of their freedom.<sup>42</sup> The Kunama thinkers have a unique perspective when it comes to the concept of evil. According to their beliefs, only human actions can be classified as evil, while natural phenomena are exempt from such classification. This means that anything that occurs in nature and is sanctioned by God is not considered evil. However, if human beings choose to interfere with a natural process, any harmful or negative consequences that may arise as a result are solely their responsibility and, thus, not attributed to God. This belief, therefore, places a significant emphasis on human agency and accountability for human actions in the natural world.

Pollera states that, there are also fears of malevolent spirits and voodoo 'Usine/Sadine' who can cause harm and misfortune through their powerful evil looks.<sup>43</sup> This form of superstition is closely intertwined with religion, highlighting the limitations of Kunama's understanding of the divine.<sup>44</sup> Comprehending the concept of superstition: the word superstition derives "From the Latin *super*, meaning 'above' and *stare* meaning 'to stand;' superstition means 'to stand over.'"<sup>45</sup> It is a belief held in the face of supernatural-based fear. Parrinder expresses it as "Obviously, superstitiousness would be generally defined as a kind of cowardice when confronted with the supernatural."<sup>46</sup> The root of superstition is potentially linked to religious beliefs and practices. It manifests in the

<sup>37</sup> Pollera, *I Baria e I Kunama*, 79.

<sup>38</sup> "Il male non esisteva sulla terra e fu creato dagli uomini." Pollera, *I Baria e I Kunama*, 80.

<sup>39</sup> Gyekye, "The Problem of Evil: An Akan Perspective," 468.

<sup>40</sup> John Hick, "Evil, the Problem of," in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2nd Edition*, ed. Donald M. Borchert (USA: Thomson Gale, a part of the Thomson Corporation, 2006), 471-476.

<sup>41</sup> Jonathan Rée, and J. O. Urmson eds., *The Concise Encyclopedia of Western Philosophy: Third Edition* (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 1960), 130-131.

<sup>42</sup> Hick, "Evil, the Problem of," 472.

<sup>43</sup> Pollera, *I Baria e I Kunama*, 81-85.

<sup>44</sup> Pollera, *I Baria e I Kunama*, 88.

<sup>45</sup> Charles Taliaferro and Elsa J. Marty eds., "Superstition," in *A Dictionary of Philosophy of Religion* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 222.

<sup>46</sup> Geoffrey Parrinder ed., *World Religions: from Ancient History to the Present* (New York: The Hamlyn Publishing Group Limited, 1971), 157.

psychological mechanism that gives rise to religious experiences, causing individuals to adopt superstitious beliefs in their spirituality. John Henry Newman states, "To become a popular religion, it is only necessary for a superstition to enslave a philosophy."<sup>47</sup> Therefore, every popular religion has elements of superstitious beliefs and practices. Mbiti expresses his view of superstition stating that:

A superstition is a readiness to believe and fear something without proper grounds. We have shown that in African Religion much more than beliefs is involved. Furthermore, these beliefs are based on deep reflections and long experience. They cannot, therefore, be called 'superstitions'. Followers of every religion in the world hold a number of superstitions. But this does not mean that their religion as such is the same as superstition. This also applies in the case of African Religion.<sup>48</sup>

The Kunama people have a deep-rooted fear of malevolent spirits, sorcery, witchcraft, and Voodoo *Usine/Sadine*. They believe that these supernatural forces can cause various misfortunes, including sickness, death, droughts, locust swarms, earthworm infestations, bird migrations, and the evil eye. To appease them and prevent their wrath, the Kunama make offerings and sacrifices, ranging from simple and considerable gifts to elaborate rituals involving animal sacrifices and libations. Furthermore, the Kunama place great faith in their traditional healers (witch doctors) known as *Ankoradine* and *Asirmine*. These individuals are believed to have special powers and knowledge of the natural world that can help them combat or manipulate supernatural forces. For instance, *Ankoradine/Asirmine* may use herbs, charms, divination, or trance-inducing techniques to heal the sick, protect the community from harm, or communicate with the spirits.<sup>49</sup>

It is important to note that in times of harmony and positivity within the natural order, no offerings or words are presented to these allegedly having malicious supernatural powers like *Usine/Sadine* or to offer to *Ankoradine* and *Asirmine* as expressions of gratitude. Instead, the Kunama people simply acknowledge, "God is great; he has blessed us with a wonderful season"<sup>50</sup> and celebrate seasonally as an act of thankfulness to God. However, when the natural order is disrupted, it is then necessary to appeal to and appease these malicious entities. These concepts play a crucial role in the Kunama people's belief system as they absolve God from responsibility for natural evil, placing the blame solely on malevolent spirits, sorcery, witchcraft, and Voodoo *Usine/Sadine*. According to Kunama's beliefs, when everything is going well, credit is given to *Anna* God, but when things go awry, regardless of what type of evil is, the responsibility falls on the malicious other entities and humans.

## PADRE ANSELMO AND KUNAMA BELIEFS

Padre (Pd.) Anselmo da Ponzone was a Cappuchin Franciscan Friar (OFM. Cap.). He was born in 1888 in Italy. In 1912, he became a missionary in Kunama land, where he spent the rest of his life, known as the father/uncle of Kunama people. According to him, the Kunama tribe chooses not to represent their deity (God), through visual or graphic form. "*Anna è uno degli spiriti invisibili come l'anima umana, come il vento, dicono essi.*"<sup>51</sup> The depiction of the spirit of *Anna* God is often described as being similar to the human spirit, just like the wind that cannot be seen, but its effects can be felt. Pd. Anselmo, who was a Christian missionary, attempted to understand Kunama's concept of God, but his inquiries have yielded vague and uncertain responses according to him. The tribe's typical response when asked about the existence of *Anna* God is "*Na inti! Na itake!*" which essentially means that 'no one has seen' and 'no one knows' enough about the supreme being to describe it. The Kunama also use the phrase "*Anna Ann'oka*" to refer to God, which means "God is God, and that is enough!" This suggests that the Kunama people do not feel the need to understand or define God beyond what they already know.

According to the Islamic religion, it is believed that creating any kind of graphic representation of God is a grave sin and offensive. This is due to the belief that God is to be revered and worshipped in an intangible form beyond

<sup>47</sup> Geoffrey Parrinder, "14 Superstition," in *The Routledge Dictionary of Religious & Spiritual Quotations* (London: British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data, 1990), 24.

<sup>48</sup> John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Inc., 1975), 16.

<sup>49</sup> Gianni Dorè, "Chi non ha una parente Andinna? Donne e possessione come archivio storico ed esperienza dell'alterità tra i Kunama d'Eritrea" (Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia), 57-58. Accessed December 07, 2022.

<sup>50</sup> "Anna anda. Galla maida kimin kasoke."

<sup>51</sup> Pd. Anselmo da Ponzone, *Religione e Credenze Kunama* (Asmara: Ed. Tip. Francescana, 1938), 94. In Archivio della Provincia Cappuccina d'Eritrea, Vicariato Apostolico, Asmara, cass. 15.

human comprehension. In some Christian denominations, with the exception of Catholicism, the use of images is not strictly restricted, but still forbidden. Despite this, some Churches may use imagery to help worship God, such as stained-glass windows, statues or mosaics depicting biblical scenes. According to Bonnie Poon Zahl and Nicholas J. S. Gibson, there are two different ways in which humans can embody God's image. The first approach is known as doctrinal representation and it refers to the theological understanding of God. This involves studying the doctrines and teachings of one's religion to gain an intellectual understanding of God's image, nature and characteristics.<sup>52</sup> The second approach is known as experiential representation, and it is related to communal or an individual's personal, emotional, and psychological connection with God. This approach involves experiencing a sense of spiritual connection with God through prayer, meditation, and other religious practices. In essence, both approaches offer unique ways to understand and embody God's likeness.<sup>53</sup> To respond to the views, the Kunama's perception of God's image is based on experiential representation rather than doctrinal or theological understanding, which the missionaries probably seek.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Kunama people were subjected to a great deal of discrimination and persecution by Abyssinian Christians and Muslims. These groups referred to the Kunama people as *Aremen* and *Kafir*, which translated to godless barbarians and infidels, respectively. Moreover, they had an unwavering sense of superiority complex, which led them to feel authorised by their religious state leaders and scriptural texts to enslave and persecute non-Christians and Muslims, including the Kunama people. They justify any barbaric acts committed against these people as a divine order. Unfortunately, this led to the systematic oppression and enslavement of the Baza and many other tribes for many centuries, "*così potevano, vendendo gli schiavi catturati, soddisfare la loro brama di Guadagno*,"<sup>54</sup> translated to [so they could, by selling the captured slaves, satisfy their craving for profit.] Pd. Anselmo continues to ask himself: "*Ma i Kunama sono veramente atei? Basta conoscerli un poco per negare che siano tali*"<sup>55</sup> translated to [But are the Kunama really atheists? It is enough to know them a little to deny that they are such.] Upon thorough examination and analysis, he arrives at a conclusion that the community in question cannot be categorised as 'pagans' (as Muslim Beni-Amir and surrounding Christian Tigrini inked it) primarily owing to their lack of adherence to any major religions such as Christianity or Islam. However, their beliefs do encompass certain paganistic elements, which are distinct and unique to their culture. It is important to note that these elements do not involve fetishism or idol worship, and may be more aligned with their traditional customs and practices. In fact, ethnological research suggests that the less intricate and more straightforward a community's beliefs are, the less elaborate their religious customs tend to be. This is because such communities may prioritise simplicity and practicality over complexity and symbolism in their religious practices.<sup>56</sup>

Pd. Anselmo appears to be having some difficulties in grasping the fundamental differences between Paganism, Atheism, religion, and the concept of God. Paganism, in essence, refers to a broad range of beliefs that revolve around the worship of multiple deities or nature spirits known as animism. It is a diverse and complex system of beliefs that has been a part of human culture for thousands of years. However, some people still view it as a form of idol worship. On the other hand, Atheism is a belief system that denotes the complete absence of belief in any divine entity or higher power. Atheists reject the idea of God, deities, or supernatural beings and instead place their faith in reason and scientific evidence. Religion, meanwhile, refers to a set of beliefs and practices that are centred around the worship of a particular deity or deities. It is a complex and diverse system of beliefs that varies widely across different cultures and regions.

Exploring the relationship between God and religion can be a complex and nuanced topic. While many people use religion as a means to experience God, it's important to notice that seeking God and following a specific religion are not always the same thing. It's possible for a community or an individual to have a deep spiritual connection with God without following any particular religious doctrine. Furthermore, it's important to avoid making assumptions about someone's beliefs or religious practices based on their lack of adherence to a specific religion. Labelling someone or a community who doesn't follow a known religion as an 'atheist' or 'pagan' can be insensitive and

<sup>52</sup> Bonnie Poon Zahl and Nicholas J. S. Gibson, "God Representations, Attachment to God, and Satisfaction with Life: A Comparison of Doctrinal and Experiential Representations of God in Christian Young Adults," 216-217. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 22:216-230, 2012, accessed March 27, 2024.

<sup>53</sup> Zahl, "God Representations, Attachment to God, and Satisfaction with Life," 216-217.

<sup>54</sup> Anselmo, *Religione e credenze Cunama*, 94.

<sup>55</sup> Anselmo, *Religione e credenze Cunama*, 94.

<sup>56</sup> Anselmo, *Religione e credenze Cunama*, 94.

dismissive of their communal or personal spiritual journey. Religion can be viewed as a human construct created to facilitate a deeper connection with God. It can provide a framework for individuals to explore their spirituality and connect with a community of like-minded individuals. However, it's important to remember that religion is not the only path to experiencing God or developing a sense of spirituality. Ultimately, the relationship between God and religion is deeply personal and unique to each individual. Additionally, it's worth noting that it's not entirely accurate to assume that individuals or communities who don't adhere to a specific religion are unable to experience a connection with God. On account of the fact that certain religions, like Buddhism and Taoism, do not acknowledge or feature God in their practices, but are still considered religions. Consequently, comprehending the complexity of the interplay between God and religion can be quite challenging.<sup>57</sup>

## CONTI ROSSINI ON KUNAMA BELIEFS

Conti Rossini assesses that the Kunama people depict God as absolutely good, but they perceive that God does not take an active role in the events that occur in the world, whether they are positive or negative. To the Kunama "*Anna è molto buono, ma nulla fa né in bene né in male*,"<sup>58</sup> translated to [God is absolutely good, but neither acts in good nor in bad.] This proposition raises questions of whether the statement presents a contradiction. Where does good or bad come from without the act of good by somebody or something? What defines good, and what standards should one use to measure it? In the face of challenging questions, can one truly distinguish God's inherent goodness from human concepts of goodness experienced in daily life? To refute the premise, Antutu deploys the following remarks: the Kunama use phrases such as "*Annam esoke*," which means "God has gratified/favoured you," or "*Anna maida ninake*," which means "you have a benevolent God." They also say "*Annaye Samaye dabbu*," which translates to "God protected you from danger," and "*Anna Anda/Timbisina*," which means "God is magnificent/almighty." These expressions demonstrate their appreciation and gratitude for the goodness of God in their daily lives.

Rossini continues to argue that the Baza's belief in "God is absolute good, but neither acts in good nor in bad"<sup>59</sup> is deeply ingrained in their history, as they have endured repeated attacks from various groups, such as the Turks, Egyptians, Beni-Amir, and Abyssinians, who follow a different species of god that is more actively involved and adopt a warrior-like approach. This kind of god equips its followers with amulets, iron, gunpowder, and rifles and directs their troops to overthrow the Kunama God, *Anna*. Despite this, *Anna* intervenes to protect the Kunama people against these assaults. *Anna's* protection and defence of the Kunama people is a testament that God may not be directly involved in the affairs of the world but is always present to protect them when they are in need.<sup>60</sup>

From the perspective above, Rossini draws a sharp contrast among the gods worshipped by various groups. Notably, he presents Baza's God as absolute goodness while he characterises others' gods as embodying aggression and a propensity for warfare, inciting conflicts that reflect a darker aspect of human spirituality. This dichotomy highlights a substantial fault line in the area of religious beliefs and God. It suggests that different interpretations and representations of God often contribute to division, leading many to skewed perceptions of faith. Ultimately, Rossini's insights reveal how religious beliefs, while potentially uplifting, can also have profound implications that misguide many in their spiritual journeys.

## VITTORIO ANTUTU AND KUNAMA CONCEPT OF GOD

As previously noted, the Kunama community reveres a singular divine being they credit as the originator of all creations, including humans. As such, any other deity who indulges in wars or exhibits greater participation in conflicts, as per Pollera's and Rossini's hypothesis, is incompatible with their belief system in *Anna*. Within Kunama

<sup>57</sup> Parrinder ed., *World Religions: from Ancient History to the Present*, 7-11.

<sup>58</sup> Carlo Conti Rossini, *Storia d'Etiopia: "Africa Itallana" Collezione Di Monografie A Cura Del Ministero Delle Coloni* (Milano: Stampato Coi Tipi Della Officina D'arte Grafica A. Lucini & C., 1925), 86.

<sup>59</sup> Rossini, *Storia d'Etiopia*, 86.

<sup>60</sup> "I Cunama stessi ravvisavano nel buon esito delle spopolatrici razzie compiute contro loro da Abissini, da Turchi, da Beni Amer, una conseguenza dell'alleanza di questi con un Dio d'altra specie, attivo e fattivo, da essi invocato come grido guerresco ad alta voce, Dio dichiarato da essi autore d'ogni cosa, ond'egli largiva ai suoi fedeli sale, amuleti, polvere da sparo, ferro, fucili: soltanto di quando in quando i clamori degl'invasori riescono a scuotere Anna, che allora interviene a difesa dei suoi." Rossini, *Storia d'Etiopia*, 86-87.

theology, God is considered all-knowing and benevolent, as accurately noted by Pd. Anselmo is never responsible for causing harm. Throughout their history, Kunama society has never waged wars deliberately against their neighbours or any others in the name of God, Allah or *Anna*; contrarily, the opposite is true. They often see war as a grim manifestation of humanity's darker nature, impervious to the influence of any benevolent God. It is viewed as a purely human affair, devoid of God's influence and is frequently associated with evil. Philosophically speaking, wars are considered to be a failure of human rationality, akin to the behaviour of an animal brute. Its feature is always ugly, nuptial with the absolute lack of love! The Kunama community has a distinct approach towards warfare, preferring to adopt a defensive stance rather than an offensive one. They exhibit a reluctance towards retaliation, choosing instead to prioritise self-protection.<sup>61</sup> They have a strict code of conduct when it comes to seeking revenge. In times of warfare, they are explicitly instructed not to lay hands on the defenceless, such as women, children and aged persons. Furthermore, the heinous act of rape is completely forbidden, and the deliberate destruction of residences through torching is strictly prohibited. In addition, it is emphasised that in the event of an enemy or man surrendering, they should never be subjected to lethal force or be killed.

### GIANNI DORÈ'S ON MONOGRAPH OF POLLERA

Gianni Dorè is an Italian scholar and anthropologist who has provided detailed and critical comments on Pollera's monograph "*I Baria e I Kunama*." Dorè has specifically raised objections to Pollera's use of "Evolutionist intellectual procedures," which were widely employed by colonial officials to reconstruct a purportedly 'original' entity through abstract processes without taking social change into account.<sup>62</sup> In his critique, Dorè has argued that this method was primarily utilised by colonial powers as a means of domination and governance through force, rather than as a reliable means of discovering tradition. He further contends that this approach is not only flawed but also a never-ending exercise in imagination, which fails to account for the complexities of social and cultural change that occur over time. By offering a nuanced and detailed critique of Pollera's work, Dorè has provided valuable insights into the problematic nature of the "Evolutionist intellectual procedures" that were widely used during the colonial era.<sup>63</sup>

In the context of colonial administration, a common tactic used by officers is to extract information from collaborators by identifying the most fundamental elements. This is achieved through a skilful approach to questioning, which involves redirecting the focus and expectations of the collaborators. By doing so, officers can uncover valuable insights and knowledge that can be used to advance their objectives. According to Dorè's account, Pollera, a colonial administrator, was particularly expert at this intellectual approach to questioning. He was able to identify the core elements that motivated the collaborators and skilfully directed his questions to uncover critical information. This enabled him to achieve success in the new colonial environment, where knowledge and information were often the keys to power and influence. Pollera's approach to questioning was rooted in the belief that understanding the collaborators' motivations and perspectives was essential to achieving success. He could achieve this by building trust and rapport with the collaborators and skilfully directing his questions, he was able to gather valuable insights and knowledge that allowed him to make informed decisions and take effective action.<sup>64</sup> Dorè states that:

Pollera selects a number of villages from which he will obtain his data: Kunama society is thus "constructed" on the basis of villages (*sukā*), thought, either by induction or by some inkling, to be the most conservative, and therefore the most representative ... Pollera names three villages as, at the same time, ground for inquiry and for the construction of a Kunama essence: Gega, Kona, and Oganna.<sup>65</sup>

In an academic discussion, Dorè expressed his concerns about Pollera's method of analysing the intricate social fabric of Kunama society. He argued that Pollera's analysis lacked the necessary depth to fully comprehend the complexity of Kunama society. Specifically, he highlighted that Pollera's understanding of Kunama society's

<sup>61</sup> Antutu, "Breve Storia dei Baaza o Kunama: Eritrea," 123, 128.

<sup>62</sup> Gianni Dorè, "Identity and Contemporary Representations: The Heritage of Alberto Pollera's Monograph, *I Baria e I Kunama*" (Venice: Ca' Foscari University), 73, accessed June 15, 2023. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41931240>.

<sup>63</sup> Dorè, "Identity and Contemporary Representations," 74.

<sup>64</sup> Dorè, "Identity and Contemporary Representations," 75.

<sup>65</sup> Dorè, "Identity and Contemporary Representations," 75.

religious sacred ceremonies, such as *Anna Sasa* and *Tùùka*, was limited, preventing him from fully apprehending their cultural significance. Moreover, Dorè suggested that Pollera viewed funerary rites, village assemblies, and other religious or ordinary gatherings as irrational sumptuary of extravagance; therefore, “For Pollera, they constituted chronicles, not history,”<sup>66</sup> rather than acknowledging their significance as integral components of Kunama’s rich history.

In the context of analysing community portrayals, it is essential to consider the input of key social figures who significantly impact the community. However, it is surprising that Pollera failed to recognise the crucial role played by the *Sanganene*. “The *Sanganene*, senior men dedicated to the ending of feuds and antagonisms, and indeed keepers of the law and of the memories of relations (never mentioned by Pollera, partly because the *Sanganene*’s functions were taken over by the colonial state.)”<sup>67</sup> It is worth noting that the *Sanganene* roles were taken over by the colonial state, which may explain why Pollera overlooked their significance. The *Sanganene*’s role was critical in maintaining social stability in the community, especially during times of conflict or turmoil, specifically crimes connected with homicide. By overlooking their contributions, Pollera might have missed crucial insights that could have provided a more accurate portrayal of the community. Therefore, it is essential to recognise the critical role played by the *Sanganene* in maintaining the social fabric of the community and their contributions to resolving conflicts and promoting peace. Their omission from Pollera’s analysis highlights the need to consider the impact of colonialism and other historical factors when analysing community portrayals.

Dorè’s findings were truly remarkable as he discovered a number of influential personalities within the Kunama society who wielded significant decision-making power. These individuals played crucial roles in shaping the social, political, and spiritual fabric of the community. Beside the *Sanganene* there were the village chiefs, also known as *Manne*, who were responsible for overseeing the spiritual and physical well-being of the community. The *Manne* were held in high regard by the Kunama people, and their decisions were respected and followed by the entire community. In addition to the *Manne*, there were key political officials like the *Laga Manne* who held mastery over the land. They were responsible for managing the natural resources and ensuring that the land was used sustainably. The *Laga Manne* were highly respected, and their decisions were crucial in shaping the economic, religious, political and social landscape of the community. What was intriguing that Pollera’s *I Barea e I Kunama* monograph, which is a comprehensive study of the Kunama people, failed to mention any of these pivotal figures. It is possible that Pollera may have missed out on these key personalities or chose not to include them in his study for some unknown reasons or at least for colonial reasons. Nevertheless, Dorè’s discovery sheds new light on the Kunama society and highlights the importance of recognising the contributions of these influential figures.<sup>68</sup>

## DORÈ AND KUNAMA RELIGION

Dorè raises an important question about the failure of Munzinger and Pollera to acknowledge the profound cultural influence of both Mohammadans (Islam) and Abyssinian Christians on the Kunama and Nara peoples. In contrast to making an effort to understand the Kunama religion, Munzinger and Pollera, unfairly and “Still lazily classified as animistic,”<sup>69</sup> which does not accurately reflect the religion’s complexity. Dorè argues that various elements of the Kunama religion, such as the invocation of ‘the only God’ *Anna* or ‘Adum and Hawa,’ possess universal qualities and may have been shaped by the ancient history of Christianity in the Ethiopian highlands. Despite this, the Kunama are often still viewed as primitive pagans, “Even when they are viewed as *splitter völker* or fragment peoples, disordered by the waves of Semitic groups from the highlands.”<sup>70</sup> The Kunama’s religion is a unique blend of Christian and Islamic influence, and their beliefs often mirror the larger history of East African religions. The invocation of ‘the only God’ *Anna* or *Adum and Hawa*, for example, is a reflection of the monotheistic belief systems that have been present in the region for centuries. Therefore, it is essential to consider the historical and cultural context when evaluating the Kunama religion, rather than resorting to oversimplified and inaccurate classifications.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Dorè, “Identity and Contemporary Representations,” 78-79.

<sup>67</sup> Dorè, “Identity and Contemporary Representations,” 79-80.

<sup>68</sup> Dorè, “Identity and Contemporary Representations,” 80-82.

<sup>69</sup> Dorè, “Identity and Contemporary Representations,” 82.

<sup>70</sup> Dorè, “Identity and Contemporary Representations,” 82.

<sup>71</sup> Dorè, “Identity and Contemporary Representations,” 82-83.

Unfortunately, the Kunama people have been subject to long-lived negative stereotypes perpetuated by the highlanders (*Kebesa*) and certain European colonial scholars. These harmful depictions have created a distorted perception of Kunama society that has been widely accepted as fact. As a result, these misguided beliefs have become deeply ingrained in individuals' minds or as a group, leading to harmful discrimination and prejudice. Dorè delves into the complexities surrounding the term 'Animism.' He highlights how the label has been associated with ideological confusion and historical inaccuracies, leading to a lack of clarity about its true meaning. Therefore, "The hypothesis of a link between Kunama social and religious customs and biblical ones was felt to be useful as a means of countering the derogatory images and stereotypes constructed in the highlands."<sup>72</sup> This approach aimed to emphasise the positive aspects of their traditional belief culture and promote a more accurate understanding of their belief practices.

## CONCLUSION

The Kunama people believe in a singular, formless, spirit-like God, rejecting the idea of multiple deities and worshipping them. Despite this, certain writers have misunderstood their beliefs, attributing them to the conflicting terms such as Pagan, Animist, Atheist or Deist, suggesting that at the core of their beliefs are charms and amulets that protect against malevolent forces. Pd. Anselmo has discovered discrepancies and contradictions in the allegations provided by other writers on Kunama. Certain writers, like Pollera, see the religion in terms of worship aspects in special and particular places. While others find it difficult to grasp the fundamental differences between Paganism, Atheism, Animism and Deism, as well as between religion and the concept of God. Munzinger's suggestion that Baza's beliefs regarding God are somewhat ambiguous, lacking any strong feelings of reverence, and neutrality towards God is inaccurate. This assessment lacks the depth of spirituality and the concept of God. The idea of the divine is not perceived in terms of feelings of good and evil. Human feelings are complex, and emotions can be conflicting. For example, there are feelings of awe, reverence, and gratitude towards God, while instantly overwhelmed with fear, resentment, and doubt about His existence. Munzinger's perspective on the practices of charms and amulets suggests 'the littleness of religion,' reflecting the lack of genuine faith in God. This affirmation also raises questions about whether the use of charms and amulets really expresses belief in gods or God, or simply a superstitious habit. Moreover, it raises broader questions about how we define and understand religion and whether we can truly separate it from cultural and superstitious practices.

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<sup>72</sup> Dorè, "Identity and Contemporary Representations," 83.