

# Ethiopia

<b>Response to Information Request Number:</b>	ETH98001.ZNY
<b>Date:</b>	28 April 1998
<b>Subject:</b>	Ethiopia and the Oromo People:  Is it possible to determine whether an Ethiopian is an ethnic Oromo by the individual's last name?  What religion or religions are practiced by ethnic Oromos in Ethiopia?
<b>From:</b>	INS Resource Information Center, Washington, DC
<b>Keywords:</b>	Ethiopia / Oromo / Religions / Belief Systems / Religious Practice / Ethiopians / Ethnic and National Groups / Oromos / Groups of Concern / Racial Minorities / Christians / Muslims/ Moslems/ Islam

**Query:**

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**Response:**

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As many Asylum Officers are aware, in order to protect the confidentiality of the applicant and also to ensure the safety and security of an applicant, the applicant's name is never revealed to sources. Moreover, 8 CFR Section 208.6(a), Disclosure to Third Parties, states that "an application for asylum or withholding of deportation shall not be disclosed, except as permitted by this section, or at the discretion of the Attorney General, without the written consent of the applicant."

While it is true that certain groups and nationalities might have certain names that may be identified with a particular group, it is very difficult to draw a conclusion on a person's ethnicity from their name. So many factors can affect a person's last name, intermarriage, and in this case, the Oromo and Amharic languages and whether or not the Oromo spelling was modified, or even changed to Amharic. Based on the aforementioned, the RIC is unable to conclusively establish the ethnic identity of a person from their name. We can provide some background information relating to Oromo naming traditions.

The Chair of the Oromia Support Group provided the following insight on the Oromo name issue. He stated that in Oromo tradition, children of both sexes can have their father's name as their second name and their grandfather's name as their third name, and on down through their lineage. Some Oromo can recite up to 50 names following their paternal lineage. During the Mengistu era, the Oromo were ordered to give three names in order to standardize records. The combination of names used was up to the individual.

Oromo names may also include Amharic names, sometimes a near-sounding alternative to given Oromo names. Under the last century's regimes, Amharic names were necessary if the Oromo were to be successful. As a result, today many Oromo only have Amharic names. If an Oromo is a Muslim, they could have an Arabic name such as: Ahmed, Awad, Mohamed, Mahmud, Ali. An Oromo could also have maintained their traditional Oromo name such as: Tolera, Waaqgaaro, Caaltuu, etc. The only exception is that sometime parents are referred to as the father or mother of one of their children: Abu or Abba Lamessa, the parents of Haada Lamessa. The possibilities are endless (Trueman 10 April 1998).

What religion or religions are practiced by the ethnic Oromo in Ethiopia?

There are three major religions practiced among the Oromo: traditional Oromo religion, Waaqefeta, Christianity (Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox), and Islam. The majority of the Oromo people are followers of Islam and Christianity, while the remaining few are followers of the traditional Oromo religion (Facts About the Oromo of Ethiopia, Oromo Religion of Ethiopia). The Oromos accepted Islam and non-Orthodox Christianity en masse because they identified the Abyssinian Orthodox Christianity with the Amhara. There are many Oromo who are followers of Islam or Christianity and still practice the traditional Oromo religion (Facts About the Oromo of East Africa). The Chair of the Oromia Support Group quotes sources that state that 55% - 60% of the Oromo are Muslim, 40% - 45% are Christian, and up to 15% Animist. Most rural Oromo, 80% of Oromo population, retain Animist Oromo beliefs. However, it is said that the Oromo wear Christianity and Islam like clothing over the traditional beliefs. The RIC spoke with an Oromo, who stated that many Oromo may claim a religion to enjoy the privileges of the religion, however, they do not practice the religion in actuality. The religious diversity is a reflection of the invasions overtime and the missionary work of the major religions.

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**Attachments:**

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