Oromo Development Conception and Practice

An Ethnographic Study of the Tulama Oromo

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June 2004

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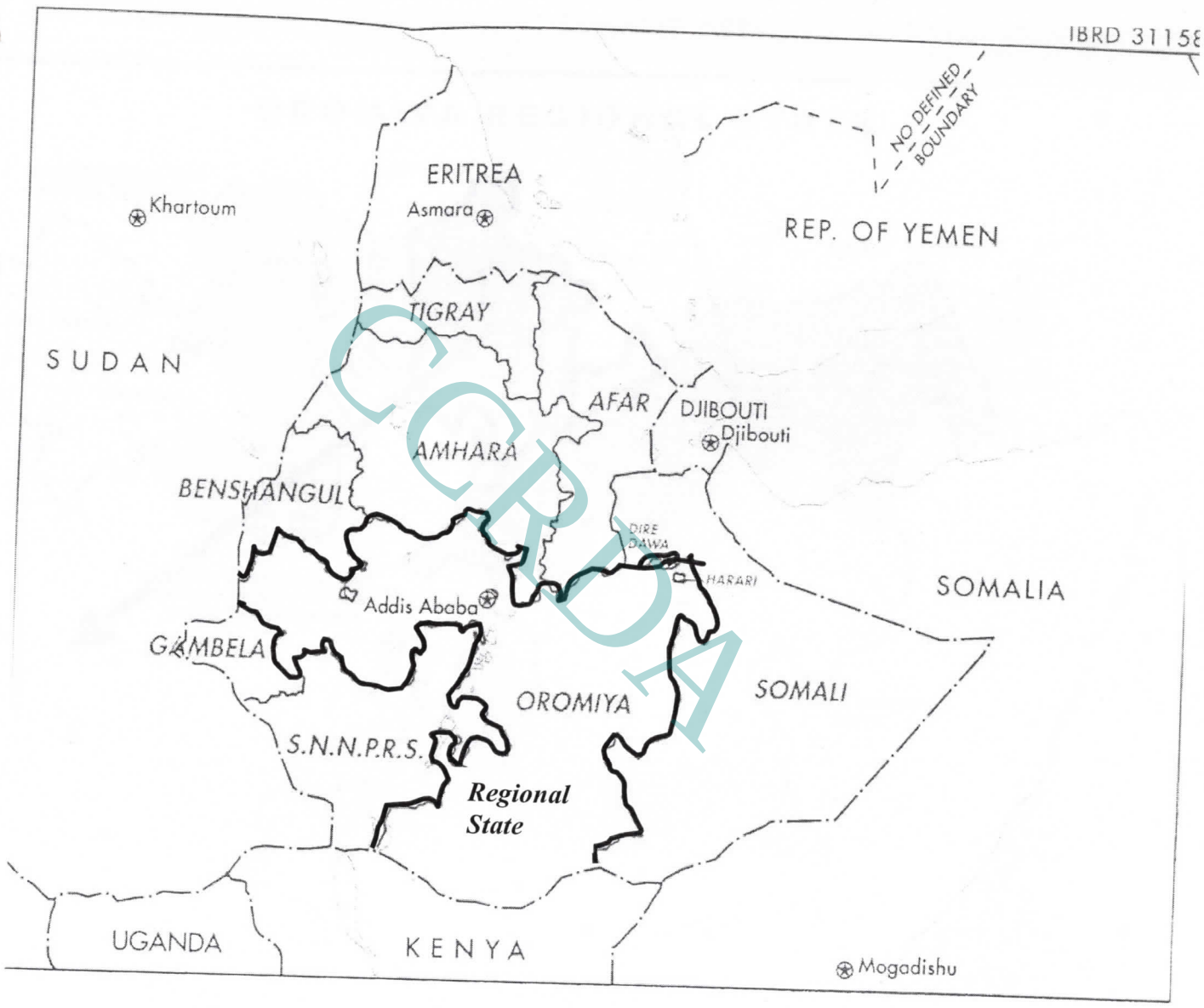
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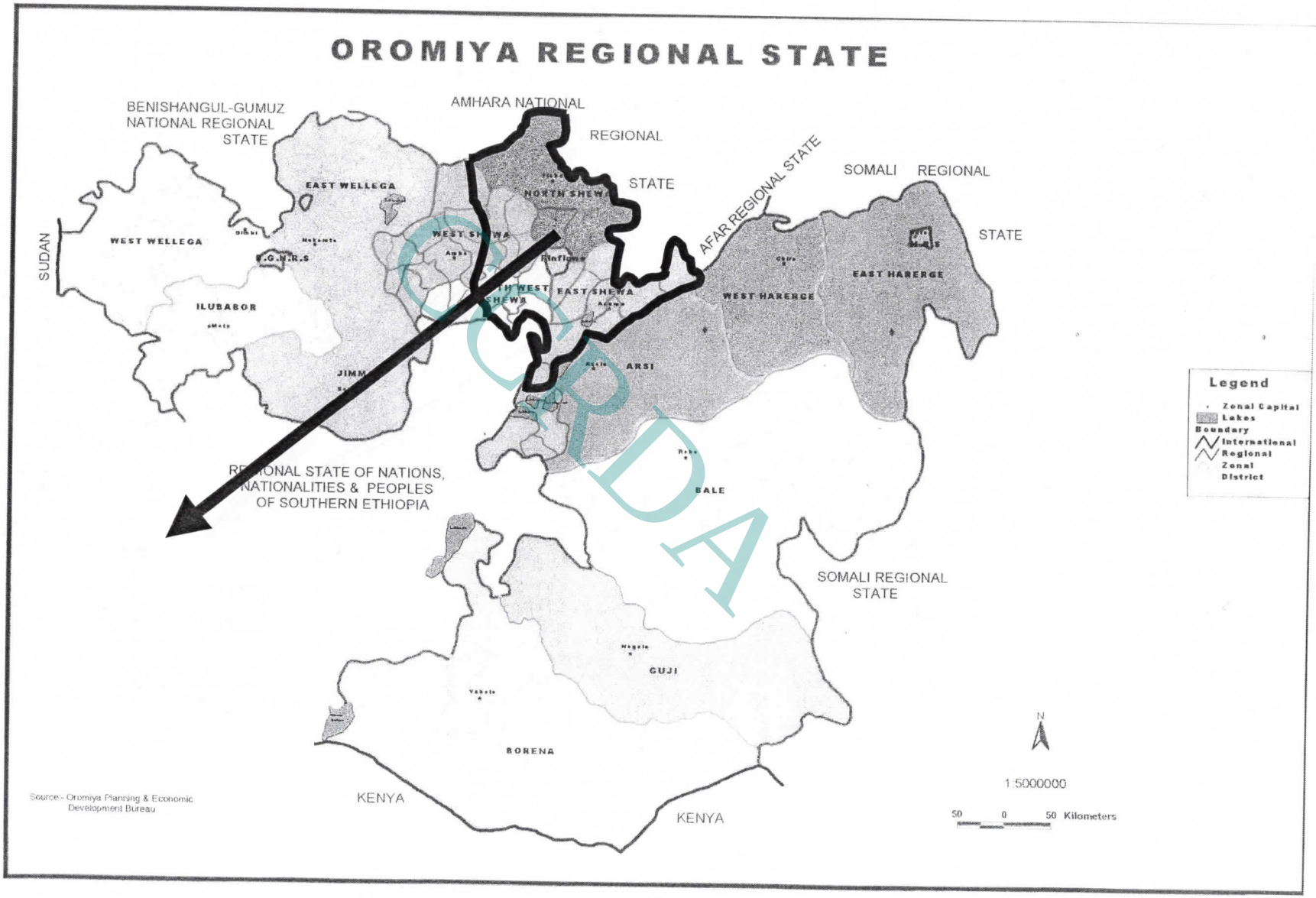
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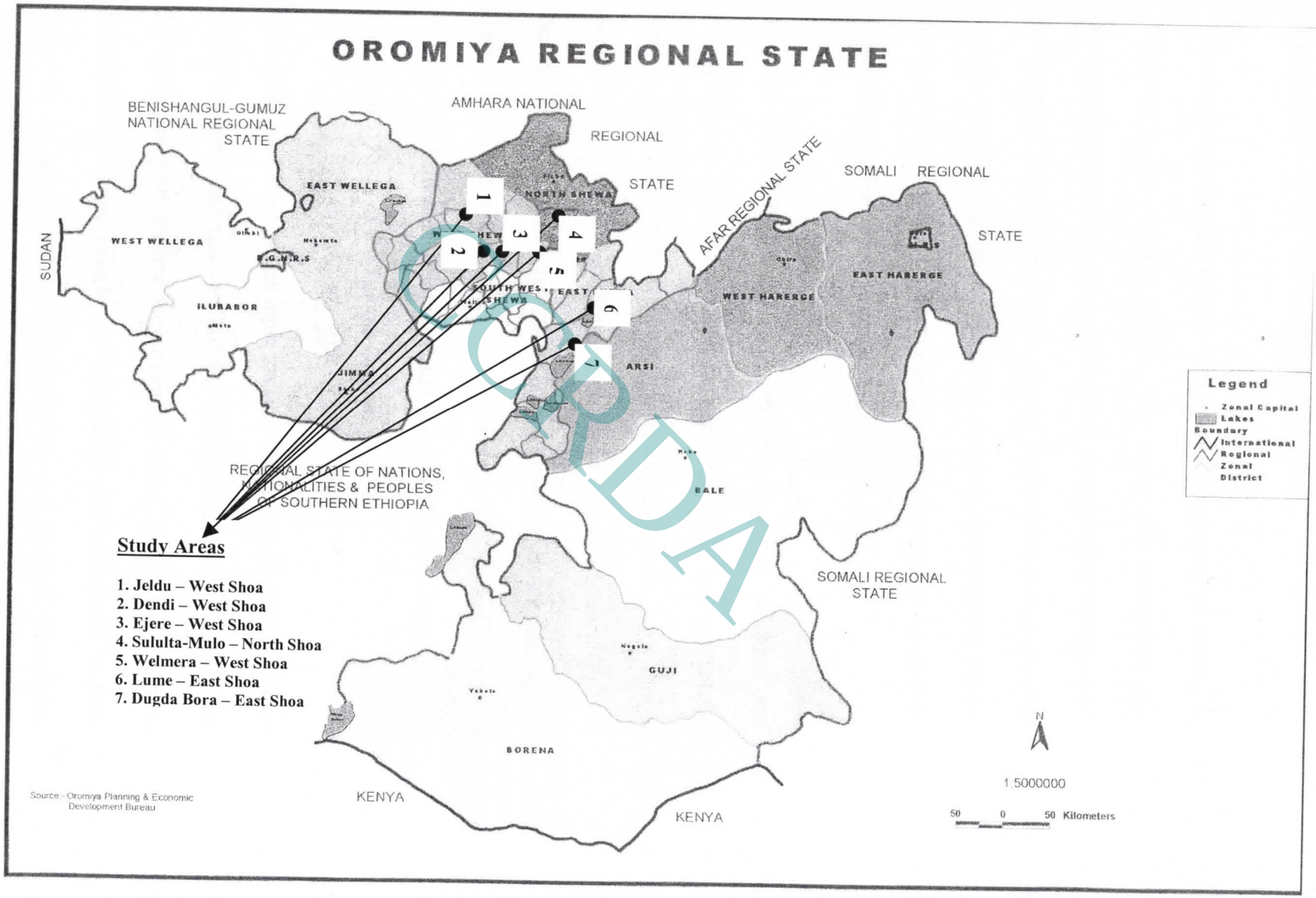
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PREFACE

This study is about the Oromo conception and practice of development with particular reference to the Tulama Oromo. The study was undertaken mainly because little anthropological inquiry has been made to understanding development from the native's perspective. Towards this end, an attempt has been made to explore the Oromo notion of development with special emphasis on economic development. Institutional mechanisms put in place to mobilize productive resources for development and distribute development benefits among the people have also been assessed.

Initially, when I began the study, the intention was to carry out an ethnographic comparison on the subject matter between the Mecha and the Tulama divisions of the Oromo. Later, however, it became difficult to proceed with the comparative study essentially because of two things: first, the preliminary assessment I made revealed that the two Oromo divisions tend to be similar on major issues related to the topic. Second, the two Oromo divisions cover a wide geographical area and its coverage requires much more time and financial resource than I was able to afford. Thus, I decided to focus on an ethnographic study of the Tulama Oromo.

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I was motivated to study this topic because most of the development interventions carried out by academic and research institutions and development organizations, regardless of the extent of participation they claim to make, hardly base and build on existing development notions, knowledge, experiences and institutions. In many instances, the power to set directions and strategies for the peoples' development still remain exclusively in the hands of development practitioners. The goal of the study is, therefore,

to show alternative development conception including institutional mechanisms put in place to practice it from the native's perspective.

The study has a number of parts. The first two chapters briefly deal with the purpose of the study, methodological tools employed and pertinent literatures reviewed. Chapter three provides an historical overview of the Oromo's political, social and economic systems and religious practices. Chapter four presents the social organization of the Tulama division of Oromo. Chapter five explains the Oromo conception of development, which is the core issue of the study. Chapter six deals with the Oromo view of land and discusses this view particularly in light of the notion of land privatization. Institutional mechanisms put in place to practice development through mobilizing productive resources and distributing development benefits to the people are discussed in Chapter seven and eight, respectively. Chapter nine attempts to present an analysis of the Oromo development conception and practice. Finally, Chapter ten presents some concluding remarks about the findings.

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Finally, I would like to note that I have taken care to cite the year and page of publications I referred to in brackets during this study. But there are cases when I have cited only years of publications without citing pages including for some direct quotation. These are books I referred from digital library organized by United Nations University entitled 'Collection on Critical Global Issues 2.0'. CD-ROM 2.0 (1999 Edition) contains 210 publications in the field of environment, development and food and nutrition. These publications do not indicate pages as they are in the hard copies. Therefore, this situation makes it difficult for me to cite pages of the books.

CHAPTER ONE

Problem Statement

Development has continued to be a major challenge facing the human race in general and African societies in particular as we enter the new millennium. Poverty is pervasive and expanding over a period of time. A considerable proportion of the African population suffers from hunger, homelessness, illiteracy, and illness. Considerable efforts have been made by multiple stakeholders - governments, donors, academics and other development practitioners to reverse the situation and bring about positive and progressive changes. Yet, very little improvements have been witnessed in some corners of the world while the general trend reveals increased poverty. We may all raise a legitimate question, 'why is this happening?' We do not get a clear answer. But one thing seems very clear. Kaplan (1996:xi) stresses that there is much that is dubious that goes under the name of development.

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Different disciplines of social science have dealt with issues related to development. For many decades, development thinkers have debated around two insurmountably different types of social and economic organization, one imported and imposed by the Westerners (or colonial powers), the other belonging to the "native" population. The former approach was based on an ethnocentric viewpoint and a belief in Western supremacy, which in itself claimed to show the less developed societies the direction they should be going in order to attain development by taking the West as their model. As regards the problems encountered, in both development theories and discussions about policy choices, there

has been a gradual shift away from a purely economic approach in favor of a more interdisciplinary one. Conceptualization of development from an economic viewpoint alone has made it difficult for social anthropologists to entertain the concept since they would prefer to appreciate self-defined development that reflects the lived realities.

It is apparently clear that different social groups conceptualize development differently. A concept is understood as an idea expressed in words or as a symbol that can be created from individual's experience, creative thought and observation. The formation of concepts leads to increased knowledge. Knowledge encompasses the skills, experiences and insights of people, applied to maintain or improve their livelihood (World Bank 1990). Application of knowledge for development is realized through the use of institutions. This patterned nature of relationships between people's conceptualization of development, increased knowledge expressed in terms of their applied skills, experiences and insights, and institutional mechanisms put in place to realize development significantly differs from one culture to the other.

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Many theoretical frameworks are, however, characterized by generalizations, which disguise heterogeneity between cultures and tend to reduce societies to a series of commonalties. In this regard, anthropology is no exception although it has always had some post-modern tendencies in that one of its central convictions – cultural relativism – insists upon recognizing the inner logic of different societies. Post-modernism insists upon difference and cultural diversity. It rejects the possibility of common problems and thus common solutions (Gardner and Lewis, 1996:21). Each and every society deserves to be studied in its own right.

However, this does not mean that theoretical perspectives do not have any relevance. Ethnography – the practice of writing about peoples, and theory – anthropological mode of thought inevitably merge into one. It is impossible to engage in ethnography without some idea of what is important and what is not. Conversely, theory without ethnography is meaningless, since the understanding of cultural difference is at least one of the most important goals of anthropological inquiry (Barnard, 2000:4-5).

Although development is a critical issue for many societies in the world, little has been studied from natives' perspectives. The Oromo is no exception. It has recently been acknowledged that indigenous peoples have their own effective 'science' and resource use practice, and that to help them, it is necessary to understand something about their knowledge and management systems (Kloppenburg, 1991; DeWalt, 1994 cited in Sillitoe, 2002:2). It is this failure to understand people's conception of development, and their knowledge and institutional mechanisms being used to practice development, which comes out as one of the critical challenges that has drawn my attention to carry out this study. Thus, this study has shifted away from studying development from modernization theoretical perspective, which suggests that all changes inevitably follow the Western model to people's perspective, which acknowledges that development comes in many shapes and forms.

This study attempts to explore how the Oromo perceive and practice development. I have studied Oromo development perceptions because there are several interwoven institutional mechanisms that derive from development, which have been neglected by

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development practitioners. This study attempted to assess some core issues related to the following guiding questions:

- How do the target community get organized and governed?
- How do they conceptualize and understand development?
- How do they perceive land?
- What institutional mechanisms are put in place to practice development from their perspective? How do they mobilize productive resources for practicing development?
- Who benefits from development and how are these benefits shared among the people?

Major objective of the study

The major objective of the study is to inquire into the alternative notion and practice of development from the Oromo's perspective with particular reference to the Tulama Oromo.

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Specific objectives

The study has the following specific objectives:

- To understand the social organization of the Tulama Oromo including why and how they got organized into such social units;
- To explore how the Tulama Oromo perceive and understand development from their perspective; and
- To investigate into the institutional mechanisms used to realize the perceived development and also help facilitate distribution of resources.

Research Methods

The study generally relied **on qualitative research methods** to understand different perceptions, aspirations and interests and how these influence accounts of ' facts ' and events. Particularly, the following approaches were employed to gather, analyze, and interpret data:

Participant observation: I, as an observer, attempted to share in at least some of the activities and discussions that were being assessed in order to get a better understanding of insider views and experiences. Successive informal discussions were held at different localities of Dendi, Ejere, Lume and Dugda Bora districts with selected individuals (oral historians and custodians of the culture) to understand how things are related to each other and how specific institutions fit with others. I observed crop-cutting activity carried out based on a mutual support system called *Daboo* at Dhamotu locality of Ejere district in January 2004, which served as an entry point to understand *Daboo* and other mechanisms of mobilizing productive resources for development.

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I have also attended several public gatherings aimed at discussing various social and economic issues during which I was able to observe critically how people look at themselves and understand their environment to a certain extent. Particularly these observations gave me good insights as to how I should go about exploring the notion of development from the native's perspective. I also made considerable efforts to look at the phenomena from different perspectives because I share the view that if carefully observed and listened to, phenomena 'speak for themselves'. Above all, my experience working

with some communities of the Tulama Oromo for the last seven years as development practitioner helped me acquire deep insight about their understanding of development. During this process, I have practically proved Kaplan's view (1996:1), which asserts that the most important faculty in any intervention is the faculty of observation.

Unstructured/ informal interviewing: This method was used to obtain a wider understanding of the topic understudy. I made this informal interviewing with people I met on the way when traveling to different places and when I socialized with them in different contexts such as funeral service attendance and sharing friendship drinks at local markets. That way I was able to obtain very important information although such informal discussions were not always productive.

Semi-structured interviewing: This is a method in which the questions were more open and answers were recorded in more detail. Spaces were left for unanticipated issues, which arise in the course of conversation. To that effect, I developed a brief list of points, which I thought, I could use to get a mental picture of what I wanted to know in the study. Few questions (checklists) were prepared for the interview. But I was flexible enough to get more in-depth information. Individuals interviewed were selected from different categories (classified based on sex, age and social status) of the respective communities. I interviewed fifteen people at three different localities (Meki of Dugda Bora, Koka of Lume, and Ilu Aga of Ejere).

Collaborators (key informants) interview: A few resource persons who have deep knowledge about the Oromo culture and ways of life were identified to hold intensive

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discussions on the subject matter. These collaborators were extremely helpful not only in giving important information but also in reconciling some disparities I encountered during data collection using the methods mentioned above (i.e., triangulation).

During the study, I enjoyed the privilege of being part of the Oromo culture. This does not mean that all what I know about Oromo was accurate. In fact, I faced some challenges with some of my understanding and preoccupations about the Oromo culture and ways of life, which I had to explore further and draw lesson from the exercise. I also recognized that not all people are equally knowledgeable about the subject matter understudy. From the people I interviewed and I held intensive discussions with, key elders such as Bayisa Jimma, Dori Erba, Fitche Jirru, Diro Lalise, Iddo Obse, Aberra Mul'ata, Leggese Ayana and Gada Badhaso provided me with full-fledged, very coherent and well-organized information about the study topic.

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Secondary data: I attempted to assess pertinent studies carried out by different scholars to obtain more complete information about the study topic. Particularly, Aneesa Kassam's (2002:64-81) study on '*Ethnodevelopment in Oromia Region*', in which she constructed the Oromo model of growth and development served as a point of departure for the analysis made regarding the Oromo conception of development.

It should be noted that in the above mentioned data gathering methods, both the *etic* approach in which I attempted to determine the agenda and categories for people to provide the information; and the *emic* technique in which I tried to see the issues from within to discover perspectives, interests, and problems as seen by the insider were

applied. Moreover, in addition to the synchronic approach, which looks at the relation of things together in the same time, the diachronic approach, which assesses the relation of things through time, was used in the study since the existing situation alone does not account for the Oromo traditional conception and practice of development.

Study Areas

The research focused on the study of Tulama division of the Oromo living in the central part of Oromia. In order to obtain more complete information, I visited several localities in West Shoa, East Shoa and North Shoa Administrative Zones of Oromia State. In particular, I went to Boracho of Dendi, Hindhe of Jeldu, Ilu Aga of Ejere, Lencha Telecho of Welmera, Ekko Gimitchu of Sululta-Mulo, Koka and Ejersa of Lume, and Meki of Dugda Bora. While my visit was brief in other places, I focused heavily on Meki, Koka, Ejersa, Borecho and Ilu Aga localities to obtain more detailed information.

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Significance of the study

So far little work has been done with regard to exploring and understanding the development conception of the Oromo from the their perspective. This research, therefore, can provide development anthropologists and other development researchers and practitioners with valuable information to broaden their understanding about the Oromo in general, and their development thinking, in particular. It is usually the educated section of the society in various disciplines that coins development theories, approaches, and programs. Development discourses have most commonly been restricted among the

educated elite. Grassroots peoples have limited opportunities to take part in such discourses although they have extremely useful cumulative knowledge and experiences in development. This study, therefore, attemptes to present development from a grassroots perspective and thereby contributes to indigious knowledge studies which are part and parcel of the bottom-up development approach. In that regard, the study makes an important contribution, as development should always be inclusive of local views and perceptions rather than being restricted to academic and professional circles.

Limitations

No research study can be complete in terms of capturing all views and ideas pertinent to the subject matter. But one research study can be more complete than the other depending on, among other things, the magnitude of information one is able to gather and analyze. This research is not exceptional. Although I have tried to gather as much information as possible for this research, much more information, which is pertinent to the research, could have been gathered had it not been for both time and financial constraints. Moreover, I faced some difficulty in translating some of the Oromo concepts, parables and proverbs since getting equivalent words and concepts in English is very challenging. I apologize for the gaps created because of this.

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CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The blobal notion of development, which in its broadest sense includes both economic development and the social and cultural changes that accompany it, is closely linked to certain ideologies or theories of international relations and to world history. The development concept is embedded in the neo-colonial construction of the world and is a key to ideological tool in global power relations (Escobar, 1988; 1995, cited in Gardner and Lewis, 1996:1).

Modernization theory – a collection of perspectives most influential in the 1950s and 1960s - which entails the transition from subsistence agriculture to cash-cropping, and industrialization visualizes development in terms of a progressive movement towards technologically more complex and integrated forms of 'modern' society (Long and Long, 1992:18 cited in Gardner and Lewis, 1996:12). Modernization is essentially evolutionary and envisages that all countries should go through a linear path to development, which leads ultimately to an industrialized society. By presenting all countries as being one and the same, modernization theory completely neglects historical and political factors, which have made the playing field very far from level (Gardner and Lewis, 1996:12-15).

Defining development as economic growth is still common today. For many governments and experts, successful development is measured by economic indices such as the Gross National Product (GNP) or per capita income in which the poor, if not directly, can

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benefit through the 'trickle down effect'. Development is quantifiable and reducible to economics. According to Meier (1984), it was after the Second World War that academic economics began to tackle the problem of how to deal effectively with poverty and destitution. Development economics is a comparatively young area of inquiry that arose not as a formal theoretical discipline, but was fashioned as a practical subject in response to the needs of policymakers to advise governments on what could and should be done to allow their countries to emerge from chronic poverty.

During the 1980s major debates raged in many countries on the subject of development economics. Latouche (1986 cited in UNU 1994) wondered whether it would not be better simply to throw out development, on the grounds that it is the product of a technocratic attitude that considers only the economic aspects of the problem. In fact, underdevelopment results from the destruction of the cultural coherence of developing countries by the expansionist and imperialist forces of capitalism.

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Latouche rejects development that depends only on the solutions of economists and technocrats, that is based on copying other cultures and leads to the Westernization and acculturation of third world societies. He defends a historical and cultural approach that sees the solution to these countries' problems by a revival of their own cultural identity. Once their native cultural creativity is reestablished, they will be able to have an independent vision of their situation, identify their own problems, and find appropriate solutions for them.

Seers (1979) also asserts that a low opinion of what development economics had achieved is matched by unambiguous skepticism as to the discipline's chances of survival, which he considers slim for two reasons. For one thing, it has become clear that the economic aspects of development cannot be studied in isolation from the social, political, and cultural factors. A macroeconomic analysis of changes in consumption patterns cannot pretend to be exhaustive unless it is accompanied by a study of foreign cultural influences or the way they are transmitted. Secondly, contrary to the understanding of the term development economics in the 1950s and 1960s, the problems of development are no longer confined to the developing countries. According to Seers, recent changes in the "developed" world, especially since the oil shock of the early 1970s, show that there is no longer a distinct frontier between North and South. Consequently, development economics should be disposed of, and greater emphasis should be placed on the similarities rather than the differences between countries.

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For Amartya Sen (1983), traditional development economics has mistakenly identified economic growth as the end of development. Development should be defined in terms of the quality of people's lives, since people are not only the most important means, but also the ultimate end of development. Given the many aspects of human life - and therefore of development - it is not easy to measure development. Many of the different aspects could of course be measured separately. Several indicators are available with regard to health, nutrition, educational attainment, employment, income and its distribution, environmental pollution, housing conditions, etc. But assessing development on the basis of a set of indicators is only partially satisfactory.

Ekins (1992) also criticizes development economics in that development and GNP growth are not the same thing: *"Development is a qualitative improvement, an achievement of potential. GNP growth is a quantitative increase. There are many examples of GNP growth resulting from, or in, mal-development."* Therefore, the second principle of sustainable development is that *"people and societies must be the subjects of their development, its creators and implementers, based on their knowledge and resources, rather than being its objects or even its victims."*

Albert Hirschman (1981), both an observer and a long-time participant, has examined the causes of the rise and decline of development economics. Hirschman suggests a typology of development theories based on two criteria: the monoeconomics claim (the belief that there is one form of economics that is valid everywhere for all time), and the mutual-benefit claim (the belief that reciprocal advantages are to be found in any bilateral relationship). Using these two criteria, Hirschman distinguishes four types of development theory: orthodox and neoclassical theories, which believe in the universality of economics and reciprocity of benefits on the one hand, and neo-Marxist and dependency theories, which reject these two postulates on the other.

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According to Hirschman (1981), the first proposition was the prerequisite for creating a separate theoretical structure, and the second was *needed "if Western economists were to take a strong interest in the matter."* The right-wing attack, from the neoclassicists, criticized development policies for denying the "*universal validity of economic laws*" and consequently alleged they were the main reason for the misallocation of resources in underdeveloped countries. The left-wing attack (from neo-Marxists and dependency

theorists) argued, among other things, that these "*so-called development policies only created new forms of exploitation and 'dependency.*"

The reactions to these arguments were many and various. Among them Paul Streeten deserves to be mentioned. In an article on "development dichotomies," Streeten (1983) discusses the typology proposed by Hirschman and argues that the theories of development, which at the outset were devised on the basis of broad generalizations and abstractions, as they are based increasingly on concrete examples, is becoming more precise and realistic. He admits that there is a wide range of development theories, but with time this diversity appears both relative and highly complex as it is realized that many of the South's problems are shared by the North, and that few problems are common to all the countries of the South. This diversity is not always an expression of a split in the discipline, dividing it into opposing camps, but may be rather the result of the fact that there are many possible solutions to every social problem. Seen from this angle, Streeten asserts that the dichotomies are not, as Hirschman believed, the reason for the inevitable decline of development economics, but are on the contrary a sign of its great richness and intellectual vitality.

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He further stresses that in many cases the diversity of theories hides the beginnings of convergence, in so far as the tools created by development economists prove useful and efficient in analyzing developed economies. According to Streeten, therefore, we are not witnessing the death of development economics but its transition "*from the 'economics of a special case', viz. Third World economies, to a new global economics of shared problems, but with greater differentiation of approaches and analyses*".

For Todaro (1986) what had to be criticized is traditional economics but not development economics. He argues that development economics has a greater scope than traditional economics, which is concerned primarily with the efficient, least-cost allocation of scarce productive resources; and political economy, which is concerned with the relationship between politics and economics, with special emphasis on the role of power in economic decision making. He strongly criticizes traditional economics or Western neoclassical and neo Keynesian economic theory as having limited relevance for understanding the characteristic features of both the economies and the economic processes of many Third World nations (1986:7-13).

While economic progress is an essential component of development, it is not the only component because development is not purely an economic phenomenon. Development should be perceived as a multidimensional process involving the reorganization and reorientation of entire economic and social systems. It also involves radical changes in institutional, social and administrative structures as well as in popular attitudes, customs and beliefs. The three core values of development are *life-sustenance*, *self-esteem* and *freedom*. He concluded that "*development*" *is both a physical reality and a state of mind* in which society has, through some combination of social, economic and institutional processes, secured the means for obtaining a better life (Ibid: pp. 56-71).

Modern anthropology has presented an increasingly critical attitude towards the concept of development, and there are many different strands of opposition to both conventional development studies and applied anthropology. It has been repeatedly pointed out by a range of critics that the development concept is one which puts a convenient label on a

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highly complex series of variables, the analysis of which raises problems of a theoretical, political and ethical nature (Seymour-Smith, 1986). Anthropological insights can provide a dynamic critique of development and help push thought and practice away from over systematic models and dualities (traditional as opposed to modern; formal as opposed to informal; developed versus underdeveloped) and in more creative directions (Gardner and Lewis, 1996:2).

The most fundamental criticism of theories of modernization is that they fail to understand the real causes of underdevelopment and poverty. Today, there is no single theoretical model which is commonly used to explain development, nor is there any one 'solution' to the problems of underdevelopment (Gardner and Lewis, pp.12-15). In anthropology, postmodernism involves a rejection both of grand theoretical truth and of the wholeness of ethnographic reality. In other words, to a postmodern anthropologist there is no true, complete statement that can be made about a culture (Barnard, 2000:168)

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Post-modernism insists upon diversity and hence allows every culture to be studied primarily from its perspective. It is within this framework of postmodernism that the Oromo indigenous version of development is studied. In fact, the desire to study indigenous knowledge is rising to make it acceptable across disciplines. Many scholars bear on issues of development and indigenous knowledge. The question of how indigenous knowledge helps to solve the problems of development has immense practical and ethical implications, and has also theoretical importance. Indigenous knowledge as defined by Warren (1991*) is the local knowledge – knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society that contrasts with the international knowledge system.*

According to the World Bank (1990), indigenous knowledge encompasses the skills, experiences and insights of people, applied to maintain or improve their livelihood. Significant contributions to global knowledge have originated from indigenous people in many ways. During the modernization era, indigenous knowledge was side-lined by the classic transfer-of-technology model associated with the political right and the dependency, marxist-informed model associated with the political left. The new paradigms that have recently emerged in the post-modernism to challenge the top-down perspectives are the market-liberal, which promotes market forces, and the neopopulist, which advocates participation and empowerment (Sillitoe, 1998:224). Although it was noted that both the market-liberal and the neopopulist paradigms are not mutually exclusive, this study emphasizes more on the neopopulist perspective of the indigenous knowldge.

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In light of this, Kassam (2002:64-81) has studied the Oromo's indigenous concept for development under the title, "ethnotheory, ethnopraxis: Ethnodevelopment in the Oromia Regional State of Ethiopia." Kassam noted that among the Oromo, custodians of the oral traditions possess a highly systematized form of knowledge that is not generally known to ordinary members of the group. According to the study, the word 'development' can be rendered in the Oromo language by the term *finna*; the core meaning of the word can also be said to refer to different forms of fertility such as: *finna namaa*, 'human fertility'; *finna lafaa*, 'fertility of the earth'; *finna horii*, 'fertility of livestock'; *finna baraa*, 'fertility of the times'; and *finna durii*, 'fertility of the past'. She also articulated the Oromo model of growth and development, which served as a point of departure in my research particularly in the analysis of the Oromo development conception.

CHAPTER THREE

Background: Brief Description of the Oromo

Location and Topography

The country of the Oromo used to be called Biyya-Oromo, which literally means the Oromo Country. Oromiya is given to the Oromoland, now part of the Ethiopian Empire by young Oromo nationalists for the independent state to which they aspire, and serves the same purpose and is as justified as 'Ghana', 'Benin', 'Mali', and 'Zimbabwe' (Baxter, 1983:131-132; Melba, 1988:23). Oromiya National Regional State is located in the central part of Ethiopia extending from $3^0$40'N to $10^0$35'N and from $31^0$05'E to $42^0$11'E with a total area of nearly 367,000km^2. It constitutes about one-third of the total land size of the country making it the largest of all the regions. The Oromiya National Regional State has common boarders with Sudan, Kenya and six national regional states. The longest boarder is being shared with the SNNPRS (1860km.) followed by the Somali Regional State (1410km.) (ILRI, 2002:8).

Topographically, Oromiya can be grouped into three parts. The eastern plateau covers West Hararghe, East Hararghe, Arsi, Bale, Borana, and Guji administrative zones. The rift valley is part of the Great Rift Valley extending from Jordan in the north through to Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania to Mozambique in the south that predominately covers East Shoa administrative zone. The western plateau includes North Shoa, West Shoa,

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Southwest Shoa, East Wellega, West Wellega, Illubabor and Jimma administrative zones (Berhanu et al. 1998a cited in ILRI, 2002:8).

Elevation in Oromiya ranges from less than 500 to over 4300 meters above sea level (masl). The highest mountains are concentrated on the Eastern Plateau of the regional state namely Batu in Bale (4377 masl), Kaka, Chilalo, and Arba Guna in Arsi with the height of 4245, 4170, and 3625 masl, respectively. Moreover, Mul'ata in Hararghe (3405 masl), Sellale in North Shoa (3544 masl), and Wenchi in West Shoa (3387 masl) are included in the highest plateau of Oromiya.

As temperature is inversely related to elevation, the mean annual temperature in the high lands varies between 10^0C and 22^0C, while it is between 22^0C and 30^0C in the lowlands. The major rainy season extends from June to September and covers most part of Oromiya while October and May are normally dry. The average amount of rainfall decreases from west to east. Reliability of rainfall is important in the Regional State since livelihood of the rural population particularly the highlanders is based mainly on rain-fed agriculture.

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Population

Until 1994, official statistics did not contain figures on the Oromo population making it difficult for researchers to know the exact population that constitute Oromo in Ethiopia for several decades. However, there have been several estimates as regards the Oromo population. Foot (1913) and Leonard Bloomfield (1933) put the Oromo population at a figure of ten million, while Gene Gragg (1976) has estimated the Oromo population to be

more than ten million of the total 26 million Ethiopian population (Gamta, (1989:i). Similarly, Legesse (1973:7) estimated the Oromo population at eight to ten million.

The Oromo approximately account for 35% of the country's 28 million population making them one of the most numerous people in the whole of Africa (Bartels:1990:13). The Oromo are certainly the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia and make up somewhere between a third to a half of its population with a reasonable estimate of ten million and it could be as high as fifteen million (Baxter, 1983:135). According to Melba (1988:8), the Oromo population constitute 23 million out of 46 million population of the Ethiopian Empire. Huntingford (1955, cited in Legesse, 2000:3) calculated the proportion of the Oromo population to be 42.7% of the country's total population.

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Other authors who have not figured out the number of Oromo population have also endorsed the view that Oromo constitute the dominant people in Ethiopia as well as one of the numerous people in the whole of Africa. For instance, Edward Ullendrof (1960, cited in Legesse, 2000:2) who was ethically deficient in his writing about the Oromo also admitted that Oromo were numerous and far outnumbered the Abyssinians when describing the Oromo expansion as "the gathering momentum of *tidal wave* which, by sheer force of number, was utterly irresistible. Abyssinians … were swallowed up in this vast immigration."

The 1994 Population and Housing Census reported that the total population of Oromiya was 18,732,525, out of which the size of the Oromo population was 15,709,474 with average growth rate of 3.1%. This figure does not include Oromos living in other

Regional States including Finfinne (Addis Ababa), Harar Regional State, and Dire Dawa. The Population Census was contested by many Oromo politicians and political groups such as the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), on the grounds that the ruling Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) Government manipulated the figure deliberately to reduce the share of Oromo representation in the Federal Government structures, which is said to be proportional.

The large size of the Oromo population cannot only be attributed to biological reproduction, but also because of the institutional mechanisms of *Guddifachaa* and *Moggaasaa*. *Guddifachaa* is a cultural process by which, in most instances, childless families adopt children from other families regardless of their ethnic background. *Moggaasaa* is an institutional mechanism by which minority groups are allowed to become members of one of the Oromo clans with which they have established the closest relations.

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In addition, Hassen (1991:93) asserts that the Oromo military strength and social organization helped them to easily unite with war captives while at the same time imparting their complex *Gadaa* system which facilitated the process of Oromonization. At present, it is impossible to distinguish between the so-called Oromo 'proper' and the assimilated groups (Jalata, 1993:16). The Oromo give more attention to one's cultural values and practices than to biological descent in the identification of individuals to one social organization or the other.

History

The Oromo are one of the ancient groups of people living in the Horn of Africa. The Oromo being one of the most numerous nations in Africa enjoy a homogenous culture and share a common language, history and descent. At present, although the Oromo differ in religious practices, and hardly exercise their political and legal systems formally, they also once shared common political, legal and religious institutions. According to the Oromo oral tradition, every group of Oromo traces their origin to a common ancestor. Baxter (1983:131) states, 'each of the several Oromo groups cherishes descent from an eponymous ancestor or family stock named Oromo or Orma. They all claim to be *ilman Orma* – 'descendents' of Orma or the *Orma* family'.

The Oromo who claim their descent from a founding father called *Orma* belong to the Cushitic people with significant differences in color and physical features and inhabited the region for thousands of years (Baissa,1993:83). According to *Gadaa* Melbaa (1988:4), the land of Cush, Nubia or ancient Ethiopia in middle and lower Nile is the home of the Cushitic speakers. Probably the dispersion of Cushitic speakers and their subsequent differentiation into separate linguistic and cultural groups resulted in the various Cushitic nations inhabiting in northeast and east Africa today. The Oromo form one of those Cushitic groups, which spread southwards and then east and west occupying large parts of the Horn of Africa.

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In fact, different authors indicated different places of origin for the Oromo. The area probably recognized as the cradle land of the Oromo is the southeastern grassland of Ethiopia currently known as *Guji* and *Boranaland* (Lewis, 1966:27-46; Legesse, 1973:9; Baxter, 1983:129-149). Melba (1988:7) mentions that some ethnologists and historians indicated the origin of the Oromo to be in the fertile valley of *Madda Walaabu* in the present Bale Administrative Zone of Oromiya. This conclusion, according to Melbaa, was reached mainly on the basis of Oromo oral tradition and scanty anthropological evidence. While some authors pointed to the coastal area of the Horn of Africa, particularly the eastern part of the Somali peninsula, as the most probable place of Oromo origin, others such as Bruce, an English traveler, indicated Sennar in Sudan as the Oromo origin from where they expanded to other places.

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Despite differences in locating the specific area of the origin of the Oromo, these and many other authors have not questioned the fact that Oromo are indigenous to the eastern and northeastern part of Africa. It was, however, the Abyssinian rulers, court historians, monks and their supporters that contend that Oromo were new comers to this part of Africa and try to depict the Oromo as 'invaders' to justify their colonization of the Oromo, which took place between 1870 and 1900 (Jalata, 1993:17; Melbaa1988:4-7). For instance, Aleqa Taye (cited in Melbaa, p.4) alleged that the Oromo migrated from Asia and Madagascar, entered Africa via Mombasa and spread north and eastwards. Even today, despite the fact that the modern colonial empire of Ethiopia which is also known as the new Ethiopian dependent colonial state (Holocomb and Ibssa, 1990:71-144) was created based on the condition present in the 19th and early 20th century, the Abyssinian

elite still sees myths and fables of ancient world to be relevant to the present day life (Megerssa, 2001:480).

According to Hassen (cited in Baxter, 1983:133), Tewedoros (1855-1869) and Johannes IV (1872-1889) campaigned against the Oromo but it was Menelik (1867-1913) who effectively extended his Shoan Kingdom to incorporate the Oromo into his colonial empire. As a consequence, the Abyssinian conquerors confiscated the Oromo land, which constitutes much of Ethiopia's best land (Bartels, 1990:13) and handed over to *neftenyas* (foreign armed settlers) and to the Coptic Church. As the Oromo were pastoralists and agriculturists during the time of conquest they were robbed off the most important means of production – land that completely devastated their economy and forced them to lead a miserable life. The people were reduced to serfs of these colonizers.

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The Amhara settlers had been given much of the best land, which had been taken from the indigenous population particularly in Arsi and Hararghe. Many Oromo, particularly those living in the more fertile areas, were transformed by conquest from free farmers into poor sharecropping tenants (Baxter, 1983:134). It was not only the land, which was distributed, to an army of occupation but also the people were allotted as *gabars* (serfs) to the soldiers in numbers. According to Perham (cited in Holocomb and Ibssa, 1990:118), the number of people allotted to each district commander as *gabars* were from 30 to 80; to each officer – from 7 to 10; and to each soldier – from 2 to 5.

In light of the situation mentioned above, Baxter argued that the designation of pre-revolutionary Ethiopia as a 'feudal state', which might have a limited applicability to the

Amhara and Tigrean states, was misleading when seen from the perspectives of the conquered people – the Oromo and other southerners. Rather Ethiopia was '*a ramshackle...Empire of which all the members were subjects rather than citizens*' (Baxter, 1983:133-134). Hence, Baxter argued that the Oromo movement towards liberation and self-determination could be viewed as part of the continental movement towards decolonization.

Even after the revolution, the Derge that initially appeared to be pro-Oromo because of its dispossession of landlords (Proclamation No 31 of 1975) was later threatened for loosing control over the Oromoland. Thus, the Derge subsequently launched huge plantations and state farms by way of controlling the Oromo and other southerners through stretching strong controlling structures though the local people required the land for their own use. It, moreover, continued to take over vast stretches of land along Wabi Shebele and virgin land of the then Asosa sub-province in Wallaga to settle poor northerners and the urban proletariat (Baxter 1983:134-135).

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The Oromo have begun to exercise the right to self-determination to a limited extent since June 1991 after the Derge was unseated. The Transitional Charter which was followed by the making of the new Constitution recognized the rights of nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia to self-determination including independence (See: Article 2 of the Transitional Period Charter of Ethiopia, 1991; and Article 39 of the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia - FDRE, 1995). This generous promise of the EPRDF – led Government has hardly been exercised when seen from a practical point of view. According to Lata (1999:222), '*the present regime*

informed the peoples that they are entitled to an array of rights while every possible step is taken to curb the exercise of these rights.... In the process, promises made by the governments and laws enacted by them have now come to be viewed with a greater degree of skepticism than in the past'.

Political Organization

Prior to Abyssinian conquest, the Oromo had developed a well articulated and egalitarian system of governance referred to as *Gadaa*. According to Legesse, '*Gadaa is the term employed throughout the Oromo nation in the horn of Africa to refer to the organization of the society into generation sets who succeed each other every eight years in assuming political, military, judicial, legislative and ritual responsibilities*' (Legesse, 2000:31; 1987:1). Regardless of the diversity that exists between the many Oromo dialects, and other aspects of culture and social organization, *Gadaa* happens to be one of the institutions that binds the entire Oromo nation into a coherent system and gives people a common political basis for understanding each other. *Gadaa* organized the Oromo population, specifically men, into five groups known as *Robalee, Duuloo, Birmajii, Michillee* and *Horataa* incorporating persons of agricultural, pastoral and mixed forms of livelihoods.

Bahrey himself (cited in Baxter, 1983:132), who wrote *A History of the Galla*[1] (1590) and also regarded the Oromo as a bad people (Melba, 1988:6), was not able to deny the fact that *Gadaa* was the organization which harnessed Oromo bravery into an

[1] Pejorative name given to the Oromo by the Amhara.

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undefeatable force and maintained a strongly democratic and egalitarian ethos. Under the rules of *Gadaa* no elected official could retain office for longer than eight years. However, the famous *Gadaa* system was gradually and systematically deprived by the Amharas of most of its political and judicial power and reduced to a ritual institution with very little practical functions in the greatest part of Oromiya. The system was best preserved in the Borana Administrative Zone, and, to a lesser extent, among the Guji and parts of Arsi and Shoa. In most parts of Macha land, the weakening of the *Gadaa* system had already taken place before the Amhara conquest (1885-88) through the rise of petty 'kings' (*mootii*) from among the Oromo themselves (Bartels, 1990:15).

There has been a continuous debate as to whether or not the *Gadaa* system can offer some political or practical functions in the contemporary situation. Particularly, the debate between Baxter (1983:132) who thinks that *Gadaa* is unlikely to provide a practical working model to deal with the complexities of a modern nation state, and Legesse who argues on the contrary. According to Legesse (2000:245-260), Oromo democracy (*Gadaa* system) excels modern democracies of Western Europe in some aspects while it suffers deficiencies in other aspects. Distribution of power across age groups and generation and the period of testing the elected leaders are some unique features of the Oromo democracy which are not well developed in Western democratic traditions. However, exclusion of women from formal political participation and leadership; rigidity of the political structure in terms of succession of generations in forty-year cycles; and the absence of some type of voting procedures were discussed as major weaknesses of the Oromo political organizations.

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Gadaa is basically a male institution. However, it cannot function with out women. *Gadaa* embodied the particular code of conduct historically developed and governs the life of every Oromo including the women. Women play an important role in *Gadaa* system although they are not allowed to assume politico-military power. Traditionally, it was women's exclusive right and responsibility to build huts, own them, and largely in control of activities that take place inside these huts. Women are also not prohibited from attending meetings and rituals being held by men outdoors, of course, more often as observers than participants and can directly express their feelings and interests in these meetings for men's considerations in decision-making (Legesse, 1973:20-21). Because of such participation in outdoor meetings, women sometimes excel their husbands in knowledge of ritual, history, genealogy, and social structure that question the view that men exercise exclusive power over the activities that are supposed to be their domain.

There are also cases when women make their feelings known about the subject of deliberations indirectly through using songs. Although women are actively excluded from age-sets and hence from the politico-military structures of *Gadaa* (Legesse, 1973:19-20), Kumsa (1997:119) argues that there was a check and balance mechanisms built into the *Gadaa* system by which *Siiqqee* was institutionalized, and women formed parallel organizations of their own which actively excluded men.

Thus, *Siiqqee* is a woman's institution, which the Oromo women used to defend their rights. It functions hand in hand with the *Gadaa* system as one of its built-in mechanisms of checks and balances (Kumsa, 1997:119). Siiqqee is basically a stick made of a tree called *harooressa* and given to the bride on the day of her marriage symbolizing the

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bride's dignity and respect in the society for the rest of her life. This implies only married women are entitled to have *Siiqqee*. *Siiqqee* is highly honored by the society.

According to the study carried out by the Rift Valley Children and Women's Development Association (RCWDA, 2002:9-22), *Siiqqee* has multiple functions. *Siiqqee* – as a symbol of women's power – is used, among other things, to cease fire between two fighting groups (clans); prevent conflict before it takes place; and punish husbands that are involved in domestic violence particularly during pregnancy and early birth time. Moreover, it is used to punish a rapist; reconcile a husband and a wife that fought because of sexual promiscuity; raise support for the destitute; adopt a child (*Guddifacha*) for childless woman; and pray to Waaqaa (God) during time of difficulty.

Similar to the *Gadaa* system, which was reduced to a ritual institution with limited practical function, successive rulers of the Ethiopian Empire have been counterproductive to the very existence of the *Siiqqee* institution and its advancement. As a result, the institution has completely been relinquished except in some parts of the present Arsi, Bale and Shoa where it has continued to serve some rites and rituals.

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Social Organization

Malinowski (1948) defined social organization in terms of the purposive manner in which humans act upon their environment in order to satisfy their needs, while Radcliffe-Brown (1952) conceived of social organization as the arrangement of roles associated with the statuses which constituted the social structure. It was, however, Firth (1951) who

established the notion of social organization as a distinct analytical level. He distinguished three levels of analysis: a) social structure - the set of rules or principles governing social action, b) social function - the manner in which social relations serve individual or collective ends, c) social organization, which refers to the dynamic, situational and decision-making, or strategic, aspect of social relations (Seymour-Smith, 1986:261-262).

It is normally difficult to make a clear demarcation between peoples' political, economic, social, cultural and religious organizations in traditional African societies. The overlapping political, social, economic and religious functions of *Gadaa* system and Siiqqee institution can be referred from various studies of the Oromo. As briefly discussed earlier, the *Gadaa* system, and Siiqqee institution, which organizes married Oromo women around common issues of concern have tremendous social functions other than their political, economic, and religious significance (See: Legesse, 1973; Megerssa, 1993; Jalata, 1993; Hassen, 1990; Melba, 1988; Kumsa, 1997; RCWDA, 2002). They embrace all aspects of the Oromo life including politics, economics and a wide range of socio-cultural issues, which are quite useful for development if given proper attention (ILRI, 2002:62 - 63).

Social anthropologists, historians and other social scientists have not made a complete study with regards to the Oromo kinship organizations. Some scholars in the field have partially discussed the Oromo social organization by way of studying other aspects of the Oromo life. Although some scholars have accepted the early division of the Oromo into *Borana* and *Barrentu* moieties along kinship organization, they have not agreed as to how

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the division took place and should be understood. Earlier writers designated the *Borana-Barrentu* divisions of the Oromo into the western and the eastern territories of the Oromo region (Huntingford, 1955:11 cited in Legesse, 1973:10).

According to Megerssa (1993:23-24), the division of Oromo into *Borana* and *Barrentu* is one that is the most misunderstood by ethnographers, historians, and most ordinary Oromo who think of *Borana* and *Barrentu* as two founding fathers. The *Borana-Barrentu* division is a mental one designating the division of the social body into right and left respectively. Similarly, Jalata (1993:16) states that the Oromo were organized into two confederations known as *Borana* and *Barrentu* between 12th and 15th centuries and presumably began to expand from their original homeland in different directions.

Megerssa (1993:24) used the meaning of *Borana* and *Barrentu* terms to justify the designation of the former and the later division of the Oromo into West and East respectively. The two terms *Boroo* and *aanaa* from which the term *Borana* was formed together signify 'those towards the west' while *Barrentu*, which was coined from *barii* and *antuu*, terms together designate 'those towards the east'. Thus the terms *Borana* and *Barrentu* stand for the division of the Oromo into west and east, or left and right, constituting the classification of the people into two moieties.

A radically different perspective of the *Borana* and *Barrentu* division comes from Legesse who happened to be one of the most prominent social anthropologists with regard to the Oromo ethnography. According to Legesse (1973:10-11), the appropriate interpretation of *Borana* and *Barrentu* dual organization is not designation of any one

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continuous territory but the name of ancient moieties that have since become and localized throughout the Oromo region. He argues that in traditional Oromo society, it is not the territory rather it is the mobile, dispersed groups (*Gadaa* classes and kinship units) that served as the basis of their social organization.

In the first half of the 16th century the Oromo nation as a whole divided into great moieties called *Borana* and *Barrentu*. The designation of *Borana* in the Western regions and *Barrentu* in the Eastern regions is unlikely to have happened. Moieties in Oromo social structure are non-territorial entities that are completely intertwined and interspersed (Legesse, 2000:xx-xxi). Legesse's assertions are based on the argument that:

a) The *Borana –Barrentu* moieties were not localized as the leaders of the warrior classes who led the northward expansion of the Oromo were sometimes *Borana* and sometimes *Barrentu* as stated in the manuscript of an Ethiopian monk named Bahrey written in 16th century (Legesse, 1973:11).

b) There exists high degree of similarity between the contemporary social organization of the *Borana*, which has two moieties known as *Sabbo* and *Gona* that have completely dispersed throughout *Borana* territory, and the organization of the Oromo into *Borana* and *Barrentu* as a whole in the 16th century (Legesse, 1973:11).

c) Two moieties cannot drift apart and be localized in two different regions without fundamentally changing their character as interacting, balanced, adversarial, or dialectical entities, which remains true whether the moieties are exogamous or not (Legesse, 2000:xx).

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Gadaa Melbaa also upheld the presence of two moieties – *Borana*, senior division of the Oromo and *Barrentu*, junior division of the Oromo – which descended from the two 'houses' (wives) of the person Oromo. Similar to Legesse, Melba (1988:8) argues that in reality there is extensive overlap in the area between different moieties, clans, and other social groups occupied making difficult to associate kinship relations with territorial boundaries.

Although the division of the Oromo into *Borana* and *Barrentu* moieties have been acknowledged by many anthropologists, sociologists, historians and other social scientists that have studied the Oromo, so far none of them was able to present complete genealogical form of the Oromo social organization. Even those who have attempted put the Oromo kinship organization partially and differently. For instance, Jalata (1993:17) only mentioned the *Macha* and *Tulama* sub-division of *Borana* while Megerssa (1993:36) presented the subdivision of *Borana* Oromo as having pairs of three branches namely: *Raya* and *Assebu*, *Macha* and *Tulama*, and *Sabbo* and *Gona*. According to Legesse (1973:11) the *Borana* have two moieties – *Sabbo* and *Gona*. The *Barrentu* sub-division is more confused among some of the authors. For Jalata (1993:17) the *Barrentu* moiety is subdivided into *Humbana*, *Borana*, *Arsi*, *Itu*, and *Karayu*. Megerssa (1994:36), on the other hand, classified the *Barrentu* moiety into pairs of two branches: *Siko* and *Mando*, and *Itu* and *Humbana*.

Custodians of the Oromo culture whom I identified as key informants both from *Tulama* and *Macha* areas had no ambiguity in describing *Macha, Tulama*, *Rayya, Assebo*, *Sabo* and *Gona* as branches of the *Borana* Oromo. Their ambiguity rather relies on whether

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these branches are structurally parallel or one subdivision is higher than the other in the Oromo genealogical order.

On the other hand, many other ethnographers, sociologists and historians who have studied Oromo attempted to list various branches of Oromo without indicating their genealogical relations. According to Melba (1988:8), for example, descendents of *Borana* and *Barrentu* form major Oromo clans and sub-clans that include *Mecha, Tulama, Wollo, Garrii, Gurraa, Arsi, Karrayyu, Itu, Ala, Qalloo, Anniyya, Orma, Akkichuu, Liban, Jillee, Galan, Sooddoo, Gujii* and many others. Baxter (1983:130-131) also notes that the Oromo are made up of a number of branches which include the *Raya, Wollo, Karayu, Afran Kallo, Leqa, Mecha, Tulama, Guji, Arsi, Borana,* and more others.

The other common mistake observable in many of the Oromo literatures dealing with Oromo social organization is related to the use of the term *Borana*. In the contemporary political settings, *Borana* is also the name of a geographical location given to one of the fourteen administrative zones of Oromiya where the *Sabbo* and the *Gona* branches of the *Borana* moiety predominately live. This geographical area used to be called *Borana* province in the previous regimes. Perhaps because of the frequent identification of *Borana* with the geographical naming and also because people living in that part of the geography constitute part of the *Borana* moiety, many of the writers tend to associate the term only with the *Sabbo* and the *Gona* subdivisions.

Legesse (1973, 2000) throughout his writings employed the term *Borana* to refer to the *Sabbo* and the *Gona* branches of the *Borana*. In particular, Legesse (1973:11) stated that

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'*there is a direct and thoroughly instructive parallelism between the contemporary social organization of the Borana and the organization of the Oromo as a whole in the sixteenth century*'. The analogy clearly tells us that similar to the Oromo division into moieties, the *Borana* is subdivided into moiety structures consisting of only *Sabbo* and *Gona*. Other researchers such as Coppock (1993), Bassi (1996), Mengistu (1998), Tach and Irwin (2003), and many others have exclusively applied the term *Borana* to mean a geographical territory where the *Sabbo* and *Gona* divisions of the Borana take hold.

Even Megerssa (1993:168-219) who articulated the division of *Borana* moiety into a pair of three branches employed the term to refer to the *Sabbo* and the *Gona* branches of the *Borana* towards the end of his thesis. Thus, the mistake is not to identify the *Sabo* and the *Gona* with the *Borana* moiety, but the complete reduction of the *Borana* moiety to the *Sabo* and the *Gona* sub-divisions. It should be underlined in the Oromo social organization that *Borana* stands for half of (the senior division) their kinship organization inclusive of *Sabbo* and *Gona, Macha* and *Tulama,* and *Raya* and *Assebo.*

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The Oromo kinship based social organization has remained significantly important in the daily life of the people. It dictates and directs their ways of life in many aspects despite extensive and competitive interventions of modern state hierarchical structures. At present, in most instances, property inheritance, ritual and ceremonial activities, conflict arbitration, marriage arrangement, productive labor mobilization, customary law making processes, resource allocation and utilization are mostly dictated and strongly influenced predominantly by kinship based social organization. This implies that the Oromo social,

economic, political and, to some extent, religious ways of life are characterized by dual structures of tradition and modern state.

Religion

While some anthropologists such as Tylor (1871) define religion as belief in spiritual beings, others question this definition on the ground that religion includes belief in natural phenomena since both belief in spiritual beings and natural phenomena are acquired by means of the same socialization and educational processes. Other anthropologists are interested in the functions of religion rather than its definition. Durkheim, for instance, viewed religion as a social creation, which expresses and reinforces social solidarity. On the contrary, Marx viewed religion as a distorted or ideological reflection created by the interests of a dominant social class meant to neutralize the revolutionary potential of the oppressed class (Seymour - Smith, 1986:242-245).

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Arguing along Durkheim's and Marx's viewpoints of religion and seen from Oromo's historical perspective, religions in the Oromo nation have served both positive and negative functions. The Oromo traditional religion commonly known as *Waaqeffannaa,* which is believed to have existed since mythical times and indigenous to the Oromo and developed through the Oromo ways of socialization had tremendous functions that helped the Oromo develop strong social solidarity and coherence. Legesse (1973:9-10) emphasizes the role that the Oromo religion plays in terms of bringing the Oromo pilgrims together from as far as Wallaga and Shoa to Boranaland to take part in the

anointment (*muudaa*) of *Borana* religious leaders. He further states that the *muudaa* religious ceremony had special significance since it lies at the point of intersection between the moiety system and the *Gadaa* system. It was also noted that the Oromo traditional religion through its Qaalluu institution serves as preserver and protector of the Oromo culture (Melba, 1988:19).

The Qaalluu institution was weakened with the advent of colonialism to Oromiya, which was accompanied by Orthodox Christianity - the dominant religion of the Amhara conquerors. As a result contact between various Oromo groups was severely affected. Traditional ritual centers and buildings were instantaneously replaced by the Orthodox Church. Orthodox Christianity has imposed the Amhara values and culture on the Oromo that were forced to become Christians. According to Melba (1988:22), despite hundreds of years of resistance in defense of their traditional religion, significant number of the Oromo eventually accepted Islam as a reaction to Abyssinian Orthodox Christianity, which also affected the Oromo ways of life in many ways.

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Despite the fact that the greatest majority of the Oromo has accepted Christianity and Islam, many of them have continued to practice their traditional religion. Bartels (1990:15) reaffirmed that *'whether they became Christians or Muslims, the Oromo's traditional modes of experiencing the divine have continued almost unaffected, in spite of the fact that several rituals and social institutions in which it was expressed, have been very diminished or apparently submerged in new rituals cloaks*'. Thus, dualism in religion is rather a rule than exception among the Oromo.

Economy

Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy of the Oromo People. Agriculture accounts for 70% of Oromiya's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and 92.2% of employment. The share of services and industry to the Region's GDP is 24% and 6%, respectively, while they account for 6.5% and 1.3% of employment, respectively. The region's major crop production accounts for about 51% of the total production in Ethiopia and is considered the source of the country's agricultural surplus. The region also produces 63% of the national exports and is a major source of raw materials for domestic industries (Berhanu et. al. 1998a cited in ILRI, 2002:12-13).

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Subsistence agriculture is the means of livelihood for almost all people living in rural areas of Oromiya that account for 88.2 % (CSA, 1994). One can broadly classify the economy of the Oromo into mixed agriculture (livestock rearing and crop production) of the highlanders, and pastoral economy exclusively specialized in livestock production predominately among the lowlanders of the south and southeast of the Oromo Region. Megerssa (1993:38) classified the Oromo economic activity into the pastoral economy in which the Oromo engage in cattle and/or camel raising; the agro-pastoral economy in which the precarious pastoral economy is supplemented by seasonal cultivation; and the agricultural economy, in which the Oromo depend on the cultivation of land with some livestock production. The last two classifications can, however, merge together under agro-pastoralism as both involve simultaneous production of crop and livestock but at varying degree – the former more of livestock rearing and the latter more of crop production.

Livestock and livestock products play an important role in the economic, social and cultural life of the Oromo. Oromiya has immense resource of livestock population with variations across administrative zones. The Regional State is estimated to have nearly 15.5 million cattle, 7.4 million small ruminants (sheep and goats), 2.2 million equine, 90 thousand camels, and over 10 million poultry under private holdings (OESPO, 2000:xvi). Some studies even indicate prevalence of higher livestock population in the Region. If we take the camel population in the then Arero province and *Borana* province alone, it is about 700,000 (Mengistu, 1998:13).

Even though a higher prevalence of livestock is found in the highland with the exceptions of goats and camels (Mengistu, 1998:2-3), the lowland livestock play considerable role in the economy of the Oromo. Particularly, the *Borana* rangeland is one of the drier areas assumed to be the best cattle rangeland even in Africa (UNDP/RRC, 1984; JEPSS, 1983; cited in Mengistu, 1998:2). In Oromiya, pastoral areas are found in the lowland districts of East Hararghe, West Haraghe, Borana, Bale and East Shoa Administrative Zones. The rangeland coverage of pastoral areas constitutes over 34% of the total area of the Oromo Region (OESPO, 2000:xxix).

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Of the Oromiya's estimated total area of about 367,000km^2, cultivated land and grazing land constitute 19.4% and 11.9%, respectively. The remaining over two-third of the land is classified into forest (7.3%), woodland and shrub land (48.8%), afro-alpine vegetation (0.5%), water body and swampy (1.1%), rock and wasteland (3.3%), and others (7.4%) (OESPO, 2000:xvi). Because of diverse ecology and favorable climatic condition,

different crops such as wheat, barley, *teff*[2], sorghum, corn, millet, and others are grown. Moreover, varieties of root crops, pulses, oil crops, fruit trees, spices and vegetables are also produced. The major exportable cash crops, coffee and *chat* (*Catha edulis*), are mainly grown in Oromiya (ILRI, 2002:11).

Despite the mismanagement and continuous destruction over several decades, the forests of Oromiya are still a source of good timber production. Oromiya is also endowed with important mineral resources such as gold, silver, platinum, sulfur, iron-ore and others. Major rivers of Oromiya are major sources of electric power and energy apart from their huge potentials for irrigation schemes. Many lakes, hot springs, different landscapes and plants together with different species of wild animals and various types of birds make up tremendous potentials for the development of the tourism industry in the Region.

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Despite the rich natural resource endowment of the Oromo nation and vast potential for (agricultural) development, the majority of the Oromo suffers from daunting poverty. Poverty, as defined by the World Bank, is pronounced deprivation in well-being. Poverty is not only material deprivation but also low achievement in education and health. Broadly seen, the notion of poverty includes vulnerability and exposure to risk-and voicelessness and powerlessness (World Bank, 2001:15). Prevailing economic and social situation signal highly difficult life condition in Oromiya.

Despite the fact that agriculture constitutes a lion's share of the regional economy, the sector itself is backward and intertwined with multiple problems. Land degradation

[2] An endemic crop used to make bread locally known as *Budeena*.

caused by different human-induced and natural factors stands out as one core impediment to agricultural development. Extreme diversity in natural resources and ecological conditions within the region causes the processes of land degradation to vary significantly. Fertile soils and abundant rainfall attracted many farmers to the region's highlands. As soil degradation in the northern highlands of Ethiopia advanced, people moved southwards, particularly to the Oromiya highlands. This situation is still putting pressure on the highlands of the region, increased demand for trees/forests for construction and fuel, expansion of farmlands to steep and marginal areas have also contributed to land degradation. The present extent of soil degradation over a very large area of Hararghe highlands, North and East Shoa, Wellega, Arsi and other administrative zones is evidence of the unabated spread of soil degradation in Oromiya. Land degradation not only impacts crop and livestock productivity but also water resources on which the welfare of human life depends (ILRI, 2002:18).

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Apart from land degradation, there are other factors that have contributed to failure in agricultural economy in the region as well as in the country. Crop and livestock production has seriously been affected due to erratic and unpredictable nature of rainfall upon which the region's agriculture depends as a major source of moisture. Moreover, limited source of alternative incomes, high population growth, limited provision of new technologies, lack of product diversification and inadequate agricultural market information system, limited capacity of development practitioners in planning and implementation, and limited access to credit facilities are amongst major constraints to the development of the agrarian economy (NCFS, 2003:4-5).

Since late 1950's, successive leaders of the Ethiopian Empire have introduced different development policies, programs and plans in order to develop the agricultural sector and gradually transform into the industrial economy. During the feudal system (when the Oromo were considered as subjects, not as citizens), three successive Five Year Development Plans, the first 1957 – 1961, the second 1962 – 1967, and the third 1968 – 1973 were launched. Implementation of these plans either totally neglected peasant agriculture, or evicted small peasant farmers from their land, or widened income inequality as large-scale landlords benefited from the interventions at the expense of poor farmers.

The Derge, which nationalized land and industrial enterprises being guided by the socialist ideology, also drafted national development plans and implementation. It allocated huge resources for the establishment of large state farms (which covers only 5% of the cultivated land) giving little attention to private smallholder, which accounted for about 95% of the total cultivated land. Development of large-scale state farms ended up in complete failure.

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Although sporadic achievements have been registered in terms of GDP growth at the national level after the Derge (3.2 per cent in the first two years, 10.6 per cent in 1995-96, and 6.5 per cent in 1996-97), there has never been a steady and sustainable economic development in the last decade. Hence, the country has partly continued to rely on food aid. Oromiya, which is considered to have high potential for agricultural production, has sustained an average of 1.4 million people under relief food assistance program for the last decade (1994 –2003) (NCFS, 2003:3). The extent and severity of the problem has

continuously been scaling up over a period of time despite Agricultural Development-Led Industrialization (ADLI), which is regarded as a long-term economic development strategy, and the Food Security Strategy that focuses on increasing food availability, improving entitlement to food, and enhancing emergency response capabilities.

Regardless of differences in their political ideologies and development policies and strategies they claim to pursue, successive leaders of the Empire share many commonalties that have hampered the economic development of the Oromo Region as well as the country at large, amongst which the following worth mentioning:

a) All successive governments of the Empire regard themselves as the sole actors of the country's economic development, and consider nations, nationalities and peoples as ultimate recipients of their development policies and plans allowing no or limited opportunity for the people to play active role in the development process. They tend to control the nitty-gritty of development activities rather than facilitating them. Peoples' various institutions, knowledge, skills, and experiences are undermined and occasionally seen as barriers to 'modern' economic development rather than being considered as important resources for development. Thus, throughout the economic history of the country, people who are supposed to actively participate have become alien to development.

b) These governments have developed explicit and implicit policies as to who should benefit from the development. The uncontestable dichotomy of the north (Abyssinians) and the south is clearly apparent when it comes to sharing the benefits

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of development. If not whole, the greatest share of the benefits goes unjustifiably to the northerners at the expense of the Oromo and other southerners. It is common to observe that the northerners have much better chances to access educational facilities, and employment opportunities. The fact that majority of entrepreneurs and businesspersons have almost exclusively been from among the northerners further validates the partiality of these governments to the people they belong. The Oromo and the southerners have been marginalized not only from political participation, but also from the socio-economic benefits since the formation of the Empire in the second half of the 19th century.

c) Previous development practices and experiences have hardly been considered upon the change of one regime by the other. After overthrowing the Emperor, the Derge Regime came up with completely new development policies and strategies along the new socialist path of development without giving any attention to previous development experiences. The present regime in turn began its development policies and programs without giving due regard to previous experiences. Thus, instead of building on previous development performances that could be twisted along their new political ideologies, successive new governments tend to end up making the country a testing ground for new development policies, strategies and practices. Seen from an economic perspective alone, no evidence can be obtained justifying that succeeding governments have remarkably achieved better economic performances than their predecessors.

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d) Successive development policies and strategies tend to be problem solving types rather than envisioning development within the overall political, social and cultural contexts of the country as well as the global context. Peoples have existed and continue to exist regardless of the type of the government they have. Their existence is not merly incidental and solely depends on what their governments offer. They have cumulative experiences doing development work, which legitimizes that government roles should be reduced to facilitation and should be oriented towards accompanying people's development.

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CHAPTER FOUR

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE TULAMA

Kinship Structure

When I began to find out the Oromo development perception, which is the core of this study, I never thought of studying the Tulama social organization. Soon after the start of my research, I came to realize that the Tulama social organization and its various kinship units have a much wider array of functions. Kinship units often serve as basic units of production and political representation, and for the worship of spiritual beings. They dictate and guide the day-to-day ways of life of the Oromo including their development actions; division of labor between different age groups and sex; resource (land) possession, distribution and transfer; labor and productive resource mobilization; and their ways of thinking towards development. Thus, I was convinced that understanding the social organization of Tulama would be a good point of departure to explore their development thinking.

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The Oromo kinship structure has several levels. In some instances, these levels go up to ten steps. The commonly known levels in the Oromo kinship structure are *Ibbida* – household, *Warra* – comparable to minimal lineage, *Balbala* – comparable to minor lineage, *Mana* – comparable to major lineage, *Gosa* – comparable to maximal lineage, sub-clan and clan, *Lammi* – higher level of the Oromo kinship structure such as moiety and beyond. There exists some degree of overlap in using these terminologies particularly

amongst the Macha and the Tulama Oromo. The most commonly used term in identifying an individual to a particular kinship grouping is *Gosa*. When one is asked to tell his/her *Gosa* - '*Gosti maali?*', meaning 'to which clan do you belong?', he/she may respond, for example, saying Tulama! If one is interested in knowing the details he may continue asking '*Tulama keessattoo?*'- What within Tulama? The respondent may say '*Galan*'! That way one can proceed until he gets to know the minimal lineage of the person instead of asking his/her *mana, balbala* or *warra.* In the process of self-identification, one usually begins with higher level of the kinship grouping and goes to lower level sequentially. In kinship group identification, it is also common to use such term as *mana* and *warra* but not in the strict sense of describing levels as they are supposed to be.

I spent considerably significant time discussing the issue of the Oromo kinship organization with tens of Oromos both from Tulama and Macha who are regarded as custodians of the culture. Each of the informants was able to provide me with limited information – part of the kinship units. It was during group discussions that an attempt was made to construct more or less complete kinship structure of the Tulama division of Oromo.

Tulama is part and parcel of the Borana moiety, which constitutes the senior division (*Angafa*) of the Oromo. The second half of the Oromo called *Barrentu* is regarded as junior (*Quxusuu*) division. There has been no study that reveals complete kinship structure of either the Oromo as a whole or one of the higher divisions. There are some scanty research findings that reveal that Macha and Tulama have directly descended from Borana (Megerssa, 1994:36; and Jalata 1993:17). Many of the informants I interviewed

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who usually tend to trace every Oromo group organized along kinship line to a common ancestors have noted that Macha and Tulama were not immediate descendents of the *Borana* moiety.

In the traditional Oromo blessing (*Eebba*), elders, interalia, recite who they are at the start by referring to their ancestral fathers. In fact, the depth of ancestral fathers to be recited can vary depending on the situation. This recitation usually gives good indication as to which bigger division of the Oromo a particular kinship group belongs. In the Tulama case the deepest ancestral father recited is *Boruu Guyyee*, who was a spiritual leader (*Ayyantuu*) once up on a time. The following is how the Tulama Oromo get used to recitation of ancestral fathers during the start of blessing:

Ayyee Waaq! Ayyee Waaq!	Ho God! Ho God!
Waaqa Boruu Guyyee	Creator of *Boruu Guyyee,*
Guyyee Hiddoo	*Guyyee* (the son of) *Hiddo,*
Hiddattii Boranaa	Our kinship line is Borana,
Fincaan Tulama sadanii…	The three descendents (urines) of Tulama…

This recitation clearly tells us that the Tulama belongs to the bigger division of the Oromo called *Borana* without specifying at what level of the kinship structure the linkage was established. The elders can also shorten the depth of recitation of ancestral fathers and limit to the senior kinship group within Tulama kinship organization by saying:

Ayyee Waaq! Ayyee Waaq!	Ho God! Ho God!
Hayyuu Maaruu Kuraa	The honorable *Maaruu,* the son of *Kuraa*
Kuraa Jiddaa	*Kuraa* the son of *Jidda* (senior kinship group)

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Fiincaan Tulama sadanii... The three descendents (urines) of Tulama, etc.

In my journey of exploration of the Tulama kinship organization, I encountered different and seemingly contradictory views. For instance, there are three opinions with regard to separation of the Macha and the Tulama subdivisions and defining their level within the overall Oromo kinship structure:

1. According to oral history, Macha and Tulama belong to *Rayya* who is regarded as their common father and believed to descend from the Borana division of the Oromo. *Rayya* had two wives called *Akkittoo* and *Siree* who were considered to be mothers of Macha and Tulama, respectively. People believe that the two 'houses' or families broke up along their matrilineal line. The traditional saying, "*Akkittoon Machaan citee Sireen Tulamaan citee*", – meaning Macha of *Akkittoo* separated from Tulama of *Siree* – signifies that the two 'houses' i.e., *Akkittoo* family and *Siree* family to which Macha and Tulama belong, respectively drifted apart and formed dual kinship groupings called Macha and Tulama.
2. On the other hand, many of the oral historians both from the Macha and the Tulama sides repeatedly refer to the term Tulama *Nagawo* in their discussion as if Tulama was the son of *Nagawo*. This view contradicts with the first explanation because Tulama as a person cannot have two biological fathers at a time when seen from the Oromo culture. This view also strongly challenges the belief that *Rayya* is the name of a person who once happened to be an ancestral father.
3. All informants indisputably acknowledge that the Macha and the Tulama divisions belong to the senior division of Oromo known as Borana. This implies that Macha

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and Tulama are supposedly descendents of the Borana moiety. But any of the informants was not able to establish a link between Borana moiety and the Macha and Tulama subdivisions. If Borana were the founding father as people traditionally think of, Macha and Tulama should have been his children, and hence a direct link could have been established. Borana has not been considered as a person who once happed to be the father of Macha and Tulama throughout the discussion, nor have the informants explained how Macha and Tulama descended from Borana.

By making inference to the above explanations, it becomes very difficult to associate various Oromo kinship groups to the name of ancestral fathers. In the Oromo social organization, names of kinship groups do not necessarily represent ancestral persons. Perhaps, *Rayya* is not the name of an ancestral father but the name of one of the divisions of Borana moiety from which the Macha and the Tulama groups broke up and emerged. This case implies that the Macha and the Tulama subdivisions might not be direct descendents of the Borana Moiety, but would remain Borana at lower level of the kinship structure.

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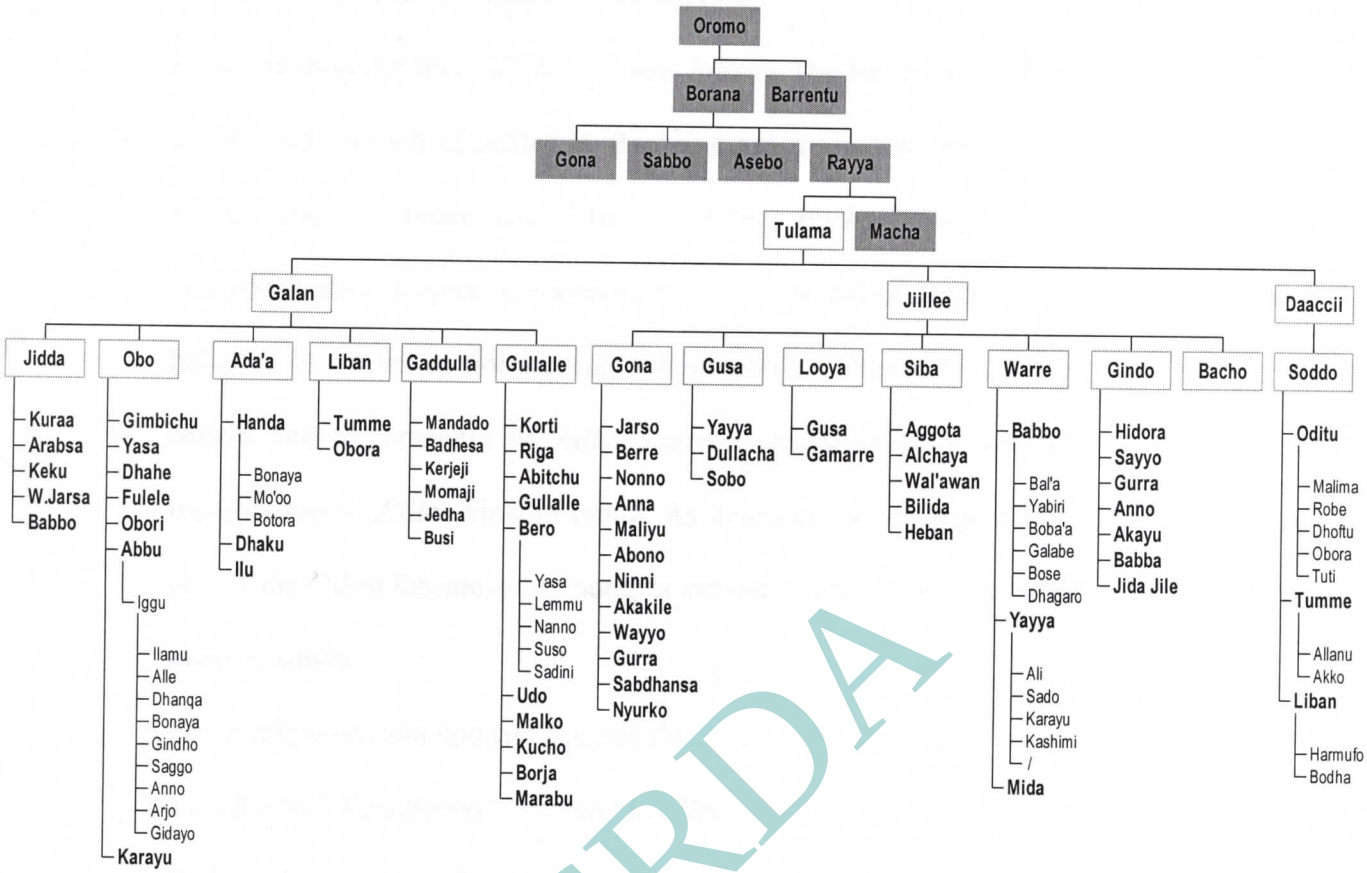
The Oromo construct kinship groupings, roles and relationships by tracing descent through the male line. However, there are situations where matrilineal line served as a basis for forming kinship groupings. Split along matrilineal line is not limited to Macha and Tulama alone. According to Bayisa Jima, in the Macha case, *Kuttaayye* was said to have had seven children (*Torban Kuttaayyee*), from his two wives called *Galan* and *Buluudoo*. *Galan* gave birth to five children (*shanan Galan*), and *Buluudoo* had two children (*lamaan Buluudoo*). The *shanan Galan -Hidhaabuu, Burra, Malliyyuu, Macha*

and *Itu* and the *lamaan Buluudoo – Daada* and *Abeebee* altogether constitute *torban Kuttaayyee*. People belonging to these kinship groups quite often refer to the matrilineal line as a basis for kinship groupings. The two sub-clans of Arsi known as *Utaa* and *Waayyuu* are classifed along matrilineal line since the two names – *Utaa* and *Waayyuu* – are believed to be the name of two mothers. It is also common to observe among the *Sabbo* and *Gona* sub-clans of the Borana Oromo to trace one's major lineage (*Mana*) along matrilineal line.

The Tulama and the Macha kinship divisions, which are categorized on the horizontal axis, are subdivided into many lower level groups. Accordingly, the Tulama kinship division is classified into three major groups commonly known as '*Fincaan Tulama Sadanii*' – which literally means the three 'urine' of Tulama. The word *fincaan* in this case signifies 'sperm' and denotes people of the same 'gene'. These three kinship groups are *Galaan, Jiillee,* and *Daaccii*. These groups are again subdivided into subgroups. Subgroups of *Galan* are *Jiddaa, Obo, Ada'aa, Liban, Gaaddullaa* and *Gullallee*. *Goona, Guusa, Looyaa, Siibaa, Warree, Gindoo* and *Bacho* subgroups constitute the *Jiillee* kinship group. Only *Soddoo* subgroup is said to have descended from *Daaccii* kinship group. (Lower branches of the Tulama kinship structure can be referred from the diagram below.)

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Tulama Kinship Structure



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One surprising aspect of the Oromo kinship structure is the fact that people very well know the number of branches of every kinship group. The numbers are used as prefix to the name of a particular kinship group. For instance, people would call *Jaan-Galan, Torban-Oboo, Kurnaan-Gullallee, Shanan-Guusaa, Sadan-Soddoo* etc. as indicated in the Tulama kinship structure. Prefixes before names of kinship groups such as *Jaan* (the six), *Torban* (the seven), *Kurnaan* (the ten), *Shanaan* (the five), *Sadan* (the three) are numbers indicating size of branches of respective kinship group. Usually confusion does not arise as regards the number of branches that constitute certain kinship group but identifying who they are and naming those branches are sometimes controversial even among traditional historians.

The only ambiguity I encountered in knowing the number of branches is that of *Jiillee* kinship group. The six *Jiillee* (*jaan Jiillee*) is frequented by many of the informants while some mention the seven *Jiillee* (*torban Jiillee*). The latter group of informants argues that the seventh branch of *Jiillee* is *Bacho*, a subgroup that became deviant for failing to respect law and order. Dori Erba states that *Bacho* being one of the junior kinship subgroups stole scepter-like symbol of authority called *Bokkuu* from *Goona*, which is believed to be the senior kinship subgroup from among the *Jiillee* branches. For this reason, the six branches of *Jiillee* imposed social sanction against *Bacho* and denied membership to *Jiillee* kinship group. As evidence to this argument, informants reiterate one of the oldest Oromo songs sung in memory of the incidence, which is well known to many Oromos:

Yaa Bachoo yaa Bachoo yaa Bachoo Jillataa

You *Bacho!* You *Bacho!* The son of *Jiillee*

Waljalachaa olii, waldhabuun dingata

No matter how much you love each other, missing each other is incidental

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In the Oromo culture, social sanction would remain operational for definite period of time in most instances. In this particular case, however, the problem remained unsolved because of the weakening of the *Gadaa* system, which is supposed to mediate such occurrences. I was informed that some preliminary activities have already begun by some group of elders to enable *Bacho* subgroup to resume its former position in *Jiillee* kinship group. In the classification of kinship groups to lower subgroups and units no similar pattern can be observed as far as the number of branches is concerned. Nevertheless, in the Tulama kinship organization the number of subsequent lower branches increases by

about fivefold. For example, the three Tulama kinship groups were divided into 14 subgroups, which in turn were further diverged into 74 lower units, etc.

In the Oromo kinship organization, it is not uncommon to observe identical names of kinship groups along different lines of the kinship structure. *Galan* appears both in the Tulama and the Macha kinship structure. But the Tulama *Galan*, which is classified into six kinship groups and the Macha *Galan*, which is assorted into five kinship groups are quite different. While the Tulama *Galan* is traced through agnatic descent, the Macha *Galan* is traced matrilineally. Even within Tulama kinship structure, identical names appear at different levels. *Liban* is one of *Galan's* subgroups while it appears along *Daaccii* line but at lower level than the former *Liban*. *Karrayyuu* appears both under *Galan* and *Jiillee* but again at different levels of the kinship structure. More surprisingly, the same name can occur at group and subgroup level along one kinship line. For instance, out of the ten small divisions of *Gullallee* kinship subgroup, one remains *Gullallee* itself. Hence, *Gullallee* appears at two levels along same kinship line. There is no clear argument as to why names of kinship groups repeatedly appear along different kinship lines in the Oromo kinship structure. Perhaps, this could be because of the dynamic situations created due to population movement. For instance, while the eldest son in the family is culturally allowed to inherit his parents' homestead, younger brothers are insisted to look for other places of settlement. That is why people belonging to one kinship group might drift apart and join other social groups while maintaining their original group name.

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One of the challenges I faced during my inquiry of understanding the Tulama kinship organization was to be able to find out why the Oromo, particularly the Tulama Oromo, traditionally organized themselves the way they are now and how these forms of social organization took place. In any of the Oromo literature I reviewed, I did not come across a research finding that attempts to respond to the WHY and the HOW questions.

Of course, little is known as to for what reasons such kinship organization took place among the Oromo. Some reasons given to justify the split of Oromo clans into different smaller kinship groups are to certain extent similar to that of the Yanomamo adoptive strategy of trekking. Many anthropologists regard the Yanomamo, who live in almost complete seclusion in the Amazon rain forests of South America, as the last culture to have come in contact with the modern world. They developed an adoptive behavior of trekking to combat depletion of their food supply. Trekking is an extended camping trip that allows the Yanomamo to explore and begin cultivation of new garden sites where they would eventually found a new village. This permits the population to split preventing overpopulation (http://lucy.ukc.ac.uk/EthnoAtlas/Hmar/Cult_dir/Culture).

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According to a group of oral historians and custodians of the Oromo culture I held discussion with at Meki, the split of bigger Oromo kinship groups to smaller groups took place, interalia, for four interdependent reasons. First, since the Oromo were by and large cattle herders in the past, they used to move from place to place in search of pastureland and water for their livestock. The need for split arises, as the number of population and livestock increase and more pastureland is required. Thus, scarcity of resource particularly of land was one major factor for bigger kinship groups to break into two or

more subgroups and presumably expand in different directions. As the number of livestock multiplies much faster than human beings, the need for wider grazing land and water was substantially high being a critical juncture for people belonging to same group to drift apart in different directions.

The fact that as the Oromo ways of life shifted from pastoral economy to sedentary agriculture, classification of kinship groups into further lower units has substantially been reduced or completely abandoned. This clearly demonstrates the close association between resources particularly land on the one hand, and formation of smaller kinship groupings on the other. Such economic-oriented driving force for breaking up of bigger kinship groups into smaller ones was enforced by *Gadaa* (particularly by the *Kuusaa* grade that provides defense service) since *Gadaa* classes and kinship units have been interlocked and served as the basis of the Oromo social organization (Legesse, 1973:11).

Secondly, as the number of population in a particular kinship group increases and the number of livestock multiplies, various competing interests emerge threatening peace and stability of the group and making it difficult to enforce law and order to control disruptive behavior among group members through imposing social sanctions and exclusions. This situation necessitated bigger groups to divide into smaller groups so that law enforcement could better be implemented while at the same time the divisions served as conflict prevention mechanism.

Thirdly, such continuous divisions of the Oromo kinship groups into smaller groups were more importantly meant to facilitate marriage, which is exogamous among the Oromo.

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Marriage is possible only between different kinship groups and hence with the increase in population size in one kinship group, a need arises for split to make marriage possible. It should be noted here that while kinship groupings facilitate exogamous type of marriage, such marriage in turn played important role in creating strong ties among different kinship groups.

Finally, there were times when political rivalries among different groups of the same *Gadaa* class became causes for splitting kinship groups to further lower units. Existing historical evidences support this view in that it was in the 16th century that one system of *Gadaa* classes governed over a major part of the Oromo. Between the 17th and 19th centuries as their territorial areas expanded, however, the major divisions of the society drifted apart along kinship line, each evolving slightly different versions of the same institutions while maintaining relations through the office of *abbaa muda* (the father of anointment) (Legesse, 1973:8; and Jalata, 1993:20). Such rivalry, however, did not lead to violent conflicts and hence separation was used to take place with some degree of consensus among groups without compromising the rule of *Gadaa* and its governing principles.

The presumption that different rival individuals would evolve into subgroups within the bigger group and might cause conflict that ultimately results in formation of smaller autonomous groups is highly unlikely in the Oromo case. If violent conflicts were the basis for separation, smaller groups could have been adversarial to each other and hence *Gadaa*, as opposed to Legesse's (2000:31) assertion, could not have bound the entire

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Oromo nation into a coherent system and given a common political basis for understanding each other.

This functionalist approach for explaining why larger kinship groups drift apart to smaller ones is not adequate enough since human relations can never be understood mechanistically. Relations between people are dynamic and involve the interplay of several factors, which could partly trigger separation of kinship groups into small divisions other than the above-mentioned factors and partly cement existing group unity and solidarity.

The other formidable task in the Tulama kinship structure relates to understanding strategies employed for a bigger kinship group to break into smaller groups. Such division into smaller segments cannot happen randomly. There should be some internal logic applied and pursued in the process of separation. There has been no evidence indicating that such separation takes place ritualistically although during the separation each group is endowed with status and authority that have important roles and functions in various rituals. For instance, one of the smaller groups from among the lower kinship groups that were drifted apart from a bigger kinship group would always become senior (*Angafa*) for the rest.

Custodians of the Oromo culture assert that, in most instances, separation of smaller kinship groups from major group takes place peacefully and through participatory discussions. According to Lemma Hunde, the Oromo usually prefer to assemble on top of hills where they can observe and notice as wider areas of their environs as possible. Hills

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are strategic locations for Oromos to exchange information and make decisions about utilization of resources around them. Perhaps, this could be one of the reasons why hills are ritual centers in many instances. Hills normally serve as points of reference to locate the direction each and every subgroup including its livestock is supposed to occupy. Because of such situation, many kinship groups or subgroups call the newly occupied places after the name of their respective kinship.

Names of kinship groups and names of individuals quite often overlap. Perhaps, kinship group could be named after an individual that has gained high degree of acceptance because of some remarkable achievement or because of culturally prescribed privileges offered by the society for being senior (*Angafa*). In the Tulama Oromo it is quite common to detect many places and localities called after major and minor kinship groups. To mention some, places such as *Ada'a, Liban, Jidda, Gimbitchu, Abbu, Soddo, Warra Jaarso, Gullalle,* and *Bacho* are some of the localities named after the name of kinship groups that predominately settled in those places. Since the Oromo trace descent through patrilineal line, marriage can hardly affect composition of members of any kinship group although matrilineal lines could have important roles in the formation of kinship groupings. That is why people can locate the predominant settlement areas of major kinship groups without difficulty. This evidence further validates the view that Oromo kinship organization is territorial. As opposed to Legesse's argument (2000:xx), kinship groups can break apart and be localized in different localities without fundamentally changing their character. This feature may be unique to the Oromo in that it is the *Gadaa* system that binds different Oromo kinship groups together and shapes their character.

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4.2 *Gadaa* and *Siiqqee*

The other crucial form of the Tulama social organization is *Gadaa* system. *Gadaa*, as repeatedly stated, is a system that organizes the Oromo people particularly of men into age-set groups that succeed each other every eight years in assuming subsequent level of social and political responsibility (Legesse, 1973). There are five *Gadaa* classes in Tulama, namely *Birmajii, Melbaa, Muudana, Dhalchisa, Roobale. Gadaa* supposedly organizes men in the same age groups into these five *Gadaa* classes. According to the *Gadaa* system, a father and a son should belong to the same *Gadaa* class but with the time span difference of 40 years. Thus, in the ideal situation there should be an age difference of 40 years between a father and a son to succeed each other in assuming political and military power.

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Each *Gadaa* class assumes political and military power for eight years and remains passive for 32 years until the other four *Gadaa* classes exercise their political and military powers. However, when a particular *Gadaa* class is inactive in assuming political and military power for 32 years, it does not mean that those members of the *Gadaa* class do not do anything. Since birth, members of same *Gadaa* class change their status every eight years – what Legesse (1973) calls *Gadaa* grade or Van Gennep (Seymour-Smith, 1986:248) terms as rites of passage. There are eleven *Gadaa* grades that every man passes through in his lifetime. These are *Dabballee, Follee (Gamee Xixiqqaa), Qondaala (Gammee Gurguddaa), Kuusa, Raaba Doorii, Gadaaa, Yuba I, Yuba II, Yuba III, Gadaamoojjii,* and *Jaarsa* (Melba, 1988:11). *Gadaa* prescribes activities to members of a particular *Gadaa* class at every subsequent *Gadaa* grade.

In the Tulama *Gadaa* system, however, it is common to see people from different age categories belonging to one *Gadaa* grade. Many people in their fifties and sixties become members of the first *Gadaa* grade which is supposed to be for children under eight. This is because of the demographic factor that failed to keep pace with the system over a period of time. For this age-set system to perfectly function, a man should be 'allowed' to give birth to male children when he is between 40 and 48. According to the Oromo viewpoint, which could be deduced from the *Gadaa* grades, men are believed to be physically fit, psychologically confident, intellectually competent and morally responsible in their forties and hence it is during this span of time that they can deliver the best of their capabilities in serving the people.

Gadaa organizes all Oromo men across all kinship groups no matter what the level of the Oromo kinship structure we are concerned about. Thus, members of every kinship group at every level of the Oromo kinship structure are divided into five *Gadaa* classes. Like in many other parts of Oromo, the function of *Gadaa* among the Tulama society has been drastically reduced and *Gadaa* as a system of governance has been denied recognition with the emergence of the modern Empire State. Legesse Ayana emphasizes that there were times during the Emperor's Regime when *Gadaa* was completely denounced by the ruling elite not to be practiced even for ritual purpose. Despite the continuous suppression of *Gadaa* system by successive rulers of the Empire for over a century, it has managed to survive as a parallel governing structure to the modern Empire State structure playing a critical role in the social, economic and cultural life of the Tulama Oromo.

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The Oromo view peace not only as a precondition, but also as an inescapable part of their social cohesion and development process. That is why *nagaa*, which literally means peace is the most frequently used term in the daily life of the Oromo. It would be a wonder if there exists a term which is so frequently used as *nagaa* in the Oromo life. *Nagaa* is the most repeatedly used word during exchange of salutations and information, community meetings, conflict arbitration, marriage and other ceremonies, and during any collective undertaking which often begins and ends with traditional blessing. In this regard, *Gadaa* plays an extraordinary role in peace building and conflict resolution among the Oromo as well as between the Oromo and other peoples who are in close contact with the Oromo. In addition to being one of the universals that bind the entire Oromo together, the *Gadaa* system has become to be recognized as a pan-Oromo symbol of identity.

One interesting situation observable in the study of Oromo social organization is how seniority (*Angafa*) is determined and traced. Every Oromo grants special status and dignity that cannot be confronted by any individual or group of individuals. Seniority is not determined by age, i.e. the oldest person is not necessarily the senior person. It is rather to which kinship group one belongs that determines whether he is senior or not. No individual claims seniority and enjoys privileges associated with it unless he belongs to the senior kinship group. Kinship based seniority prevails at every level of the Oromo kinship structure.

Nevertheless, tracing the most senior kinship group begins from bigger kinship divisions and goes down to the lowest kinship unit. For instance, in the Tulama kinship structure,

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Galan is the most senior kinship group, within *Galan, Jidda* subgroup is senior, and within *Jidda, Kuraa* becomes senior. This seniority is recognized along all Tulama kinship groups. Thus, members of *Kuraa* kinship unit are senior for the entire Tulama. It is only in the absence of any member of *Kuraa* kinship unit that people start searching for the second senior kinship group. Even when members of the most senior kinship group are available, all of them cannot claim seniority at the same time. Only groups of individuals that are members of the active *Gadaa* in power become senior. It is at this point of intersection between the Oromo kinship units and the *Gadaa* system that seniority is determined. Since members of the active *Gadaa* in power could be many in number, identification of the most senior person would be determined by age from this last group. It is at this last stage that age becomes an important but not necessarily a determining factor for being a senior person.

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It should be noted that seniority is permanently vested in a particular kinship group at different levels of the Oromo social organization. From the *Gadaa* perspective, however, there exits no permanency in becoming senior. Every *Gadaa* class becomes senior only when it actively assumes power. At the household level, seniority is given to the first-born son from the first virgin wife. Among the Oromo the husband is allowed to marry more than one wife i.e., polygyny is practiced. In this polygynous marriage, it is only the first son that is born from a virgin wife who claims and becomes senior even when the virgin wife is the second wife for the husband. This is so because virginity is culturally given special consideration in the society. However, there is no clear evidence as to how seniority is determined in the Oromo kinship structure. Most probably, people categorized with the senior person from a bigger extended family might have claimed and

become senior segments in the kinship groupings. Seniority between Macha and Tulama is orally explained along this line of argument.

One of my key informants, Fiche Jirru, states that Macha was a first-born son from his mother who was not found virgin upon marriage. Tulama was born from the second wife who happened to be virgin. Despite the fact that Macha was born earlier, the status of seniority was given to Tulama. This oral tradition was greatened into kinship groupings and applied to the Macha and the Tulama subdivisions of the Oromo. This similar oral tradition is commonly used to designate seniority of kinship groups at various levels. *Bokku* – symbol of seniority and authority – is believed to be held by senior segment (*Angafa*) among the Tulama kinship groupings. Occasionally, some anomalous incidences take place in claiming seniority between kinship groups at different levels. I have encountered three cases with more or less similar oral history in which junior kinship groups mischievously gained the status of seniority.

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First, such mischievous claim of seniority took place between Macha and Tulama. Despite the fact that Tulama's seniority is acknowledged in terms of culturally accepted principles of seniority designation, it is currently the Macha subdivision that assumes seniority. According to Jirru, this is so because people believe that Macha betrayed Tulama when the latter handed over the *Bokku* to the former in order to help a cow deliver offspring. Macha knowing the authority associated with *Bokku* ran away until he crossed the river without being caught by Tulama. It was culturally prohibited to claim *Bokku* once it crossed a river regardless of how it is taken (*Bokkuun laga cehe hin galu!*, meaning '*Bokku* that crossed a river is never returned'). Since then Macha has become

senior. What is more surprising is the fact that the Tulama subdivision has recognized seniority of the Macha since that time.

Secondly, within Macha kinship classification, it is said that *Ammayyaa, Waliso,* and *Kuttayyee* were regarded as three brothers (descendents) of *Liban.* According to *Bayisa Jima*, *Ammayya* who happened to be senior to his two other brothers delayed for some time before arriving at *Liban's* home to receive blessing and ritualistically take over *Bokku* from his father. When the ceremony was to begin, *Waliso* misleadingly declared the arrival of the three brothers to *Liban. Liban,* who was said to be blind, gave blessing to his three children and called up on *Ammayya* to come and take over *Bokku* from himself. Unfortunately, *Ammayya* did not arrive at that particular time. Since the ritual for handing over *Bokku* to *Ammayya* was over before his arrival, *Liban* instead authorized his second son *Waliso* to receive *Bokku* and declared him to become senior on all matters other than the one that made *Ammayya* delay from the ceremony. That only matter over which *Ammayya* claims seniority is blessing *Ateetee*[3] ceremony (*Ebba Ateetee*).

Thirdly, the one that took place within Tulama kinship groupings was different. Dori Erba states that out of the seven kinship subgroups that constitute *Jiillee*, *Goona* is recognized as senior. However, *Bacho*, one of the juniors, stole *Bokku* and ran away. Unlike the two cases mentioned above, this time *Bacho* was not successful in getting recognition from his other brothers. Rather, *Bacho* has totally been sanctioned from being a member to *Jiillee* family. These oral stories have significantly served in maintaining some degree of coherence among different Oromo social organizations although they are loaded with mystery and obscurity.

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Similar to the *Gadaa* system, the other forms of the Oromo social organization that organizes exclusively married Oromo women across kinship groupings is called *Siiqqee*. *Siiqqee* is a stick made of a tree called *Harooreessa*, which symbolizes fertility in the Oromo culture. In the old days *Siiqqee* used to be given on marriage day to the bride by her mother. The message is such that wherever a married woman goes holding her *Siiqqee* stick, she would be regarded as if she were with her mother, which implies that she is protected from any abuse that might possibly be committed against her. *Siiqqee* is, therefore, a symbol of dignity and respect for the Oromo women.

Siiqqee helps the Oromo women gain control over resources (See: Chapter 8). *Siiqqee* as women's solidarity organization has also multiple social and religious functions that help enhance women's status and security. Among the Tulama Oromo, although *Siiqqee* is still fresh in the memory of many of the people as regards its traditional roles in the Oromo life, its current function has tremendously been reduced. In fact, it is used in conflict resolution and in practicing some religious ceremonies. In conflict resolution, a woman is regarded as a linking pin between different kinship groups as she belongs to one kinship group by birth and to the other kinship group by marriage.

Siiqqee institution is notoriously known for taking collective action against any abusive interference in the life of any Oromo woman. In principle and where possible in practice, every single misdeed committed against a particular woman is regarded as a crime committed against all Oromo women and hence should be reacted collectively and cooperatively. Every Oromo woman is equally entitled to all rights and privileges *Siiqqee* can offer while at the same time equally share responsibilities and authorities vested in

[3] *Ateetee* is an spiritual activity mostly carried out by the Oromo women for different forms of fertility to take place.

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the institution. Unlike the *Gadaa* system, *Siiqqee* does not have an elected body of leadership or otherwise. Under the *Siiqqee* institution, power and authority is laterally distributed among all Oromo women on equal terms. Thus, it is the strong social values and principles embedded in the institution that has made the institution to operate effectively without having any form of leadership.

Successive rulers of the Ethiopian Empire made every possible effort to dismantle the Oromo social organizations and replace them with their imposed governing structure that helped them effectively control over people and their resources. Apparently, the Oromo traditional forms of social organization and the way the Empire State organizes people are fundamentally different. While geographical territory and resource endowment are given priority and serve as bases for organizing people for the Empire State, the Oromo forms of social organizations put people at the center. Here, it is the kinship groupings that define territory unlike the State structure in which territory defines the people. The State structure would help facilitate State control over people and their resources including collection of taxes and other obligatory payments. Under the traditional forms of social organization, people were effectively governed based on commonly acknowledged values and principles.

It is this value-driven and principle-oriented approach that helped the Oromo social organizations resist the strong campaigns made against them by successive rulers. The Oromo traditional social organizations have survived as parallel governing structure to the Empire State ruling structure. Even today, it is the traditional Oromo social organizations that play significant and meaningful roles in the day-to-day life of the people. They still serve, interalia, as bases of their development thoughts and practices.

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE OROMO DEVELOPMENT CONCEPTION

The notion of development has been applied differently in different contexts. The concept of development is often reduced to economics and is conceived of as the process of transition from one type of economic system to another. Such reductionist approaches failed to encompass the conceptual understanding of the term from the 'native's' perspective. Development in its broadest sense, however, is beyond economics and includes social and cultural changes associated with economic development. Conceptualization of development from an economic viewpoint alone has made it difficult for social anthropologists to entertain the concept since they opt for understanding from 'natives'' perspectives. Conceptualizing and understanding development has been an ongoing issue of debate among many scholars of social sciences.

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In the exploration of the Oromo development thinking an attempt was made to find out an equivalent concept of development in the Oromo language. In the attempt to understand development and look at the concept from the Oromo perspective, I will not dare to fully explain or rationalize the concept. I only strive to describe what I observed without intending to fix it. It is believed that development is a life process and thus never static and complete. The Tulama Oromo use different Oromo words to explain development. Words such as *misoma, guddina, dagaagina, hormaata* and *gabbina* are ordinarily and interchangeably applied to mean development. Megerssa (1993:196-218)

states that *finna* is the Oromo word for development. According to Megerssa's assertion, *guddina* and *gabbina* are words measuring levels of development. *Guddina* is the lowest stage of development (*finna*), which leads to *gabbina. Gabbina* in turn leads to another level of development called *bal'ina. Badhaadha, hormaata, degaaga* and *daga-horaa* sequentially constitute higher levels of development.

Unlike Megerssa's assertion, many of my informants could not associate the word *finna* with development. *Finna* in the Tulama Oromo context stands for children. Perhaps the word lost its broader meaning of development over a period of time. In fact, Megerssa, throughout his discussion, has emphasized on the economic angle of development although he acknowledges that *finnaa* can stand for different types of fertility or reproductivity. For the Oromo, of course, development is not only an economic phenomenon. It includes changes occurring in social and cultural life of the people. The Oromo better explain development in biological process. Of course, it is noted that development is fundamentally biological and hence evokes natural metaphors of organic growth and evolution (Harris, 1968 cited in Kaplan 1996:2; Gardner and Lewis, 1996:3).

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Development and Lawmaking

The Oromo use different words to express development depending on the subject matter to be discussed. However, under all circumstances, development implies progressive change. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Oromo believe that peace is a necessary condition and an inescapable prerequisite for development. Peace is maintained and reinforced by the rule of law. As society evolves from simpler stage of development

to more complex stage, new ideas related to, interalia, governing laws are conceived in view of embracing the complexity. Traditionally, before laws are finalized and become ready for application, there are evolutionary lawmaking stages that the Oromo people had to go through under the rule of *Gadaa* system. As development is better understood when seen from a biological perspective, the Oromo mostly use metaphors of biological growth to express the development of each stage in the lawmaking process. The first stage is called *seera ulfa'u* – a stage where laws are conceived.

At this initial stage, Iddatto Obse explains, people discuss on the pros and cons of the prevailing laws and identify critical gaps that need to be addressed. complain, songs, and group and public discussions are some of the mechanisms used by the people to express their viewpoints. Once some degree of common understanding is created and consensus is reached, few selected individuals who are believed to understand the views of their community would take the conceived ideas to a lawmaking center – *Odaa Nabee*, which takes place once every eight-year. Thus, according to the Tulama Oromo, for the conceived views to be born, a period of eight years is required. This first stage of lawmaking process leads to the second stage known as *seera dahuu* – which literally means 'giving birth to law'.

In the second stage, gathering of representatives elected from different communities and any volunteer participants is held in the presence of concerned traditional authorities, i.e., leaders of active *Gadaa* in power to forward the viewpoints of their respective communities. Intensive discussions and dialogues continue for several weeks until the importance and pertinence of the forwarded views are convincingly accepted. This

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process leads to the third stage called *seera tumaa* and *itichuu*- 'making and sustaining the law'. Newly proposed laws are incorporated either to replace or complement the old ones. During this lawmaking process, old laws are reiterated so that those participating in the discussion and dialogue would understand the customary laws in-depth, which is regarded as the fourth stage – *seera dhuguu*, simply understood as 'drinking the law'. *Seera dhuguu* implies understanding the content of the Oromo traditional laws including the reasons behind the creation of each law. Such oral laws well captured and understood by few would be declared and popularized to the public. This fifth stage is called *seera dhangalasuu* – popularization of the laws.

According to Fiche Jirru, the Oromo traditional judges - *abbootii seera* are classified into two broad categories. Constituting the first group are those who have participated in each and every step of the lawmaking process. This group of people understands both the 'what' and the 'why' of the laws. These are locally known as *Caffee Taa'ichaa* or *Akkesitee* – 'those that involved in and can echo' what has been said and agreed upon during the making of the law. The second group of judges is those who learn the 'what' of the law from the first group and make use of it in the daily affairs of their respective communities. This latter group is commonly referred to as *Waraabbattee* – 'those who have copied the law'. Major disputes and conflicts that involve homicides are mediated and arbitrated by the former groups. The *Waraabbattee* group can participate in the mediation and arbitration of major disputes as supporters and can also actively involve in leading minor disputes as arbitrators. Thus, the level of participation in the process of lawmaking determines the status of the individuals as traditional conflict mediators and arbitrators.

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Gadaa Grades are Development Stages

Gadaa grade and *Gadaa* class are slightly confusing concepts. According to Legesse (1973:51) *Gadaa* class designate group of people who share the same status and who perform their rites of passage together and hold corporate responsibilities, whereas *Gadaa* grades are stages of development though which the groups pass. Actually, *Gadaa* system, which probably began as a system of age-sets, has currently little to do with age. Among the Tulama Oromo, people of different age groups belong to the same *Gadaa* grade. This wide age disparity occurred mainly because of the fact that *Gadaa* sets a rule that any person enters the system of grades exactly forty years behind his father regardless of the age of the father. Thus, it is very common to see people of different age categories belonging to a particular *Gadaa* grade. Despite age differences among group of people belonging to the same *Gadaa* class, they are all in principle supposed to do activities prescribed to them at each *Gadaa* grade. There are eleven *Gadaa* grades for which the Oromo has defined duties and responsibilities. These are *dabballee, gaammee xixxiqqaa (Foollee), gaammee gurguddaa (qondaala), kuusaa, raaba doorii, Gadaaa (lubaa), yuba I, yuba II, yuba III, yuba IV,* and *Gadaa mojjii (jaarsa)* (Legesse, 1973:52-95; Melba, 1988:11-14).

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Dabballee is the first grade occupied by sons of the *Gadaa* class who are in power as leaders. This class of boys should have been up to eight years of age had it not been for age disparities caused by rigid requirement that the generations must succeed each other in forty-years cycles and that all brothers must belong to the same *Gadaa* class regardless of their age. From a development point of view, *Dabballee* grade is a stage of childhood. The next development stage is *Gaammee Xixxiqqaa (Foollee)* consisting of boys who are

supposed to be between nine and sixteen years of age. The primary responsibility of boys in this second *Gadaa* grade is to look after small livestock further away from their villages and to perform light work.

The third *Gadaa* grade - *gaammee gurguddaa (Qondaala)* is not popularly functional among the Tulama Oromo. Groups of people in this grade are expected to travel long distance to hunt wild animals both for adventures and supplementing their food, and perform heavy work. Three years before the end of this grade, members of this *Gadaa* class come together and nominate their leaders based on the candidates' wisdom, brevity, and physical fitness. *Qondalaa* grade develops into *Kuusaa* grade during which the previously elected leaders formally assume their office although their authority is limited to their own group. The name of the most senior person in the group becomes the name of the group as a whole. It is at the fifth grade (*raabaa doorii*) that members are allowed to marry although the practice of relating *Gadaa* grade and marriage have presently ceased to be functional among the Tulama Oromo. Many of the ceremonial events that are supposed to take place during the rite of passage from one *Gadaa* grade to the other are hardly practiced among the Tulama Oromo. However, every individual fully recognizes each of the first five *Gadaa* grades since the sixth *Gadaa* grade – *Gadaaa (lubaa)* is the most important grade for the Tulama Oromo.

Gadaa stands for the Oromo institution of governance as a whole as well as for a period of eight years during which *Gadaa* class stays in power i.e. the sixth *Gadaa* grade. For distinction purposes *Gadaa*, which begins with capital letter, stands for the former while the one, which begins with small letter, represents the latter. In the development of

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Gadaa class, *gadaa (luba)* grade is the most important stage during which each and every ritual is practiced although the *Gadaa* system seems to be subdued among the Tulama Oromo over the last several decades. The sixth grade is well recognized because the social and leadership status associated with this grade is still very high.

The transition from *gadaa (luba)* grade to *yubaa* grade takes place ceremonially through handing over the power to succeeding *Gadaa* class. *Yubaa* is a large category consisting of four grades. Although the function of *Gadaa* class in each *yubaa* grade is differentiated in the *Gadaa* system, this functional differentiation seems to be negligible among the Tulama Oromo. Their responsibilities range from actively participating in community affairs as leaders to playing the role of advisory or assistant to active *Gadaa* in power. In this regard, some degree of permanence in assuming power is observable. I have observed several incidences where *Caffee Taa'ichaas* play active role in conflict arbitration regardless of the *yubaa* grade to which they belong.

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The final stage of development regarding the *Gadaa* grade is *Gadaamoojjii* whose transition is a formal ritual. *Gadaamoojjii* cannot carry arms. They are not allowed to kill any living creature. They give blessing to people. People come to them as refugees from misfortunes and enemies.

This sequential development stages prevail not only in the *Gadaa* system as a whole but also within every *Gadaa* grade. For instance, Gada Badhaso notices that the most important *Gadaa* grade - *gadaa (lubaa)* - in the Tulama Oromo *Gadaa* system has eight development stages, which takes place annually. The development from one stage to the

other is a formal ritual. Bulls are sacrificed as members of *Gadaa* class in the *lubaa* grade progress from one stage to the other. These development stages are:

- *Qarree saaqqachuu* (getting into power): In the Oromo culture *Qarree* is a symbol that stands for virginity. The first stage is an opening up a space to begin entering the new *lubaa* grade of development. Members of the *Gadaa* class entering the *lubaa* grade would express their preparedness and commitment to do better for their community than their predecessors. They also manifest their wishes of good luck.
- *Godaansa (Bobbaa)* (taking a trip): This second stage is like paving a way to success. They travel from one locality to the other to monitor the ongoing situations and also gain good reputation in the community they intend to serve. They travel to know more about the community they lead and try to identify critical issues they need to resolve under their leadership.
- *Dagaaga (Babal'achuu)* (expansion): The word literally means to grow wider. At this stage members of the *Gadaa* class make maximum effort to be known to the people. Their power begins prospering and their legitimacy is increasingly built.
- *Goobanuu* (mounting up): This is a stage when members of the class feel confidence in what they do as well as in the recognition they obtain from their community. They express their adequacy in terms of capability and competence they acquired because of their good practices.
- *Bantii (Ifatti bahuu)* (shining on): This is when members of the *Gadaa* class sparkle and fully visible to their community. People talk about their good or bad practices.
- *Odaa (biyya barsiisa)* (symbol of achievement): At this stage members report to the public particularly what the *Gadaa* class has accomplished as achievements. Critical

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community problems they have resolved; extent of peace and stability they have maintained; and their rich wisdoms are shared with their community.

- *Buttaa(Gadaaa fixachuu)* (towards completion): This is a ceremonial event towards graduation from the grade with success and achievement and readiness to hand over power to the successors.
- *Jaarraa (Dhuma Gadaaa)* (finishing point): This final stage symbolizes complete withdrawal from *lubaa* grade and enter into the following retirement grade of *Gadaa* system, i.e., *yubaa* I.

It should be emphasized that as the *Gadaa* system was weakened and the Oromo way of life shifted from pastoral economy to sedentary agrarian economy, responsibilities of the people in every stage of *Gadaa* grade have changed. For example, members of the *Gadaa* class in grade IV who are supposed to provide defense service are no more engaged in defense activity in the Tulama Oromo *Gadaa* system. Election of group leaders during the second half of grade III no more exists. For that matter, it is solely the *Gadaa (lubaa)* development stage, which has remained highly ritualistic and has drawn high public attention although its role has tremendously reduced over a period of time.

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Economic Development

Development as a concept has mostly been associated with economics. Several theoretical orientations and empirical studies were oriented towards defining development from a material point of view. For the Tulama Oromo economic development cannot be defined but can be described along three interrelated concepts.

These concepts, as noted by Bayisa Jima and Aberra Mul'ata, are *sanyii* ('seed'), *hormaata* ('productivity'/'fertility'), *gosa/fira* ('security'). The first and most popular word that helps us understand economic development among the Tulama Oromo is *hormaata*. *Hormaata* is derived from the word *horuu,* which simply means 'to multiply' or 'to reproduce'. The word *horuu* has conceptually wider meaning. The Oromo use the word *horuu* in different context. For example, *ijoollee horuu* – raising as many children as possible; *fira horuu* – multiplying relatives/friends; *diina horuu* – multiplying enemies; *loon horuu* – rearing cattle; *qabeenya horuu* – becoming resource rich; etc. It is also common to call paper money after *horii*, which would also mean cattle in the Oromo language.

There is no bad development for the Oromo. Development is always positive and progressive change. According to Jima and Mul'ata, when the Oromo say *'hormaatni qajeele'*, it is an indication of promising development. It is when the Oromo perceive that the process of development is straightened and in the right path, which implies putting the right thing in the right place at the right time. In this context, the word '*qajeeluu'* signifies development in the 'right' direction. Both informants also agree that an opposite concept to *hormaata* is *badii*, which means self-destruction. When a particular family gives up development and starts impoverishing from time to time, it is referred to as *qe'e badii*. These informants emphasize that contingent household economic crisis is not termed as *qe'e badii* since this particular household can soon or gradually recover from the crisis through making different efforts and adopting different coping strategies. *Badii* is a continuous decline of livelihood not because of circumstances beyond control but because of resource mismanagement and deliberate counterproductive actions. The word

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badii can apply at higher level than a family (household) or an individual. In the Oromo tradition it is common to talk about *'biyya badii'* – a destroyed country.

The second core concept in understanding the Oromo view of development is *sanyii*. *Sanyii* literally means 'seed'. Similar to *horuu, sanyii* has a wider scope of application. The meaning of *sanyii* is not limited to mean grain seeds, or tree seeds. *Sanyii* can be applied to mean human race – *sanyii namaa*, cattle breed – *sanyii loonii*, or any other wild animal breed – *sanyii bineensaa,* etc. *Sanyii* in broader development perspective applies for initial resource ('capital') that reproduces itself and multiplies enormously. Highly productive grain seeds or cattle with high fertility rate are regarded as *sanyii gaarii* – 'good seeds'. It is believed that *sanyii* is the basis for economic development. In the absence of *sanyii* one cannot talk about *hormaata.*

Special recognition given to *sanyii* is marked, among other things, by the fact that one of the seven days in a week is called after *sanyii (ayyaana sanyii)* –Tuesday – in the Oromo language. In fact, the same day has other names: *kibxata* or *hojjaa lamaanii*. *Ayyana sanyii* signifies the day of 'seeds'. In the Oromo view, *ayyaana*[4] or a day, refers to the period between two dawns, which is believed to be the dividing line marking the boundary between the light part of the day from the dark part (Megerssa, 1993:104). During seed sowing season, the Tulama Oromo usually take out grain seeds for sowing on Tuesday since this day (*ayyana*) is associated with high productivity in the Oromo traditional belief system.

[4] *Ayana* has much wider meaning. The concept of *ayana* compromises the idea of a superhuman power dwelling in a person, an animal or plant…it can have the connotation of guardian spirit (Bartels, 1990:112-119).

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The third important concept to explain the Oromo notion of economic development relates to *gosa/fira.* For the Oromo, the presence of *sanyii* and its multiplication (*hormaata*) do not guarantee economic development at the household level or beyond. Material well-being obtained because of high grain harvest and/or high cattle reproduction can only sustain if the owner belongs to a large (extended) family or lineage or clan. Otherwise, such economic resources can easily be exposed to various risks such as cattle raids, plunder, etc. It is the large family or lineage or clan that provides sustainable security over material resources acquired in the course of the development process. The Oromo social organization (kinship structure) becomes very important in understanding this third element of the development concept.

Actually, membership to a particular family or lineage or clan alone does not guarantee security over ownership of these resources. The owner should be able to create sense of ownership among his/her lineage group and redistribute these resources through various cultural and institutional mechanisms put in place, which will briefly be discussed in Chapter 8. Loss of such social capital and promotion of the feeling of private ownership of economic resources endangers economic security of individual owners. Thus, generosity among the Tulama Oromo is not only individuals' willingness to give out but also it is a matter of ensuring durable security for one's own resources. Moreover, redistribution of economic resources to members of one's own lineage helps the owner quickly gain these resources through institutional mechanism of reciprocity during incidental crisis.

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The Tulama Oromo think that economic prosperity is achieved if productivity or fertility continues to occur along three lines. These are grain production (*sanyii horii*), livestock production (*sanyii horii*), and human reproduction (*sanyii namaa*). This notion of economic development is inferred from the Tulama Oromo's traditional blessing, which literally takes place at every ceremonial event. This traditional Oromo blessing is:

Sanyii sadiin horaa	Let you (re)produce in the three 'seeds'
Sanyii midhaaniitiin horaa	Let you prosper in the seeds of grains
Sanyii horiitiin horaa	Let you prosper in the seeds of livestock
Sanyii namaatiin horaa	Let you prosper in the seeds of human population

Although population growth that leads to creation of big family or lineage or clan is regarded as a good sign of development, the Oromo developed a system of population growth control built into the *Gadaa* system. *Gadaa* class normally performs the fatherhood ceremony in the 40th year and it is after this ceremony that the class members begin to raise children (Legesse, 1973:128). Thus, men are, in principle, not allowed to have children before 40 years. Such built in system of population growth control failed to be practicable as the *Gadaa* system weakened over a period of time.

In the Oromo view, development is limitless and innumerable. Accordingly, grain or livestock production or even increase in population size should be limitless. The most common metaphor used to express this situation is sand (*ciracha Abbayyaa ta'aa lakka'anii isini hin fixiin*), meaning be countless like the sand in Abay Gorge. Trees with multiple branches and fruits are also used as metaphors for expressing the extent of

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(re)production (*akka buusaa harbuutti horaa*), meaning multiply like the fruits of a ficus tree. This does not mean that the Oromo do not have wealth monitoring system. For that matter, wealthy individuals (households) publicly declare their wealth when they attain certain level.

The Oromo Wealth Monitoring System

Previously, when the Tulama Oromo were predominately cattle herders, every individual whose number of cattle reaches over one thousand[5] at a particular time would openly declare to the public through organizing a special ceremony. According to the Tulama Oromo when the number of heads of cattle reaches one thousand, the amount of milk collected from milk cows in a day should be able to fill a hole dug as deep as the length of a person claiming to have the said heads of cattle. Once the hole is filled with milk, the person gets into the hole until his whole body is completely covered with milk. This part of the ceremony is called *kiila lixuu* (being swamped with milk). After getting out of the swamp, the person slaughters a bull and wears its stomach like a cloth. The second part of the ceremony is locally known as *garaacha uffachuu* (wearing a stomach). The third and final stage of the ceremony is to give a heifer away that could be taken by any poor member of the community. This last part of the ceremony is called *goromsa kumaa gatuu* (throwing away a heifer of a thousand). Every stage of the ceremony is accompanied by traditional blessing pertaining to it.

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[5] For the Mecha Oromo such practice takes place when one's heads of cattle reach over one hundred.

As sedentary agriculture began to replace cattle herding, similar wealth declaration ceremony continued to take place. When a particular farmer is able to harvest hundreds of *daawwullas*[6] grains in a particular year while at the same time a lot of grain harvested in previous years (*dilbii*) are available, a ceremony known as *buddeena uffachuu* (wearing *budeena* – Oromo bread) takes place. These wealth declaration ceremonies are memorable by the majority of the Tulama Oromo although the last few generations have not practiced them mainly because of ever increasing poverty. Such wealth declaration ceremonies are part of the Oromo traditional belief system and hence failing to declare wealth status ceremonially is believed to lead to bad luck.

Those individuals who practiced the ceremony of wealth declaration are called *soreessa jiltii* or *dureessa cicitaa*. *Dureessa cicitaa* (the excessively rich) is the highest stage in the Tulama Oromo wealth ranking system. There are four other categories or ranks of wealth before reaching the stage of *soreessa jiltii.* These are:

a) *Deegaa* (the destitute): This is the lowest level in the Oromo wealth ranking system. Individuals in this category of wealth status are those who entirely depend on others for their daily survival. They have no asset of whatsoever. They are also too poor in their social relations to gain advantages of traditional support systems.
b) *Harka qalleessaa* (the poor): Individuals in this category are generally poor. But they have some economic resources such as cultivable land, an ox, a milk cow, and a couple of small ruminants. They usually face difficulty in sustaining their consumption throughout the year. They seek support particularly during the lean

[6] *Daawwulla* is a traditional measurement unit equivalent to one quintal.

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period or reduce their consumption requirement substantially. They are vulnerable to seasonal crop failure or any other economic disorder. People in this category can share benefits obtained from the traditional support system.

c) *Of danda'aa* (the self sufficient): People in this category constitute the greatest majority of the Tulama Oromo. They are endowed with basic resources such as a pair of oxen or more, a few number of cows, some small ruminants, a horse, a donkey, and fairly adequate plot of land. They normally produce sufficient amount of grains for their consumption. They have some saving in cash as well as in kind. They will not easily be affected by short-term contingent crisis.

d) *Soreessa/dureessa* (the rich): Very few people belong to this category. They have an adequate grain reserve, a number of cattle and pairs of oxen. These people are usually sharecroppers because they can rent cultivable land from poor farmers and plough other than their own. They usually keep their cattle with community members through different traditional arrangements. They are regarded as safety nets for the rest of the people in their community particularly during the time of temporal crisis such as seasonal crop failure. Thus, people in this category, in most instances, have high social status and recognition.

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Economic development is not only about quantitative increment of resources. The Oromo view quality as an important ingredient of development in their economic system. As regards livestock production, amount of milk obtained at a particular time and fertility of cattle breeds are among the criteria employed to measure quality. Grains have also different grades. According to Jima, there are four grades of grains commonly known among the Tulama Oromo. These are *callaa, girdii, mirdii,* and *ishittii* from the best

quality down to the least, respectively. Like many other African societies, the Tulama Oromo have employed diversification as the strategy for economic development and risk aversion. They normally prefer to possess cattle, horses, donkeys, mules, and small ruminants (sheep and goats) simultaneously instead of, for example, specializing in cattle rearing or sheep rearing alone.

They also produce as many varieties of crops as possible rather than practicing mono-crop culture. Moreover, as the Oromo are exposed to new economic activities other than their realms, they begin to practice. As a sideline activity, marketing and exchange have a long history in the Oromo economy. Trade, as a specialized economic sector, is relatively a recent phenomenon. The Oromo have started mainstreaming trade as one of their economic sources. This mainstreaming is better understood when the Oromo say:

Qotataan haa quufu	Let farmers gain excess production
Tifkaatan haa horu	Let herders' cattle reproduce
Daldalaan haa buufatu	Let traders gain profit

Agriculture, which happens to be the source of the Tulama Oromo economy, necessitates increased utilization of land. For the economy to develop, more and more land is required for cultivation and grazing. In fact, the Oromo have traditionally developed a complementary system between the two economic sources (crop production and animal husbandry) in view of enhancing land productivity. For instance, the Oromo use animal manure to improve soil fertility and productivity of the land while at the same time crop residues are used as fodder for their cattle. It should be emphasized, however, that the Oromo do not view land as an economic factor alone.

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CHAPTER SIX

THE OROMO VIEW OF LAND

Brief Historical Profile of Land Tenure Systems

As we have discussed in the previous chapter, agriculture, particularly crop and livestock production, remains an important source of livelihood for the Tulama Oromo. This situation makes land an important asset for the Oromo providing a basis for shelter, for food production and for livelihood activities. Large numbers of the Oromo depends for their livelihood and food security upon access to and productive use of land and its natural resources. Land is becoming a growingly scarce resource for the Oromo as well as for other peoples in the world. Its growing scarcity has necessitated the development of different land controlling mechanisms across the world.

Three major land tenure regimes can be distinguished: customary, public and state, and private. The customary tenure system has the traditional concept of considering land in a particular territory as belonging to a particular clan or community although an individual in the community has the right to cultivate it and uses the land as though he were the owner. The public and state tenure system refer to land occupied, used, or acquired by the government or any other land, which is neither customary nor private. Private land refers to land owned, held, used, or occupied under a freehold title, a leasehold title, or a certificate of claim, which is registered as private land.

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According to Seymour - Smith (1986:162), land tenure is a concept broader than that of 'ownership', referring to the rightful holding of land by a person or group of people, whether or not this holding involves ownership. Land tenure is the system of legal rights and obligations governing the holding, acquisition, use, and disposal of land. It is an important factor affecting the present utilization of land in the world and it also serves as a legal instrument through which land reforms can be started or assisted.

Since the formation of the Ethiopian Empire towards the end of nineteenth century, the traditional landholding system has not been sufficiently guarded and restricted by law particularly in the present day Oromiya and other parts of southern Ethiopia. Such denial of recognition of the traditional landholding practice has subjected the Oromo peasantry to exploitation by the Amhara settlers. In the south and south east of Ethiopia including Oromia, the question of land tenure and tenure insecurity became an issue following the introduction of the Amhara rule.

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A major historical difference in landholding system occurred when the Amhara conquerors occupied the Oromoland and the southern people. Before Menelik's conquest of Oromoland, land was common property of the people and individuals had the right to use, but not to own it. The private tenures were created when Menelik confiscated land conquered by its invading armies and granted large size of the Oromoland to a wide range of the Amhara settlers and the Ethiopian Orthodox churches (Cohen and Weintraub 1975, Berhanu et al. 1998a, ILRI,2002). Since private ownership of the land was introduced, the question of land tenure and tenure insecurity became a critical issue severely affecting the Oromo way of life and development.

The land reform under the Derge regime was performed under the slogan '*Land to the Tiller*'. Land was declared the property of the Ethiopian people, the size of holdings were restricted, existing forms of land ownership was abolished and peasant associations (PAs) were set up to administer the land distribution. The PA leaderships, which had the potential to become a self-governing political institution, gradually turned into the military's extended arm. This land reform, however, did not acknowledge the traditional landholding system, which based its root in the traditional Oromo social organization. Rather, the greatest majority of PA leaders were involved in corruption and nepotism that created inequalities once again among peasants. The newly elected leaders, who were pro-peasants during the early phase of the Derge, later began to treat peasants in the same way as the landlords had done before (Dessalegn 1994, ILRI, 2002). Under the EPRDF Constitution, the right to ownership of land is exclusively vested in the State and in the peoples of Ethiopia without describing the power limits of the State and the people. In fact, the Constitution grants pastoralists the right to free land for grazing and cultivation.

A recent study conducted in Oromiya has shown that there is no sector other than agriculture that helps absorb the rapidly increasing human population to earn their livelihoods particularly in rural areas of Oromiya. The same study also revealed that 29.83% of the total rural households of the region is landless implying that further concentration of arable land in the hands of few individuals aggravates the problem to its worst level (Oromia Rural Land Use and Administration Study (unpublished), 2002). However, when looked at historically, as Zegeye said (1993), the issue of land ownership and control cannot easily be disposed simply by treating it as any other commodity. It is intricately inter-linked with the history, identity and a sense of security of the people.

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Denying this intricacy would only amount to intensifying the deep-rooted conflicts and mistrusts. To explore further this intricacy, we need to understand how the Oromo perceive land.

What is land for the Oromo?

In many African societies, collective ownership of land is not unusual (UNU, 1986). This communal ownership has been subject to criticisms. Those criticizing communal ownership assume that it leads to either uncontrolled free riding by individual members or all returns to land use are equally shared, so there is no incentive for individuals to invest in land augmenting improvement. Thus, it is argued, communal tenure leads to wasteful patterns of land use and under investment in land improvement (Berry, 1993:102). If ownership is actually interpreted to mean exclusive control over all rights to a piece of land, then definitive control over how it is used is exercised regardless of whoever owns the land (social groups or individuals).

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Communal resources are usually misconceived as open access resources that have no mechanism of control. One has to critically distinguish between 'open access resources' and 'communally owned resources'. Communal resources are not open access resources. According to Orstom (1990, cited in Tache and Irwin, 2003:14), communal resource entails a common property management system, which is said to exist when the rights to use resources are controlled by an identifiable group, and there exists rules defining who may and may not use the resource, and how. It is disruption of common property regimes that has often led to the creation of open access systems, where access to resources is

entirely uncontrolled. Thus, the view that only private property regimes can bring about responsible management and returns on investment is completely erroneous.

The Tulama Oromo regard land as a common resource. Although land is the ultimate provider and source of livelihood, it is regarded far beyond the economic sphere for the Oromo. Abera Mulata stresses that the Oromo quite often identify themselves with land by saying '*biyyoo koo hin fakkaadhu?*', which literally means 'don't I look like my soil?'. This implies whether or not the person asking the question is identified (indigenous) with a particular place. This noticeable fact makes it difficult for any person to claim private ownership of land. The Oromo share the view similar to that stated by a Nigerian herdsman, *"... land belongs to a vast family of which many are dead, few are living and countless are still unborn,"* (A Nigerian herdsman quoted in Lane, 1998:1). Others also express the depth of the value of land in such a way that *"my land is mine only because I came in spirit from that land, and so did my ancestors of the same land. My land is my foundation"* (Yunupingu 1995:29).

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Bayisa Jimma stresses that the Oromo go beyond this view and understand land as "*the property of all living creatures including termites and flying insects whose life and presence completely disappear in its absence*". In the traditional Oromo belief system, land is a mother that gives birth to all living creatures. The Oromo employed this metaphor of 'mother' in the sense of the physical or biological reproduction of the population. According to this conception, when Waaqayyoo (God), which, in this case, is regarded as a man urinates (rains), land, which is regarded as a woman, gives birth to living creatures. This notion clearly states that termites, insects, snakes, monkeys, cattle,

birds, etc. are among the living creatures that have claims over land possession in similar manner as human beings do as they are all created on land.

The Tulama Oromo have a very articulate traditional dialogue-like sayings that further express their perception of land using the analogies of a father and a mother.

Abbaan naa ulfaa dha	A father is dignified,
Haati naa ulfoo dha	A mother is dignified, too.
Waaqni naa ulfaa dha	God is dignified,
Lafti naa ulfoo dha	Land is dignified, too.
Waaqni maaliin sii ulfate?	What makes God dignified?
Waaqni na uumee na guddise	God Created me and let me grow.
Maal sii godhe?	Specifically what did it do for you?
Lafa naa dhisee lafatti na dhiise	It stretched land for me, and let me live on it
Waaqni naaf roobe, naa magarse	It rained for me and let plants grow
Na nyaachise, na obaase	It let me enjoy eating and drinking.
Kanaaf, naa ulfaa dha jedhe.	That is why God is dignified for me
Lafti maaliin sii ulfoodha?	What makes land dignified?
Laafti naa magarsite	It brought up varieties (of plants)
Kan nyaatan dhihana kiyya	The edible ones are my meals
Kan dhiise gaaddisa kiyya	Others are my shades
Aduun du'e kafana kiyya	When I die, it will be my clothes
Jiraadhu qalaba kiyya	When alive, it is my provider
Kanaaf naa ulfoo dha jedhe.	That is why Land is dignified for me

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For the Oromo every creature is created on land, obtains survival requirements from land, and becomes part (ingredient) of land (soil) after death. Everybody acquired land upon his/her birth to live on it. But no one has manufactured land. It is nobody's product. According to Dori Erba, the Oromo stress this idea by their traditional song, which says:

Haadha tu dhalee moo abbaatu dhalche

Neither any body's mother nor any body's father gave birth to land

Waaqatu uume dachee

Only God created land

The agricultural Oromo are basically highlanders and prefer highlands to lowlands for their livelihoods. The Oromo usually associate bad incidences such as hunger, impoverishment, diseases, etc. with lowlands. Perhaps, this is so because, firstly, lowlanders are often exposed to various epidemic diseases that wipe out people particularly in the absence of adequate health services, and secondly, lowlands normally face scarcity of water mainly because of low annual rainfall, which makes life difficult for human and livestock population. Population movement from lowland to highland is considered normal and appropriate while the reverse movement is regarded as improper. Normally, being highlanders the Oromo view white calves as bad luck and going to lowland for permanent living as wrongdoing. Diro Lalise stresses this situation by referring to the Oromo saying, which says:

Saani badii fedhu adii adii dhala

An ill-wishing cow would give birth to white calves

Namni badii fedhu gammojjitti gala

An ill-wishing person would settle in the lowland (*gammojjii*)

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It is also commonly observed that the Oromo associate 'truth' with highlands (or mountains) (*dhugaan tulluu (dirree) haa ta'u,* meaning 'let the truth rise like a mountain') and 'falsehood' with lowlands (rifts) (*dharri sulula haa ta'u,* meaning 'let falsehood dip like a rift'). Mountain (*tulluu*) and wet places (*caffee,* and *malkaa*) are also seen as scared (*qananii*[7]). It is these intricacies and other issues embedded in the Oromo traditional belief system that determine the value of land for the Oromo. Thus, considering land as a source of livelihood is only partial scrutiny of the value of land.

Land from Economic Perspective

Seen from the economic angle alone, secure rights in land and control over its produce are important bases for the Oromo farmers. Alongside the production, secure land rights can improve their productivity and sustainable land management. Moreover, land rights often include collective rights held by social groups and rights of access to common property resources. Secure land tenure system does not necessarily mean privatization of land. Secure land entails providing legal protection for individuals or social groups to make use of their land in more efficient and effective manner. Controversy prevails, however, as to what type of land tenure system guarantees and protects the relative equality of the poor in accessing land.

For the purpose of this discussion we can mainly talk about two types of land tenure systems: the first involves individual ownership interpreted to mean exclusive control over all rights to a piece of land. The second type is communal ownership of land where

[7] *Qananii* stands for both prosperity and sacred depending on the context it is used.

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individual farmers are allowed to have use right over land based on agreed upon rules and regulations.

Proponents of individualized tenure strongly argue that governments should create conditions in which property rights determine patterns of resource allocation, so that their model will suffice as a basis for policy formulation. Bruce and Migot-Adholla (1994) argue that individualized tenure system, which involves the right to the land on continuous basis for good; the right to be compensated in full for land; and the freedom to use, dispose of or transfer the land free from any interference including the state, promotes investment on the land and the employment of sound land management practices, leading to high productivity.

Critics of the individual land tenure system indicate that individualization would entail a fundamental change in the social organization. Individualization results in significant impacts on the distribution of landholdings and on the distribution of income. While it may widen the scope of possible economic actions and broaden the opportunity to earn income through agriculture, it would definitely uproot some individuals or even social groups (clans) from the land they have used for centuries.

Yet another criticism of individualization is the loss of security of economic opportunity by the peasants. Individualized tenure exposes the individual to the possibility of losing this land and the opportunity to farm through land sales without guaranteeing other forms of subsistence. Those who would be in the best position to acquire land are those who have substantial income derived from nonagricultural activities. In practice,

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individualized tenure helps create opportunities for the powerful to assert absolute property rights and concentrate land in the hands of few people destroying the survival mechanisms of poor farmers and damaging their social ties and networks.

The argument that individualized tenure leads to more investment in land, as land can be used, as collateral for a commercial loan, is highly controversial. This is so because banks are not only willing to lend to the poor communities and farmers even with clear land titles, but also they do not have the capacity to reach small farmers (DFID, 2002). On the other hand, large commercial holdings, which can easily access financial services, are frequently unproductive, inefficient and speculative (Ibid, 2002).

Tenure security is a critical condition for farm investment by the poor. However, tenure security requires both social legitimacy, and formal and traditional legality that need not necessarily be delivered through freehold titling. Where individualism eventually comes to predominate, it is likely to be characterized by some or all of the abuses found under the private enterprise system, such as greater inequality and waste (Arntzen et al, 1986). When ownership of land is inequitable, agricultural growth delivers less benefit for the poor, in terms of income, employment, and direct access to the fruits of the land. With increased privatization, women's rights to land, which were realized through men in the traditional communal tenure system to a certain extent, were regarded as secondary. In deed, more limited access to land is one of the most frequently evoked examples of the decline of women's position (Pala, 1980). This provides an argument for leveling the playing field between rich and poor, and also between men and women through land reform (DFID, 2002).

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On the other hand, there is good economic evidence that relative equality in access to land and other assets encourages faster, more equitable growth. There is also evidence that small, owner operated farms, which generate employment at household and community level, make more efficient use of labor than large farm enterprises (Deininger and Squire 1997, Word Bank 1988, Toulmin and Quan/DFID 2000). In many circumstances, smallholder agriculture can be a more efficient and a more equitable basis for agricultural growth. A recent study covering 16 sub-Saharan African countries concluded that a 10% increase in agricultural productivity was associated with an equivalent per cent reduction in the proportion of people living on $1 a day. Greater equity in landholding is key to rural poverty reduction (DFID, 2002).

As regards the Oromo, when the land became private property of the Emperor and distributed to the northern settlers, which lasted for about a century, several farmers were evicted from their ancestral land. Such eviction not only affected the social and political organizations of the Oromo but also the opportunity to earn a living through agriculture until they repossessed their land in 1975 when the Derge decreed public ownership of rural land (proclamation No. 34/26, 1975).

For the Oromo, land is not an ordinary commodity that could be exchanged. More importantly, what is marketable and what is not marketable has to do with the value system of a particular society. All that can be accessed are not for sale. For the Oromo, land is perceived as a dignified mother and source of identity. Other than being source of livelihoods in terms of offering economic requirements, land remains a central factor in

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dictating the Oromo social and cultural life as well as in their traditional belief system. Selling land is not only a matter of economic resource exchange. Such exchange would mean forcing the Oromo to compromise or completely loose their social systems and cultural practices in various ways, which cannot be estimated in terms of monetary value. In addition to the above-mentioned arguments, it is this value system associated with land that strongly stands against the presence of individualized tenure system as an option to development for the Oromo.

The Oromo have experienced different land tenure systems – communal tenure before the conquest, and individualized tenure and public ownership after the conquest. These tenure systems have strongly influenced the Oromo access to land in different ways. However, the notion that land is basically communal and has value much beyond economics is seemingly intact. Land is not a simple commodity whose value can be judged simply by the law of market. Thus, the Oromo traditional communal tenure system, which is based on complex value judgment, naturally rules out the presence of individualized tenure.

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For that matter, the notion of communal ownership is not limited to land alone. The Oromo view of common property is noticeable from everyday language. Words such as 'we' and 'our' feature the Oromo conversations, expressing the thinking behind collective resource ownership (Tache and Irwin, 2003:19). The Tulama Oromo specifically utter '*Waaqa's* or our house' instead of 'my house'; '*Waaqa's* or our cattle' instead of 'my cattle'; '*Waaqa's* or our property' instead of 'my property' implying that private ownership of resources is at rudimentary stage in the mind of the people.

Although individuals have control and decision-making power over the use of their respective properties, considering individuals' property as communal property is still very strong among the Tulama Oromo.

Apart from having the notion of communal ownership of resources, the Tulama Oromo have developed articulated mechanisms of undertaking productive activities on collective basis which will be discussed in the following chapter.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

PRODUCTIVE LABOR/RESOURCE ORGANIZATION

The Tulama Oromo have developed different traditional institutional arrangements through which productive resources including labor are mobilized for development activities. These institutional arrangements have enabled almost all community members to utilize their limited productive resources in a more efficient and effective manner. The Oromo economy basically relies on labor-intensive technology. Labor is the most important factor for production both under pastoral and sedentary agricultural economic systems. In many of these institutional arrangements labor is central parameter against which the service value of every other productive resource is determined.

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These productive institutional arrangements are mostly understood as mutual support systems. In actual fact, they can broadly be classified into two categories: mutual support and exchange. Those institutional arrangements that do not necessarily entail reciprocity on equal terms can be classified under mutual support system. *Daboo* and *Kadhachiisa (Jigii)* can be cited as examples of traditional mutual support system. Mobilization of productive resources for production purpose based on values or terms known to the people can be called exchange. *Wanfala* and *Bu'ii* can be some of the examples of productive resource exchange.

Mutual Support System

What is *Daboo*[8]?

The most popular form of productive resource organization well known across the Tulama Oromo is *Daboo*. *Daboo* is a mutual support system commonly practiced among sedentary agriculturalists. *Daboo* is a traditional productive resource organization whereby a person with extensive agricultural or other activities calls upon other persons and builds a working team for their support. Although the predominant resource to be mobilized in this support system is labor, other productive resources such as draft oxen, farm tools and implements, etc. can also be mobilized as required. Major agricultural activities for which the *Daboo* system of support is practiced are ploughing, weeding, and crop cutting. House building and fencing are some of the non-agricultural activities that can be carried out under the *Daboo* system.

Daboo involves both men and women. Because of the gender division of labor, men exclusively carry out some agricultural activities such as ploughing and crop cutting (particularly barley and wheat). Construction activities are also in the releam of men. Women actively take part in weeding, collecting crops as well as in harvesting *teff*, flax, lintels, beans and peas. Even in some outdoor activities dominated by men, women take part as assistants or facilitators. During ploughing, for instance, women help their male partners in transporting farm tools and implements to work places. They can supply poles and other materials for men engaged in construction activities.

[8] (See: Bartels 1975, and 1977)

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The number of people involved in a particular *Daboo* depends mainly on two factors. First, the magnitude of work for which the support system is needed determines the number of people and other resources to be involved in the support system. Second, those who can effectively mobilize labor force for *Daboo* are those who are known for their generosity, support, helpfulness, and kindness in their community. There are explicit (reciprocity) and implicit (individual's character and social relation) criteria involved in the mobilization of productive labor for *Daboo*. Harmony is critically important. Being members of the same community, not all persons enjoy equal opportunity in mobilizing people. Reciprocity and other social factors such as peaceful co-existence and kindness are considered. Those that cannot reciprocate may not be successful in mobilizing people for *Daboo*.

Daboo is not necessarily based on the principle of equal reciprocity although reciprocity is the core principle involved in the support system. There are cases when other considerations other than reciprocity are taken into account. For instance, physically weak elderly people can be called for *Daboo*. Although they do not contribute physically anything to the activity for which *Daboo* is organized, they can play an important role in encouraging and motivating the working team by telling stories and practicing other cultural entertainments. Elderly persons are also wanted for blessing the ritual since *daboo* is ritualistic in its very nature.

Women, especially household heads, can also be called to join the working team regardless of their contributions. In fact, women fetch water, help active workers in serving food and drinks, and do other supportive activities of their capacity. Having these

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women as part of the support system would allow them to organize *Daboo* that works on their respective farms or other activities without difficulty. In this traditional support system, thus, physical presence matters a lot even when one fails to contribute something for reasons beyond his/her capacity. According to Aberra Mul'ata, female-headed households benefit from the support system because of special community consideration for household members particularly children. This community consideration is expressed as - *haadha maatii oruun urufatti hin hafu* – which literally means 'the farm of a mother of the many cannot be left abandoned'. Poor men are also called although they do not have draft oxen of their own during ploughing. These men help others who seem to be tired, supply seeds, clear plough field (*qoree ciru*) and do other activities. In return, these men enjoy full-scale support from their community. Thus, *Daboo* promotes the value of inclusiveness.

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How is *Daboo* organized?

Daboo is normally organized for activity of a day. The organizer requires some time to prepare food and drinks, which members of the working team will be served as well as to contact individuals that will be participating in the planned activity. On the day of the *Daboo*, participants arrive at the work place at about 9:00 am. Diro Lalise and Aberra Mulata state that there are certain procedures that are followed under the *Daboo* system. Upon the arrival of the working team, the organizer – the one who seeks support of others – begins the first activity. If it is ploughing, the organizer (owner) starts the activity, and then others follow. If the activity is crop cutting, the first handful standing crop is cut by the owner. Soon after the start of the activity, members of the working team elect

chairman (*jaarsa waltajjii*) from among themselves on consensus. There are no explicit and formal criteria for electing the chairman. Since members on duty get to know each other very well, and credibility and status of individual candidates are used as implicit criteria for election.

The chairman is responsible for the effective mobilization of labor and other productive resources for the accomplishment of the intended activity without wasting time and energy as well as maintenance of good working environment, peace and harmony. Once elected, his instructions are well respected by the entire members. He encourages or 'penalizes' weak performers depending on the situation. A lazy person who does not work properly could be punished in different forms. He could be denied drinks for a while, or his legs and hands will be tied up together and let him roll down from the top of a hilly place – physical punishment. In this regard, the chairperson stands for the interest of the organizer.

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On the other hand, the organizer is requested to present two to three persons as guarantors for the team. The first guarantor is responsible to serve the working team during the working hours (*waasii guyyaa*); the second is responsible for the evening ceremony (*waasii galgalaa*); and the third (optional) is responsible for protecting the team members from being bitten by dogs (*waasii saree*). The guarantors are responsible for the fulfillment of all requirements the team members are supposed to obtain from the owner. Particularly, *waasii galgalaa* should check the quality of foods and drinks to be served after the completion of the work since *Daboo* involves big feast. Serving food and drinks while the working team is on duty is an important requirement for which *waasii guyyaa*

holds responsible. Unlike the chairperson, the three guarantors stand for fulfilling the interest of members of the working team. Sustainability of *Daboo* institution is partly because of this checks and balance mechanism built into the system.

According to Mulata, traditional blessing takes place twice during the day. In these blessing events, members of the working team led by three elders express their aspiration of obtaining excessive harvest. The first blessing ceremony is held sometime after the start of the work (*erga hojii fuula baafatanii)* while the second blessing ceremony takes place towards the completion of the evening feast. The first blessing is about wishing success in what they are doing:

Humna nu haa kennu	Let God give us the energy
Jiruu abbaa waaqni haa siksuu	Let God help us accomplish this work
Midhaan/sanyiin haa barakatu	Let the fruits of what we do multiply limitlessly
Callaan galee gotaraa haa guutu	Let every granary be full of grains.

In response to the elders' blessing, the owner serves members of the working team to enjoy *farsoo* (local beer) while at the same time saying:

Akka jiruu koo na bareechitanitti qe'een keessan haa bareedu,

You made my work beautiful; let your homesteads be beautiful

Akka diinarra na aansitan Waaqni diinarra isin haa aansu,

You helped me overcome my enemies; let God help you overcome your enemy

Naa jabadhaa

Be strong

Farsoon gabra baarii dhugaa quufaa

Farso (local beer) is abundantly available; enjoy drinking it.

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After completion of the work for which *Daboo* is organized, members of the working team are respectfully invited to assume their seats at owner's home and served food and drinks. During their stay members of the team socialize and exchange information. Towards the end of the feast, three senior individuals from among the team conclude the activities of the day by saying:

Qufnee, sanyii gootarti qufi	We are satisfied; let your granary be full of grains
Sawwaan foonatti quufi	Let your kraal be full of cows
Jabbii gooranatti gufi	Let your *gorannoo*[9] be full of calves
Dagagii hori	Be prosperous

Similarly, the organizer expresses his wishes of success for members of the working team. He also conveys to the team his readiness to take part in any activity his friends ask him to accomplish at any time. Members of the team usually stay behind singing traditional songs despite the formal conclusion of the event. What is commonly noticeable in these traditional songs is that the Tulama Oromo revolves around praising breads they eat (*noor yaa buddeenaa buddeenaaf Waaqa saganna*) and cattle they care for (*horaa loonii, horii mee yaa loonii*) including benefits derived from them.

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Kadhachisa (Jigii)

Kadhachisa (Jigii) is the other form of mutual support system. *Kadhachisa* is similar to *Daboo* and shares the same objectives. But the strategy pursued to mobilize productive resources is different from that of *Daboo*. In the case of *Kadhachisa* the organizer

[9] Part of the residential house preserved for small calves.

contacts few individuals who are related to him through kinship and/or marriage to mobilize the required productive resources. It becomes the responsibility of those few individuals to mobilize the required productive resources through their respective networks. The organizer may not necessarily know those who accompany his relatives to do the planned work. The working teams can come from different directions.

If, for instance, the owner expects three such working teams to come to work on his farm, he/she should be able to prepare three different working sites to ensure peace and create conducive working atmosphere. This is so because there might be possibilities for some disputants to come together, and hence they might not feel comfortable to work together. To prevent the likely dispute that may arise, the teams are kept in different working places and served in different rooms/places even after the completion of the work. The owner can occasionally request all teams to work together. If a member of the team feels uncomfortable to work with members of another team, the teams are assigned in different sites. In the absence of any dissatisfaction, however, they may work together.

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The same organizational structure as *Daboo* (election of chairperson and guarantors) takes place in *Kedhachisa*. One major difference in this case is that each team organizes itself independently and a person responsible for each team assumes the responsibility that the owner assumes under the *Daboo* system since members of each team may not necessarily know the person (owner) they work for. Similar to *Daboo,* gender based differentiation does not exist under *Kedhachisa*. Even when it is wheat and barley cutting or ploughing, which are supposedly men's activities, there are some activities that women

do to support men. Thus, women are not excluded from *Kadhachisa* mutual support system.

Productive Resource Exchange

Apart from *Daboo* and *Kadhachisa* support systems, all my key informants are well aware of other institutional arrangements whereby the Tulama Oromo undertake activities collectively. In the latter case, however, mobilization of productive resources is on transaction basis in the sense that for any contribution one makes he/she expects to be reciprocated on 'equal' and institutionally agreed upon terms. These forms of labor and other productive resources organization entail exchange between the participants, and only few people are involved in the teamwork at a time to make the transaction manageable. These institutional arrangements are not totally devoid of social considerations. The basis for the transaction and exchange itself emanates from the complex social relations prevailing among members of a particular community.

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The fact that people come together and work collectively is not solely governed by the rules of marketing although some of the principles governing relations between individuals during teamwork are taken from these rules. Presence of excessive labor supply, for example, does not change terms of exchange in these institutional arrangements, as is the case in free market law. Terms of exchange of productive resources are predetermined and can hardly be influenced by the law of demand and supply. The supply and demand law may create better opportunities for an individual seeking additional labor, rather than immediately changing the prevailing productive

resources exchange arrangements. One may resort to hired labor instead of organizing labor, for example, through *Waanfala* when wage is very low because of excessive labor supply.

Those institutions that come under the system of productive resource organization based on exchange system are *Waanfala* (exchange of labor/productive resources based on equal reciprocity), *Inyii* (exchange of labor for traction power), *Bu'ii* (exchange of draft ox), *Leenjii Kennuu* (exchange of draft ox for training bulls), and *Humna Kennu* (exchange of draft oxen for grains).

***Waanfala* – Exchange based on equal reciprocity**

Waanfala is a form of productive labor/resource mobilization based on the principle of equal reciprocity. It is a much simpler form of productive resource mobilization in that, for one thing, only few people, usually up to ten people, are involved in this kind of arrangement at a time; and secondly, unlike *Daboo* and *Kadhachisa,* preparation of feast and election of responsible personalities do not exist. Occasionally, the owner may serve food and drinks at the work place though it is not mandatory. In the *Waanfala* system, if one works three consecutive days for his/her co-worker, he/she expects three days work in return. The fact that the participants are small in number enables each of them to monitor the contribution that an individual participant makes in a particular activity.

Similar to *Daboo* and *Kadhachisa,* there is no explicit criterion for selecting participants constituting the working team from among the able-bodied people under the system of

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Waanfala. However, from the broader social network one is connected to, those who are 'selected' for *Waanfala* are people who can expectedly make higher contributions. Thus, physically fit, energetic and skillful people are preferred to other persons. It should be noted that people in need of mobilizing labor and productive resources under *Waanfala* system make some sort of informal assessment as regards the availability of unaccomplished activities of each of the potential members of the working team. People who join the *Waanfala* working team may not necessarily have similar types of activities. However, the guiding rule is not similarity of activities but time spent on work and productive resources deployed on the activities, which should be based on equal reciprocity.

One core advantage of organizing and mobilizing labor and other productive resources under *Waanfala* system is that it forces each and every member of the team to exclusively allocate his/her time for doing the intended activities, which otherwise could possibly be allotted for some other purposes. It also gives courage for individuals involved in the system to work as efficiently as possible because of high output expectations of each and every individual, which the team members work for.

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***Inyii* - Labor exchange for traction power (oxen)**

This is a traditional form of institution whereby a person possessing no ox contracts with another person in his/her community having a pair of oxen to work under agreed upon terms. Such arrangement is made between those households (individuals) that possess draft oxen but do not have skilled labor for tilling land and households (individuals) that

have skilled labors but do not have traction power. The agreed upon term is such that one man day is exchanged for one and half days' ox power (1:1.5). Intermittently, there are cases where labor and the power of an ox is equally exchanged. Under normal circumstances, the labor - traction power exchange (1:1.5) is based on the consideration that single day manpower service weighs more than what an ox power does because in the former is included knowledge and skills which an ox does not have or acquire.

Such labor-traction power exchange often takes place between male-headed households that can supply skilled manpower and female-headed households that lack skilled manpower but have adequate traction power (draft oxen). Exceptionally, there are situations where female-headed households that have skilled labor can negotiate with other households seeking for skilled labor in exchange for traction power. In this case, it is a woman who is heading the household that negotiates on behalf of the skilled person, as she owns the arable land for which traction power is required.

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***Bu'ii* – Pairing draft oxen**

Bu'ii is an exchange system that takes place between two households (individual farmers) each with single ox possession. The term of exchange is one to one, i.e., one ox power per day is exchange for one ox power per day. Since the traditional land cultivation requires a pair of oxen, two individual farmers with single ox agree to put the animals together so that their traction power is equally shared between the two individuals. This is not always the case. When the arrangement is to be made between a man and a woman who needs skilled labor, the exchange transaction involves other factor, which is subject

to negotiation between the two parties. The usual arrangement is if a man works two days on his farm, he does the same thing on the woman's farm for one day. In this arrangement, his daily labor is considered to be equivalent to a single day ox power. This exchange system is not in conformity with skilled labor and ox power exchange arrangements discussed under *Inyii* exchange system. In the *Bu'ii* case, skills and knowledge embedded in human labor is overlooked to some extent.

***Leenjii Kennuu/Fudhachuu* – Training a bull in exchange for its power**

This is another exchange arrangement commonly known across the Tulama Oromo. Under this exchange system of productive resources, a cattle rich person gives a bull to a person possessing no ox or one ox so that the latter uses the traction power of the bull for tilling his land while at the same time training the bull for ploughing purposes. In fact, in addition to training the bull, the person is totally responsible for looking after it, including supply of proper feeding. This exchange arrangement lasts only for one year. Delaying the bull longer than a year may risk the person in need of traction power since the owner of the bull may demand payment for its service for the extra period longer than a year. For the extra time, the owner of the bull receives payments in kind (in grain) based on another traditional productive resource exchange arrangement called *Hubna Kennuu/Fudhachuu*.

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***Hubna kennuu/Fudhachuu* – Ox power exchange for grain**

In the system of exchange, the ox owner gives his/her ox to an individual farmer who requires traction power during the ploughing period on a rental basis. The owner receives fixed amounts of grain from the farmer who uses the ox power only during the plough period. The amount of grain to be paid as rent depends on the grain type and quality. Unlike other methods of productive resource exchange, this arrangement is usually made in the presence of mediators and eyewitnesses, and entails preparation of documents in written form. If a farmer who rents an ox power agrees to look after the ox for the rainy season following the ploughing period, the amount of grain to be paid in the form of rent will reduce by a certain amount in consideration of the service rendered. The amount of grain to be reduced is subject to negotiation.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS OF RESOURCE DISTRIBUTION

Distribution patterns in economic anthropology have been studied as part of each group's total socio-cultural configuration, revealing social relationships as well as cultural values, attitudes towards sharing and the rights and obligations of different persons with regard to the product of labor (Seymour-Smith, 1986:79). Although development studies give less attention to economic distribution as compared to its growth, the distribution of economic benefits deserves as much attention as economic growth. The Tulama Oromo have institutionalized different mechanisms through which they distribute benefits of economic growth to the people.

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The Oromo economic system systematically prohibits concentration of wealth in the hands of a few individuals. Individual owners can make superficial claims over their resources such as herds of cattle, flocks of sheep, and/or tons of grains. In reality, however, these claimed resources are looked after and utilized by many other people connected to the owners through various social networks. Kinship ties, marriage relations, and other forms of social connections are mechanisms that facilitate the redistribution of wealth from the haves to the have-nots, and from one generation to the other. The wealth redistribution mechanisms of the Tulama Oromo can be classified into two broad categories: grant and non-grant. Those institutional mechanisms of wealth distribution under the category of grant are *handhuuraa, tirma (loon siiqqee), dhaala,* and

ogdii (or aannaan) qicaa. Those distribution mechanisms under the non-grant category are *iribbii* and *dabarsaa (kaayaa).*

Handhuuraa – Heifer Endowment at Birth

Handhuura is an Oromo word, which precisely means an umbilical cord. *Handhuuraa* is a concept derived from the word *handhuura. Handhuuraa* as traditional Oromo institution stands for a mechanism whereby a newly born baby obtains a heifer (or a female calve) from its parents. Soon after the birth of a new baby, its umbilical cord is cut and tied. The excess part of the umbilical cord that remains attached to the baby's body will naturally dry up and be dropped in a matter of two weeks time. Culturally, it is the responsibility of a mother to keep a residue of the umbilical cord in a safe place for some definite period of time. In case it is lost, the first shaved hair of a baby can serve the purpose as a substitute.

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There is no fixed day or date for the transfer to take place. It is done arbitrarily mostly as the baby starts walking. The transfer of a heifer from parents to a baby is done ritualistically. Usually family members attend the transfer ceremony. During the ceremony, all cattle are brought together and a particular heifer to be granted to the new baby will be declared sometimes by explaining why that particular heifer is identified for the purpose. The issue to be told is about the history of the heifer and extent of its productivity by making inference of its breed. Jimma says, the residue of the umbilical cord kept for this event will be put on the back of the heifer, signifying the continuity of the relation between the baby and its parents in the same analogy as the tie between a

mother and a baby before birth (during pregnancy). It is a symbol of sustaining consumption throughout the baby's life. Then, the parents bless the baby wishing it good luck and success.

Bayisa Jimma also stresses that the kind of heifer to be given to the newly born baby is determined by its parents (mother plus father). Normally, the heifer is carefully selected from cattle breeds that are said to be best in terms of fertility and milk product. The heifer should be from among cattle breed that stayed with the family for long time and possibly inherited from their predecessors. It is common practice among the Oromo to associate some cattle breed with good fate and the heifer to be selected for this *handhuuraa* purpose should belong to these cattle breed that is believed to have good luck. Grand parents can also grant a heifer particularly when parents are resource poor or do not have any cattle to offer.

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Once the heifer is granted to a new baby, the heifer and its offspring become the property of the baby. Parents and other family members have use rights (bulls can be used for traction power, and milk can be consumed) until the baby grows up and becomes independent. In fact, it remains the responsibility of the family to look after the heifer and its offspring until the baby becomes strong enough to do so. However, if the heifer once given as *handhuuraa* has died or lost for certain reason there is no culturally recognized mechanism to replace this start up productive resource for the baby.

For the *handhuuraa* institution to function, possession of cattle is necessary. *Handhuuraa* cannot be practiced when parents or grand parents do not own cattle even if they are rich

in other resources. Thus, once the mode of life of a particular family changes from livestock or mixed crop-livestock production to other forms, *handhuuraa* ceases to exist. At present, *handhuuraa* is being threatened because of the mismatch between the number of children and number of heads of cattle a family is able to possess, i.e., in a situation where number of children is greater than the number of heads of cattle, many families have stopped practicing *handhuuraa*. Increasing poverty is severely threatening the very survival of the institution in some parts of the Tulama Oromo.

The cultural meaning of *handhuuraa* is that a baby that used to be granted survival through its umbilical cord before birth should not be left barren immediately after birth. It is considered part of the parents' responsibility to maintain the tie of survival with the new baby. It symbolizes the strong tie that should continue to exist between parents and their children in the rest of their life. Normally, a heifer obtained in this mechanism is considered as seed or start up capital and hence people reproduce them and keep some of the offspring as permanent asset of their family. Thus, in the Oromo culture one begins to be endowed with resources right after birth.

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Tirma and *Loon Siiqqee* – Cattle Endowment upon Marriage

Tirma and *Loon Siiqqee* are resource distribution mechanisms carried out upon marriage. The two mechanisms are slightly different although people occasionally consider them as one and the same. Although both take place during marriage, they basically differ in that *Tirma* takes place at the home of the bride's family while *Loon Siiqqee* is practiced at the home of the bridegroom's family. According to an elderly person named Gutama Ta'o,

Tirma is cattle given to a daughter from her parents and relatives upon marriage. Normally, a married girl receives whatever number of cattle she is given from her parents and relatives when she pays her first visit to her parents after marriage, which is usually done in a week time after marriage.

These cattle, which are granted to a newly married girl from her parents and relatives, would exclusively be under her control and ownership throughout her life. Even upon divorce, these cattle and their offspring are not considered as common property, which is subject to division. *Tirma* is one of the few opportunities that ensures absolute decision-making power of women over resources. It is common to hear a husband saying '*Tirma abbaa kee natti fidee dhufte?!*' – have you brought *Tirma* from your parents?!, implying that he cannot make any decision on cattle acquired through the *Tirma* system. This presentation does not exist for sons because, unlike daughters, sons are culturally allowed to inherit property of their parents. Thus, daughters are given *Tirma* as one method of compensating their denial to inherit the property (such as land, house, horse, etc.) of their parents.

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Loon Siiqqee are cattle that a newly married girl ceremonially receives from the parents of her husband. Granting a heifer to the bride takes place late in the morning (*waaree*) on the day following her marriage. On that day, all the cattle are brought together around the homestead and the bride is shown which heifer(s) she is going to receive. Then, the bride carries a baby boy or girl who belongs to her husband's clan on her back and touches the back of the identified heifer(s) with her stick called *Siiqqee*. This process legitimizes her possession of the heifer(s) granted to her. Although *Loon Siiqqee* are considered the

property of the bride, in practice, they are shared between her and her husband. The baby she carried during the process of obtaining a heifer is culturally considered as her first child for whom she holds responsible as a mother throughout her marriage life. Even when she divorces, the mother-child relationship remains intact. The child enjoys the privilege of having two mothers in the rest of his/her life.

At present, *Tirmaa* system has almost ceased to exist and is not so popular among the Tulama Oromo because the majority have become cattle poor and hence, instead of granting a heifer, parents have begun to provide household utensils in the form of a gift to their newly married daughters. Some of the cattle rich families have continued to practice *Tirmaa*. The cultural practice of *Loon Siiqqee* is, however, more commonly practiced. Even when the bride's parents-in-law do not have cattle, they negotiate with close relatives to get one for the purpose. In most instances, denying such grant to a daughter-in-law is culturally unacceptable.

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***Iribbii* – Offspring Sharing**

Iribbii is probably the most common type of resource sharing mechanism known to the Oromo. Under the *Iribbii* system of resource distribution, a resource poor person agrees to take the responsibility of fully taking care of domestic animals from a resource rich person for definite period of time on condition that all offspring will equally be shared between them. The most frequent domestic animals involved in the *Iribbii* transaction are small ruminants such as sheep and goats, horses and poultry. Donkeys can also be part of the transaction although this is considered abnormal. This abnormality is traditionally

expressed as "*gaddeebituun namaa harree Iribbii fuuti,*" – a person that does not aspire for better life engages in *Ribbii* of donkey. Perhaps, this is so because the return one gets from *Iribbii* of donkey is small as compared to other domestic animals due to its low fertility rate. The provision of cattle based on the *Iribbii* system is done exceptionally. Only female domestic animals are dealt with in the system except in the case of poultry in which both sexes are given since the very essence of the system relies on sharing the offspring.

A resource rich person basically offers some of his/her domestic animals to the poor through the *Iribbii* system not because he/she lacks grazing land or herdsman but because to enable the poor person to obtain productive resources, which the poor person uses as seed capital for further economic improvement. The system, however, does not totally rule out the possibility that one gets to the transaction because of scarcity in fodder and/or manpower. Some people who do not have grazing land might distribute their small ruminants to poor persons based on the *Iribbii* system just because the benefits so obtained are attractive. *Iribbii* is better explained by an Oromo concept called *Walgabbisuu,* which simply means enriching one another. In the Oromo development thinking, *Walgabbisuu* exclusively stands for a process of economic development in which all members of a social group obtain economic gains because of complex interdependence established between them. When such interdependence leads to the opposite, it is said to be *Walbaleessuu* – impoverishing one another.

As regards sharing the offspring of small ruminants, the first-born sheep or goat remains the property of the *Iribbii* taker. The owner takes the second offspring. Other things

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remaining constant, the value of the first-born offspring is greater than the second simply because of time. The owner gives up this aspect of the benefit not because of ignorance but because he/she imposes strong pressure on the recipient person to take maximum possible care for the mother sheep or goat, which is considered as compensation for the forgone cost. In this sense, the owner may not compromise the very principle of *Iribbii* that entails equal sharing of the offspring because of giving the first-born offspring to the beneficiary.

When it comes to horses and donkeys, time becomes a critical factor in sharing the offspring. The first-born offspring will be given neither to the owner nor to the beneficiary. There are two possibilities for sharing the offspring on equal basis. The first is to sell the offspring and divide the money equally among themselves. The second possibility is to wait until the second offspring is born and then make price comparison between the two so that either person of the two who takes the first offspring will pay the difference. Actually, apart from equal sharing of the offspring, the resource poor person has the right to use the pack animal under his/her custody for transport services.

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***Dabarsaa* – Providing a milking cow to the poor**

The economic institution of *Dabarsaa* is created to establish a relation and/or cooperation between the cattle poor majority and the cattle rich minority. The institution is built on the recognition of mutual interdependence of the members of the community and on the need for reciprocity. According to Aberra Mulata, *Dabarsaa* could be defined as the institutionalized practice whereby a large herd owner extends milking cows to poor

members of the community according to the terms presented by the custom and traditional law. Occasionally, this system is called *okolee buusuu* – bringing down a milk container from a wall. One of the indicators traditionally used to measure poverty is known as *okolee fannisuu* – hanging milk container on the wall. Diro Lalise stresses that when a family is said to have hung the milk container, it is a clear indication that the family is in a severe state of destitution and difficulty to bring up children and to obtain adequate food for survival.

In the Oromo dietary habit, milk and milk products constitute a major part of their daily consumption. Literally, all forms of traditional food cannot be prepared without milk and milk products. Child rearing without milk is considered almost impossible. It is also a common practice for the Oromo women to put raw butter on the top of their head periodically probably as the only hair food. Moreover, milk and milk products have strong cultural values in almost all Oromo rituals. It is the food and cultural values associated with milk and butter that motivate cattle rich people to provide cows for the poor under the *Dabarsaa* traditional arrangement.

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How does *Dabarsaa* operate? Aberra Mulata explains that the cattle rich person provides a pregnant or a recently delivered cow to one of the poorest households in a community. The transfer of a milking cow to a particular household commonly takes place when a newly born baby is unable to obtain milk because of destitution. *Dabarsaa,* both in principle and in practice, is meant to help a nursing mother and her children get access to milk and milk products although husbands and other family members can benefit by way of sharing daily meals. This is part of the special privileges that the Oromo culture offers

particularly to children. Marriage is one determining factor to benefit from the *Dabarsaa* system of resource distribution. Unmarried persons hardly obtain the opportunity to benefit from the *Dabarsaa* system. In the case of divorce, only poor women that have children under their custody can enjoy the privilege of *Dabarsaa*.

What the cattle rich person gets, as repayment for his generosity (in offering a milking cow), is respect and honor from the community members. He is considered as a father of the poor (*Abbaa Hiyyeessaa*). Under the *Dabarsaa* system, a milking cow is given to poor household during lactation period. In many cases, however, a cow and its offspring remain with the poor household and reproduce for some years before the owner decides to collect them back. Members of the household looking after the cow and its offspring are entitled to all milk and milk products obtained during this period. When the owner decides to collect his cattle, he will allow the family members being assisted to take one of the calves of their choice in the form of a grant. According to the Tulama Oromo, granting one of the calves is to prevent 'a milk pot that has once been brought down from being hanged on the wall again'.

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In a situation where the owner collects a cow and its entire offspring, people prefer to call the system *Kayaa* instead of *Dabarsaa.* The only difference between *Kayaa* and *Dabarsaa* is that in *Kayaa* there is no expectation of a heifer or a bull grant since the milking cow stays with the beneficiary only during the lactation period. *Dabarsaa,* on the other hand, implicitly involves granting a bull or a heifer to the poor upon collecting the cattle apart from milk and milk products.

Aannan Qicaa – Milk Sharing

As pervasiveness of poverty has increased over time, providing milking cow to poor households under the system of *Dabarsaa* started declining. Decline in *Dabarsaa* has led to the emergence and development of a new mechanism of sharing the meager resources called *Aannaan Qicaa* (milk sharing) and *Dhadhaa Dibaa* (butter smearing). According to Aberra Mulata, in the former case, a poor family that possesses only a single milking cow shares milk with the have-nots particularly with a nursing mother and her young baby. In the latter case, butter is shared with the poor. Recognition given to milk and butter sharing practices by the community is not less than that of *Dabarsaa*. This notion is traditionally expressed by the saying '*kan qicaa aannaaniin galata hin jenne, ameessaan galata hin jedhu,*' which means one that does not acknowledge sharing milk with the haves as generosity never acknowledges milking cow given on *Dabarsaa* system.

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Actually, sharing with the poor is not limited to milk and milk products. During the threshing period, the grain owner may give some of his grain to the have-nots. Usually a resource poor person visits the grain owner at the threshing field while the threshing activity is going on. The visitor never asks the owner to give him/her grains. The mere fact that the poor person is visiting the owner at the threshing field signifies a strong message that the visitor needs some grain assistance. The visitor can help the owner with some activities although he/she is not requested to do so. At the end, the owner gives some amount of grain from his new harvest by way of support.

Giving grain to the poor is not done in a manner of giving something to a beggar. The fact that the poor person is receiving does not in any way compromise the decency and respect he/she deserves to have as a human being and as a member of that particular community. Here the most important thing is the communication manner between any person visiting the threshing field and the owner. Anybody visiting the thresher at the threshing field says " *Ogdiin haa barakatu!*" meaning 'let God bless the harvest', expressing a wish of high production. In response, the owner makes a response wishing his visitor good luck and prosperity in all aspects of life. Sometimes when the poor fails to come to the threshing field because of physical disability, age, etc. the owner sends some amount of the threshed grain for the poor at his/her home with respect.

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CHAPTER NINE

ANALYSIS: –

THE TULAMA OROMO DEVELOPMENT CONCEPTION AND PRACTICE

In the previous chapters, an attempt has been made to present the ethnographic information concerning the Tulama Oromo social organization, development thinking, land view, productive resource mobilization, and resource distribution mechanisms. This presentation mostly relied on describing the issues from the native's perspective with very minimum level of analysis. In this chapter, I will try to present the analysis of the Tulama Oromo development conception with some emphasis on the economic dimension of it although it has become clear that the economic aspects of development cannot be studied in isolation from the social, political, and cultural factors.

It is very difficult to capture the Oromo conception of development within one single theoretical framework. Neither is it possible to completely disassociate the Oromo view of development from theories as bits and pieces of the Oromo view are incorporated in one or the other theoretical perspective. Or, conversely, each and every theory can have some degree of relevance to certain aspects of the Oromo view of development. Regardless of what each and every theoretical perspective can possibly contribute, the Oromo view of development deserves to be studied in its own right. From this standpoint, post-modern approach to the study of societies that acknowledges cultural diversity and plurality of perspectives is a very pertinent framework.

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Post-modernism has led to the end of the dominance of unitary theories of progress and belief in scientific rationality. Theoretical frameworks such as functionalism – the notion of interdependent institutions which function to maintain the workings of the overall system; and structuralism – the idea of common binary oppositions which underlie all social forms tend to reduce societies to a series of commonalties. These theoretical perspectives and the notion of objective 'reality' have been replaced by the plurality of viewpoints since everyone experiences things differently. The latter viewpoints disregard the possible existence of common problems and thus, common solutions across all cultures. Blanket remedies for economic and social problems are no more entertained. Emphasis on diversity, the primacy of localized experience and the problems of societies in the developing world, interalia, undermined any attempt at generalization. The post-modern approach discusses strategies, practices and policies rather than generalized and deterministic theory. Anthropology has always had some post-modern tendencies. Cultural relativism insists upon recognizing the inner logic of different societies (Gardner and Lewis, 1996:21-22). This study emphasizes not on commonalties that the Oromo might share with other societies, which one can assess when making comparative studies, but on the localized experience of the Oromo with regard to development conception and practice. Particularly, the newly emergining neopopulist paradigm that promotes indigenous knowledge and challenges the top-down perspectives and favors the bottom-up participation

The Oromo social organization has significantly helped shape the Oromo worldview the way it is today. The two basic forms of the Oromo social organization are kinship, and *Gadaa/Siiqqee.* The Oromo kinship structure organizes the Oromo into different levels

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mostly along patrilineal lines. The *Gadaa* system, on the other hand, organizes the entire Oromo men across all kinship groups at every level into five distinctive social classes while *Siiqqee* institution organizes the entire married Oromo women into a comprehensive social group. In fact, people who belong to neither one kinship group nor to one *Gadaa* class can form social groupings based on their settlement pattern and geographical proximity which may be regarded as the third form of the Oromo social organization.

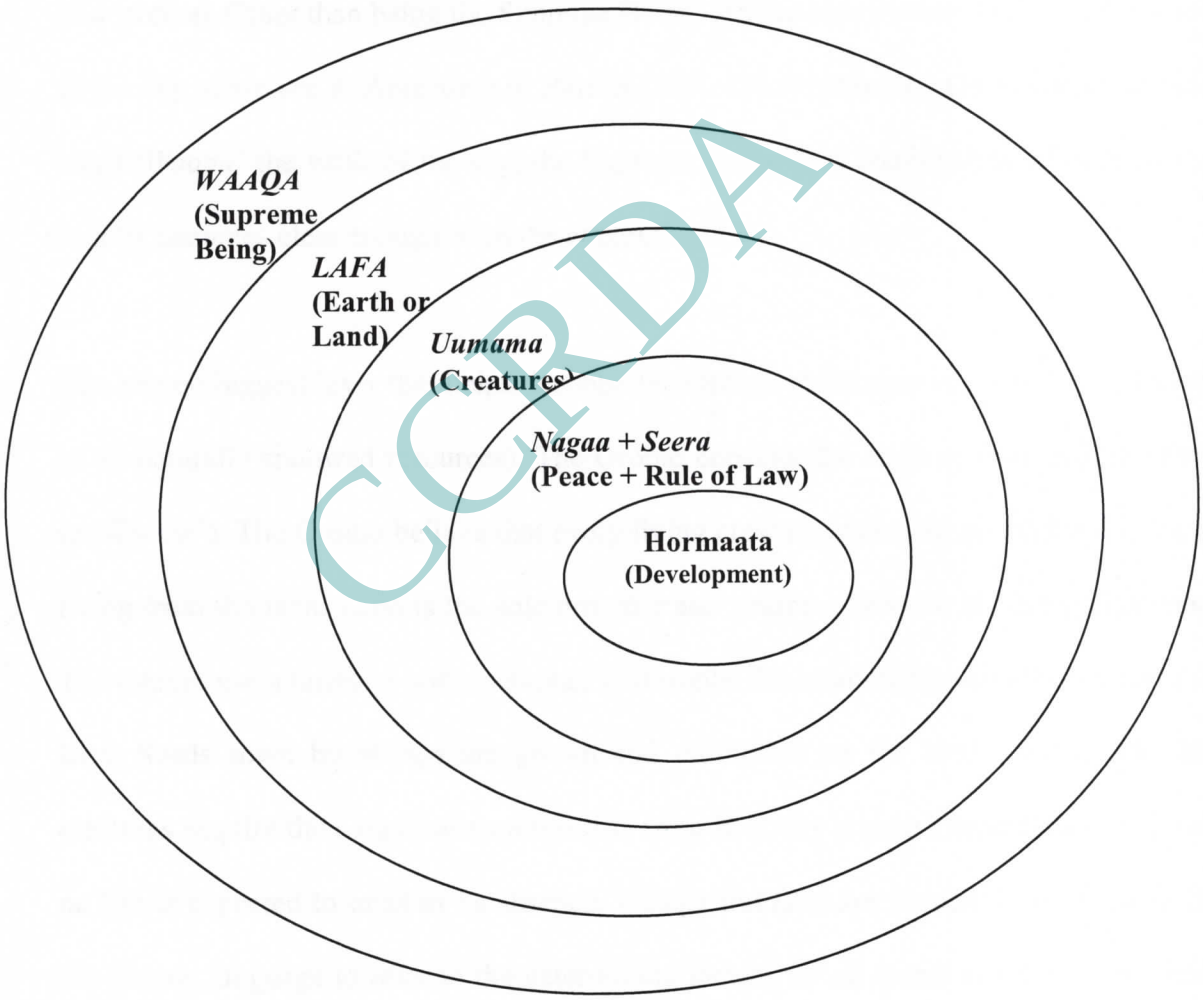
In the Oromo social organization, when kinship divisions instigate differentiation, conflict and disagreement, *Gadaa* serves as source of integration, peacemaking and harmony. These forms of social organization dictate and regulate how the Oromo perceive and understand development. According to many scholars and researchers, development did not always occur, and instead there were often disappointments and surprises. As a result the notion of development loses credibility, and hence development practice is becoming increasingly eclectic (Gardner and Lewis, 1996: 22).

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Despite its loss of credibility, the Oromo still view development as a process of positive and progressive change. There is no end to development. The Oromo equivalent concept for development is *hormaata* when combined with *Sanyyii* and *Gosa*. Kassam and Megerssa noted in their study of the pastoral Oromo that the word 'development' could be rendered in the Oromo language by the term *finna* (Megerssa, 1993:197, and Kassam, 2002:70). Both Oromo words do not differ conceptually as they refer to different forms of fertility although *finna* is commonly used to express human fertility among the Tulama Oromo. For the Oromo, fertility and productivity are core elements in understanding

development. Kassam (2002:70) states, "this notion of fertility constitutes one of the underlying generative principles of the Oromo culture, through which all aspects of the productive and reproductive life are cognitively structured."

Before embarking on the Oromo development model, it becomes necessary to consider the broader framework based on which the Oromo conception of development is to be analyzed. Based on information obtained from key informants, the Oromo view of understanding the world can be presented as follows:



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Figure 1: The Oromo framework of understanding the world.

Waaqa is an equivalent concept for the Supreme Being. The Oromo strongly believe that *Waaqa* is the creature of all that can be imagined, thought for, and understood. *Waaqa* is the ultimate horizon beyond which it is impossible to imagine anything. The Oromo proverb which says – *mana Waaqa duuba karaan nama hin dabarsu*, meaning 'there exists no road passing behind *Waqaa's* house'– clearly denotes the impossibility of imagining anything beyond *Waaqa*. According to this framework, *Waaqa* is regarded as a 'father' (a 'man[10]') although in principle it is gender neutral. When the Oromo say, '*Waaqni hin dhalu, hin dhalchu,*' it means *Waaqa* never gives birth to anybody as a man or a woman. Other than being the Supreme Being, *Waaqa* also means 'sky', i.e., the vault of the sky as we see it. According to Bartels (1990:89), whether the Oromo mean by this word '*Waaqa'* the vault of the sky, the Supreme Being or a combination of both things usually becomes clear enough from the context.

The second biggest layer that helps describe the Oromo worldview is the earth (inclusive of all naturally endowed resources). The Oromo consider the earth or land as a 'mother' (a 'woman'). The Oromo believe that every living creature is created on land and make a living from the land. Land is the sole provider and source of life for all living creatures. The Oromo use a husband-wife metaphor to describe the relation between *Waaqa* and the land. Seeds sown by *Waaqa* are grown and multiplied on the land. That is why all creatures acquire their survival requirements from it. Every creature depends on land and no life is expected to exist in its absence. *Waaqa* and land are frequently used words in the Oromo language to refer to the determining factors for all forms of life to come into being and to continue.

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[10] Bartels (1990:108-111) has elaborated the Macha Oromo view of *Waaqa,* the husband of earth and the earth, *Waaqa's* wife (women)

The third component that helps us understand the Oromo worldview is *uumama* (inclusive of all living creatures) whose life depends on *Waaqa* and the earth. According to the Oromo view, every living creature serves a certain purpose. There is no purposeless creature at all. Human beings are center to all living creatures. High degree of interdependence is believed to exist between these living creatures. *Safuu*[11] that provides the moral and ethical code according to which events take place governs such interdependence. It is by living in harmony with these laws, by following the path of *Waaqa* that a prosperous and happy life can be attained (Megerssa, 1993:226).

Nagaa (peace) enforced by the rule of law constitutes the fourth factor. One of the most frequently used word that the Oromo use in their daily life is *nagaa*. The Oromo believe that peace is a fundamental prerequisite for sustainable life. Baxter notes that peace, for the Oromo, is a prerequisite for all development and more than a mere absence of strife, which implies active cooperation and agreement. Failure to maintain the peace would result in a confused and distempered universe (Baxter, 1965 cited in Kassam, 1994:33). For peace to exist and sustain there must be the rule of law. So far, *Gadaa* plays substantial role in maintaining peace and order among the Tulama Oromo. It is within this broad framework that the Oromo begin to think about development, which is the core issue of the subject under discussion.

Among the few scholars that have dealt with the Oromo notion of development, Aneesa Kassam (1994, 2002) is the first serious scholar who has attempted to develop a model

[11] See: Bartels (1990:330-341) for further understanding of the concept.

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for the purpose of explaining development from the native's viewpoint. Her model is presented as follows:

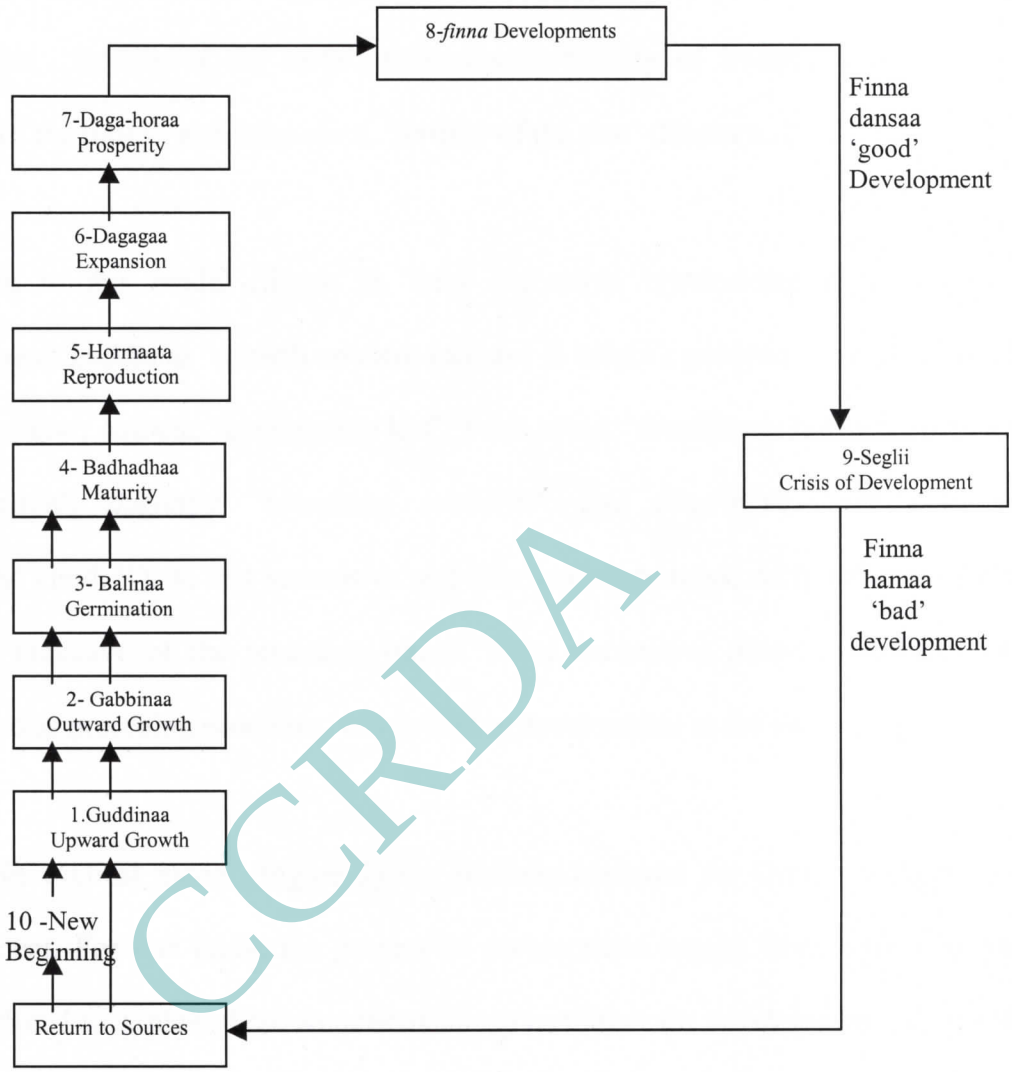


Figure 2: The Oromo model of growth and development (Kassam, 2002:71; 1994:29-35)

The Oromo model of growth and development presented by Kassam was based on Megerssa's study of the southern most pastoral Borana, who still practice many elements of the *Gadaa* system. Particularly, the study was carried out in 1987 under the mentor Dabassa Guyyoo, who was trained from an early age in the historical traditions of the Borana (see also Megerssa, 1993:196-219). According to the study the word

'development' can be rendered in the Oromo language by the term *finna,* which is derived from the verb *fidu*, meaning to bring, to give, or to hand down. The core meaning of the word actually refers to different types of fertility – *finna namaa,* 'human fertility'; *finna lafaa*, 'fertility of the earth'; *finna horii,* 'fertility of livestock'; *finna baraa*, 'fertility of the times'; and *finna durii,* 'fertility of the past' (Kassam, 2002:70-71).

According to this model (figure 2), there are seven interlocking steps leading to development: *guddinaa,* 'growth upward, increase in height'; *gabbina,* 'growth outwards, gain in weight'; *balinaa,* 'coming into leaf'; *badhadhaa,* 'abundance, fullness; *hormaata,* 'reproduction'; *dagaaga,* 'branching outwards'; and *daga-hora,* 'expansion and prosperity' (Ibid:71). In this successive and interlocking process, each and every higher phase is inclusive of the preceding phase. These successive phases of growth were considered as preceding processes, which lead to development at the eighth stage.

The above cyclical model (Figure 2) has partially captured the Oromo conception of development. For one thing, the process of development begins from certain sources. Kassam failed to explain these sources as innate condition for development. Second, the model does not adequately explain the difference between each phase of growth. Particularly, the model hardly describes how each phase in the spiral growth manifests itself in people's life. Third, the model undermined the processual nature of development and instead considered development as one phase (the eighth stage) of the process in itself, which may lead to crisis that eventually leads to new beginning.

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It should be acknowledged that any model cannot fully capture people's conception of development. However, one model can be more compete than the other depending on the information it contains. The following model provides more complete version of the Oromo development thinking, and overcomes some inadequacies observed in Kassam's model.

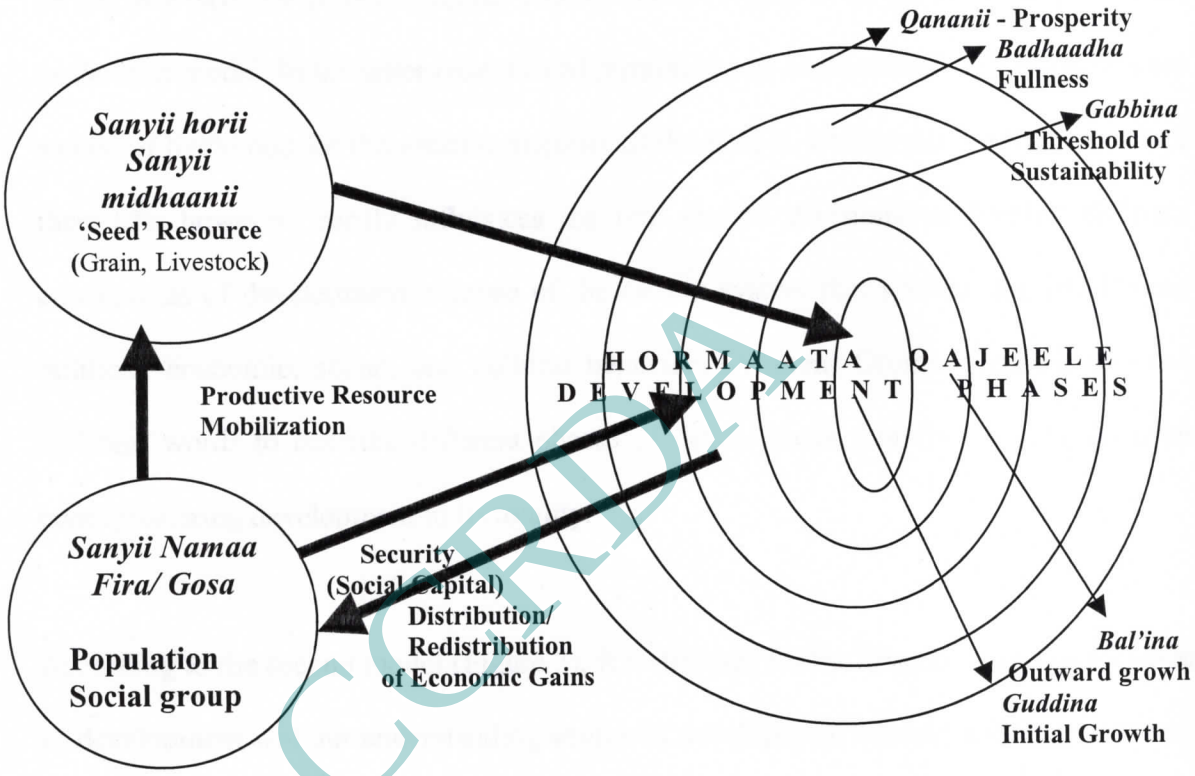


Figure 3: The Oromo conception of development (the Tulama Oromo version).

One may be of the opinion that the two models are different because the two studied communities are different and hence they can have different understanding for development. It is true that the sources of information for constructing the two models are from two Oromo divisions (the Sabbo-Gona and the Tulama) situated in different geographical areas. The first model (Figure 2) that describes the Oromo view of

development was based on the information obtained from the southern part of Oromiya where *Gadaa* system is most practiced. Livelihood of the Sabbo-Gona of *Borana* mostly depends on livestock production.

Information gathered from the Tulama Oromo, who live in the central part of Oromia, served as a basis for constructing the second model (Figure 3) on the same subject matter as the first model. In the latter case, mixed farming (crop and livestock production) is the source of livelihood for the greatest majority of the people. Difference in some aspects of their life, however, hardly influences the two Oromo divisions to develop different conceptions of development because of the *Gadaa* system that governs the pan-Oromo political, economic, social, and cultural behavior. Different Oromo divisions can use different words to describe different phases of development, but they do not differ in conceptualizing development in its totality.

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According to the second model (Figure 3), it is difficult for the Oromo to perceive phases of development without understanding source of development (*sanyii*) and how each and every phase of development is related to people's economic and social life. People are the source as well as the ultimate beneficiary of development. For development to take place we must be able to have *sanyii,* meaning seed. *Sanyii* is a startup resource ('capital') that we need to inject in order to obtain increased amount of output. *Sanyii* always implies multiplication, reproduction, or fertility. When the source of livelihood is mixed farming as is the case in the Tulama Oromo, initial resources, i.e., grain seeds and some cattle should be made available for development to take place. It is the continuous reproduction

or multiplication of grains and livestock that helps an individual step from one phase of development to the other subsequent phase.

Guddina / Upward growth: In the Oromo economic development view, *guddina* is the start up step. This initial stage requires critical minimum start up productive resource. Looking at the three broader phases of development – a move from the phase of dependence, through independence to interdependence – (Kaplan, 1996:19-28), *guddina* can be regarded as a dependence phase. At this phase, individuals depend on their parents, relatives, and other community members to acquire the seed capital (*Sanyii*) by way of grant (*Handhuura* or *Tirma*) or other traditional resource distribution mechanisms (e.g. *Iribbii* or *Dabarsaa*). If properly nurtured, the startup resources reproduce and multiply. Such increases in size of resource would gradually lead to the next phase of development, i.e., *Bal'ina* – outward growth.

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Bal'ina / Outward growth (expansion): From a biological perspective, both upward growth (*guddina*) and outward growth (*bal'ina*) take place simultaneously. In economic development, *bal'ina* symbolizes a state of self-sufficiency. At this phase of development, individuals have already obtained some amount of resources adequate for survival as well as for investment. The size of the resources enable them to react to the dependency phase by asserting their independence and individuality. They develop individual identities and define 'self' through differentiating from the other. Individuals' sense of distinctiveness and competitiveness is very high. Apart from expanding the size of their resources, they tend to explore and engage in more diversified activities.

Gabbina / Threshold of sustainability: *Gabbina* is not only a matter of further resource accumulation and possession. At this phase the need for interconnectedness within community members becomes more feasible and indispensable. Unlike the previous phase of independence, *Gabbina* is characterized by interdependence and need for integration with members of a particular social group. People in this phase of development begin to share their resources with others based on culturally prescribed rules and principles. The redistribution system creates a sense of communal ownership of individual property. It is this sense of communal ownership that renders security and protection for individual property, which could otherwise be raided or looted or exposed to other risks. This phase can be considered as the threshold of sustainable development since further reproduction and multiplication of resources get security and protection from the entire community members.

Badhaadha / Fullness: At this phase of development, individuals' well-being in terms of possessing (productive) resources reaches a very high level. The magnitude of resources (number of livestock or quantity of grains produced) reaches such a level that the owners occasionally loose track of part of their resources. The level of generosity is also very high that almost every poor individual in the community benefits from these resources in one way or the other. People at this phase of development are regarded as *abbaa hiyyeessaa* (father of the poor). Their level of interdependence and interconnectedness with other community members is highly consolidated. It is at this development phase that one gets maximum social capital. The level of richness creates the impression among many of the community members as if these resources were duplicated by certain miracles rather than proper functioning of the production system.

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Qananii / Prosperity: *Qananii* is the Oromo concept used to express the highest phase of the development process. Much more than multiplication of resources and social capital, *Qananii* refers to the satisfaction one gets from the resources by way of utilization. Not all resource rich persons attain this phase of development. People who have some trouble with members of their community or have health problems cannot enjoy benefits driven from their resources.

Qananii is driven not only from the optimum consumption one gains at a personal level as owner, but also the maximum benefits that the community members obtained from these resources. People who have attained this level of development are notoriously known and in most instances communities are sometimes called after their names (*abbaa biyyaa*). Their names and respective profiles are carried over from one generation to the other through oral history and/or songs. Since development is a discontinuous process (Kaplan, 1996:7), this phase may lead to a crisis that makes the previous stage of development no longer tenable. The crisis, in turn, creates a situation where the development process moves to a more complex state, which presents new challenges that require fundamental shifts in attitude and behavior.

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In our attempt to understand the Oromo conception of development, we have to make a clear distinction between wealth ranking and development phases, which are seemingly similar. Wealth ranking indicates the relative wealth position of an individual in relation to the other persons at a particular time. Development phases reveal the process one has to go through to attain certain level of wealth status over a period of time. In fact, there is a high degree of parallelism between the two since the wealth status of a particular person

can approximately be associated with certain phase of development. In the Oromo case such parallelism can be established as follows:

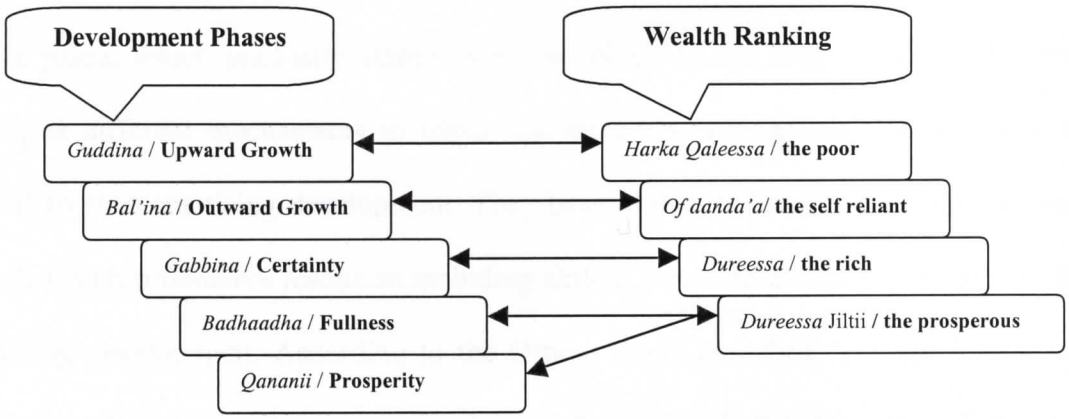


Figure 4: Correspondence between development phases and wealth ranking.

As one can observe from the figure above, resource poor people with some start up 'capital' can be categorized in the first phase of development. Not all resource poor persons can be included in this first phase of development, but only those poor people that can properly nurture their meager resources for better results. In the same manner, the self-sufficient and the rich people can be categorized in the second and the third phases of development, respectively. *Dureessa Jiltii* (the prosperous), which is the highest stage of wealth ranking, can be very rich people that have attained *Badhaadha* and *Qananii* phases of development. One fundamental difference between wealth ranking and phases of development is that while wealth ranking focuses on measuring economic resources of an individual alone, development phases consider both the extent of resources and satisfaction obtained from these resources.

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To sum up, the Oromo believe that development is a process in time. They have developed internal logic by which development is facilitated and nurtured. One fundamental requirement for development to take place is availability of startup resource. It is when this startup productive resource is properly nurtured that development begins to take place, which gradually stages from one phase to the other. The Oromo have developed different mechanisms in which the have-nots can acquire 'seed' resources (*Sanyii*) to start practicing development. They have also introduced several mechanisms through which productive resources including skilled labor are effectively mobilized for facilitating development. According to the Oromo view, therefore, it is this systematic coordination between startup resources, skilled labor, and redistribution mechanisms that explains development.

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CHAPTER TEN

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The Oromo are one of the ancient peoples in Africa and belong to the Cushitic speakers. At present, the Oromo live in the Oromiya National Regional State, which is located in the central part of Ethiopia as well as in the northern part of Kenya. The Oromo have a coherent system of governance called *Gadaa*. *Gadaa* is a system that has organized the entire Oromo men into broad social groups with a strong democratic and egalitarian ethos. A parallel social organization for Oromo women is called *Siiqqee.* Unlike the modern nation state territorial and resource based system of organizing people, the *Gadaa* system organizes people who belong to the same *Gadaa* class and share common values and responsibilities across kinship structures and territorial designations.

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The Oromo also have strong kinship based organizations that have multiple social, economic, cultural and religious functions. The Oromo forms of social organization are characterized by a combination of both the *Gadaa* system and kinship structure. *Gadaa* is the source of laws, rules and democratic principles that govern the Oromo ways of life from different aspects. Kinship organizations mostly serve as strong implementing wings of these laws, rules and democratic principles. Normally, a particular kinship group takes collective responsibility for deviations and crimes committed by its individual members. Basically, bigger kinship groups split up into smaller units mainly to effectively manage and enforce implementation of laws, rules and regulations; to overcome scarcity of resources caused by increased human and livestock population; and to prevent hostilities

between different social groups of the same *Gadaa* class competing for political power. The kinship-based organization also facilitates the Oromo exogamous marriage system. It should be noted that the exogamous marriage system has established strong ties between different kinship groups. Seniority is very important in the Oromo social organization. Senior kinship groups at every level of the Oromo kinship structure get high status and recognition particularly in ritual events. Because of this high social value associated with seniority, there were times when junior kinship groups mischievously (seemingly mythical) gained the status of seniority.

When disagreements and conflicts occur between kinship groups, the *Gadaa* system serves as a source of peace and order. Women with the help of their *Siiqqee* institution play an indispensable role in the process of peace building between conflicting kinship groups. Unlike kinship groups, there has never been a time when conflict occurred between different *Gadaa* classes. In fact, the five *Gadaa* classes – *Roobalee, Duuloo, Birmajii, Michillee,* and *horataa* – compete as regards their achievements among themselves on the basis of merit and such competition has never led to occurrence of violent conflict. Nevertheless, conflict may arise between different social (kinship) groups or individuals of the same *Gadaa* class that are competing for power. Regardless of how conflict occurs, the *Gadaa* system has continued to serve as a basis for making and building peace, which is an essential requirement for development.

The complex interconnectedness and relations between the *Gadaa* system and kinship structures not only governs the Oromo political, social, economic and cultural life but also dictates and shapes their worldview. The Oromo conception and practice of

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development is an outcome of the process. For the Oromo, development is holistic and manifests itself in the social, economic and cultural aspects of their life. There is no theoretical perspective that fully captures and accommodates the Oromo notion of development. This view, however, does not make different theoretical perspectives irrelevant. In the study of the Oromo development thinking, we have considered bits and pieces of several theoretical perspectives. For instance, I have looked at the structuralist notion of binary opposition when we described the Oromo view of development as positive and progressive change (*hormaata qajeele*) and its opposite concept, self-destruction (*badii*). I have stated functionalism, for example, when explaining the social functions of *Gadaa* system and kinship groups in the overall Oromo social organization and how different institutions are used to help mobilize productive resources for development. *Gadaa* grades, traditional lawmaking processes, and development phases were narrated in light of evolutionary theoretical perspective. I have also touched on the Marxist view when we stated that the Oromo have introduced various resource distribution mechanisms (egalitarianism) essentially to enable the rich to obtain security from the majority poor, which otherwise entail class struggle between the rich and the poor for fair distribution of the benefits of development. The Oromo development notion, nevertheless, was studied based on postmodernism approach and an attempt was made to describe their localized experience.

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For the Oromo, development is basically biological and natural. They usually employ biological metaphors in their language to explain and understand their social and economic development. They use biological metaphors to express developments taking place in all dimensions of their life. For instance, the Oromo words such as *ulfa'u* ('to

conceive' or 'be pregnant'), *dahu*, ('to give birth to') are biological metaphors used in the process of traditional lawmaking to demonstrate how laws are evolving before they grow into maturation. Terms such as *sanyii* ('seed'), *buusaa* ('bear fruits'), and *hormaata* ('fertility or reproduction or multiplication') are also driven from growth and development of natural phenomena.

Economic development can be understood along three interdependent concepts – *sanyii, hormaata,* and *tika*. *Sanyyii* as a concept that stands for seed capital or startup resource that one needs to have to engage in economic activities. *Hormaata* refers to fertility, productivity, or multiplication. Once *sanyii* is properly utilized and nurtured, it should be able to reproduce and multiply. The Oromo also believe that smooth development requires *nagaa* that guarantees security (*tika*). It is the presence of reliable security that guarantees further reproduction and multiplication of resources. Security requires, among other things, belongingness to the community one lives with while at the same time redistributing resources through different culturally accepted rules and mechanisms. Development is a process. There are five phases of growth and development that one goes through. These development phases, according to the Tulama Oromo are *guddina* (upward growth), *bal'inaa* (outward growth), *gabbina* (certainty), *badhaadhina* (fullness), and *qananii* (prosperity). The Oromo have also developed wealth-ranking system, which measures individual's wealth status in relation to other community members. These ranks of wealth are locally known as *deega* (the destitute), *harka qaleessa* (the poor), *of danda'a* (the self-sufficient), *dureessa* (the rich), and *dureessa jiltii* (the prosperous). The Oromo used to declare their wealth status to the public ceremonially when their wealth status reaches certain stage. As the livelihoods of the

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Tulama Oromo depend on mixed crop and livestock production, such wealth status monitoring used to take place when the number of heads of cattle reach over one thousand or when hundreds of *daawullas* (quintals) of grains are harvested in a year. With the increasing level of poverty, such wealth status monitoring system has totally vanished.

When describing development, the Oromo strongly believe that land is an absolute provider and source of their livelihoods. Values associated with land are also embedded in the Oromo social and cultural practices as well as their religious beliefs. More broadly, land is the source and basis of all living creatures. Thus, according to the Oromo view, human beings constitute only one of the living creatures that can claim possession over land. This outlook, of course, radically opposes the idea and practice of individualized ownership of land as any other private property.

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The Oromo have developed several institutions through which they effectively mobilize productive resources for economic development. These institutions can be classified into mutual support and exchange systems. Those mechanisms by which productive resources are mobilized but not necessarily based on equal reciprocity are referred to as mutual support systems. In this system there exists a possibility for one to benefit more than the other. *Daboo* and *Kadhachiisa* are typical institutions operating under this system. Those practices by which productive resource mobilization takes place based on equal reciprocity based on agreed upon terms and conditions are classified under the exchange system. *Wanfala* and *bu'ii* are some examples of productive resource mobilization based on exchange.

People are very important means and the ultimate beneficiary of development. Multiplication and concentration of resources in the hands of few individuals might expose these resources to all sorts of risk. These resources can be raided, or looted or damaged. Thus, they require security (*tika*). In the Oromo social organization, individuals with big families and lineages or big clans are more secure. Security is actually ensured when the rich becomes generous enough and distributes benefits of economic development to the poor in his community through traditional resource distribution mechanisms. This attitude has created a strong desire in every individual household to have as many children as possible and in effect economic growth and development could not keep pace with increased size of population making life difficult for many of the households.

The Oromo have developed different resource distribution mechanisms, which are built into their economic system. In most instances, distribution of resources is not for the immediate consumption but meant for productive purpose. *Handhuura*, *Tirmaa, Ribbii* and *Dabarsa* are traditional resource redistribution mechanisms primarily aimed at creating startup resource for resource poor persons.

Although kinship plays an important role in determining social relations among community members, most economic institutions that are oriented towards mobilizing productive resources and distributing benefits of development to the people are not necessarily based on kinship relations. For instance, provision of a milking cow based on the *Dabarsaa* system to the poor does not necessary go along kinship lines. Any poor

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community member who does not have kin-based relations can benefit from the system. Neither is *Daboo* nor *Wanfala* based on kinship relations.

Economic development for the Oromo is, therefore, a systematic and well-balanced relation between the three variables such as seed capital (*Sanyii*), its reproduction and multiplication (*hormaata*), and distribution of benefits, which implies security (*tika*). The economy of the Tulama Oromo is based on mixed crop-livestock production. Thus, economic development is based on the notion of producing as much grains as possible and as many heads of cattle as possible while at the same time redistributing the benefits to the poor based on culturally acceptable principles.

Many of the indigenous knowledge systems are at risk of becoming extinct because of the intrusion of foreign technologies or development concepts that promise short-term gains or solutions to problems without being capable of sustaining them based on top-down approach. Indigenous knowledge is part of the lives of the rural poor, meaning their livelihood depends almost entirely on specific skills and knowledge essential for their survival. A new revolution that advocates for the bottom-up particpation in the process of development provides good opportunity for the study of indigenous knowledge as an alterantive approach to development.

This study attempted to assess only part of the indigenous knowledge system of the Oromo. More research activities need to be carried out to further investigate people's knowledge, skills and institutions including possibilities as to how development interventions continue building on these traditionally proven skills, knowledge and institutions.

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Appendix I: ***List of Informants and Interviewees***

No.	Name	Age	Zone	Woreda	Kebele	Gadaa Class
1	Tuffa Huba Robi	76	West Shoa	Welmera	Lencha Telecho	Michille
2	Lemma Hunde Aredo	80	West Shoa	Welmera	Lencha Telecho	Michille
3	Tibebu Melka Shuki	60	West Shoa	Welmera	Ula Silassie	Michille
4	Desta Ayana Huba	60	West Shoa	Welmera	Dufa	Women
5	Ida'o Mumicha	72	East Shoa	Dugda Bora	Sera Wakele	Michille
6	Dori Erba	93	East Shoa	Dugda Bora	Shubi Gamo	Robale
7	Gudeta Kufa	60	East Shoa	Dugda Bora	Shubi Gamo	Dhalchisa
8	Iddato Obse	60	East Shoa	Dugda Bora	Birbirsa	Robele
9	Gada Badhaso	60	East Shoa	Dugda Bora	Meki 01	Dhalchisa
10	Fiseha Lenjiso	50	East Shoa	Dugda Bora	Meki 01	Dhalchisa
11	Legesse Ayano	51	East Shoa	Ada'a-Liben	Adulala	Michille
12	Bayisa Jima	97	West Shoa	Dendi	Wamura Seko	???
13	Gutama Ta'o	65	West Shoa	Dendi	Ginchi 01	???
14	Abera Muleta	50	West Shoa	Ejere	Ilu Aga	???
15	Yami Borena	58	East Shoa	Lume	Dungugi Bakale	???
16	Nigussie Belihu	66	East Shoa	Lume	Ejersa Jorro	Birmeji
17	Fiche Jirru	72	East Shoa	Lume	Koka Negewo	Birmeji
18	Warji Telila	68	East Shoa	Lume	Dungugi Bakale	Dulo
19	Besha Borena	62	East Shoa	Lume	Koka Negewo	???
20	Degefa Kedida	63	East Shoa	Lume	Koka Negewo	???
21	Ambessie Chefe	67	West Shoa	Ejere	Ilu Aga	Dulo
22	Dubale Eda'e	58	West Shoa	Ejere	Ilu Aga	Dulo
23	Anbessie Tuffa	60	West Shoa	Ejere	Ilu Aga	???
24	Haile Erba	55	West Shoa	Ejere	Ilu Aga	???
25	Diro Lelise	76	West Shoa	Jeldu	Gojo 01	Michille
26	Gudeta Bilto	80	West Shoa	Jeldu	Hindhe Dora	Michille
28	Adugna Ararso	57	West Shoa	Jeldu	Kolu Gelan	???
29	Teressa Irre	66	North Shoa	Sululta-Mulo	Workito	???
30	Haile Balcha	54	North Shoa	Sululta-Mulo	Kersa	???

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Key informants (Dugda Bora District of East Shoa)

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