

**OLD AGE AND SOCIAL
CHANGE: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY
OF THE LIVES OF THE ELDERLY AMONG
THE AMHARA OF ENSARO**

BY

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DECLARATION

The thesis is my original work, has not been presented for a degree in any other university and that all sources of material used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged.

Name _____

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|---|------------|
| Acknowledgements | iii |
| List of Tables, Maps, and Photos | iv |
| Glossary | v |
| Abstract..... | vii |
| Preface..... | x |

CHAPTER ONE

| | |
|---|----------|
| BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY | 1 |
| 1.1. Statement of the problem..... | 3 |
| 1.1. 1. Review of Related Literature | 5 |
| 1.1.1.1. Roles, Status, and Treatment of the Aged | 5 |
| 1.1.1.2. Problems and Needs of Old People | 7 |
| 1.1.1.3. Theories of Old Age | 7 |
| 1.2. Objectives | 10 |
| 1.2.1. Major Objectives..... | 10 |
| 1.2.2. Specific Objectives | 10 |
| 1.3. Significance of the Study | 11 |
| 1.4. Choice of the Research Site | 11 |
| 1.5. Scope and Limitation of the Research | 12 |
| 1.6. Methodology | 13 |
| 1.6.1. Data Collection Method | 13 |
| 1.6.2. Data Analysis | 15 |
| 1.6.3. Problems Encountered | 15 |
| 1.6.4. Entrance to the Field | 16 |

CHAPTER 2

| | |
|--|-----------|
| THE SOCIAL SETTING..... | 20 |
| 2.1. Geographical Context | 21 |
| 2.2. Population | 24 |
| 2.2.1 Social Organization | 25 |
| 2.2.1.1. Family and Lineage..... | 25 |
| 2.2.1.2. Marriage and Pattern of Residence | 26 |
| 2.2.1.3. Indigenous Social Institutions | 34 |
| 2.2.1.3.1. <i>Mehaber</i> | 34 |
| 2.2.1.3.2. <i>Debo</i> | 35 |
| 2.2.1.3.3. <i>Wonfel</i> | 37 |
| 2.2.1.3.4. <i>Edir</i> | 38 |
| 2.2.1.3.5. <i>Equb</i> | 39 |
| 2.2.1.4. Belief System | 39 |

| | |
|---------------------------------------|----|
| 2.2.1.5. Inter-Ethnic Relations | 44 |
|---------------------------------------|----|

CHAPTER 3

STATUSES AND ROLES OF OLD PEOPLE IN GOSHWUHA...47

| | |
|--|----|
| 3.1. Emic Definition of Old Age..... | 47 |
| 3.2. Role and Status of Old People during the Monarchy | 52 |
| 3.3. Role and Status of Old People during the Derg Regime | 55 |
| 3.4. Role and Status of Old People during the EPRDF Administration | 58 |

CHAPTER 4

GENDER AND OLD AGE IN GOSHWUHA.....65

| | |
|-------------------------------------|----|
| 4.1. Women in Old Age | 65 |
| 4.2. Men in Old Age | 69 |
| 4.3. The State of Widowhood | 73 |
| 4.4. Property and Inheritance | 76 |

CHAPTER 5

SOCIAL RELATION.....80

| | |
|---|----|
| 5.1. Intra-Generation Ties | 80 |
| 5.1.1. Husband and Wife Relationship | 80 |
| 5.1.2. Ties between Siblings | 81 |
| 5.1.3. Relationship between Peers | 84 |
| 5.2. Inter-Generation Ties | 87 |
| 5.2.1. Ties between Elderly Parents and their Children..... | 87 |
| 5.2.2. Ties between Grandparents and Grandchildren..... | 89 |
| 5.2.3. Ties with Nieces and Nephews | 92 |
| 5.2.4. Ties between Elders and Their In-Laws | 93 |
| 5.3. Relationships with Neighbors | 94 |
| 5.4. Relationship with Community | 95 |

CHAPTER 6

PROBLEMS OF OLD PEOPLE AND THEIR COPING

MECHANISMS.....101

| | |
|--|-----|
| 6.1. SOCIO-Economic Problems | 101 |
| 6.1.1. Food Shortage | 101 |
| 6.1.2. Shelter | 102 |
| 6.1.3. Toilet | 103 |
| 6.1.4. Health..... | 114 |
| 6.1.5. Burden of Caring for Dependents | 105 |
| 6.1.6. Abuse in Old Age..... | 106 |
| 6.1.6.1. Neglect | 106 |
| 6.1.6.2. Exploitation..... | 108 |
| 6.1.6.3. Abandonment..... | 111 |
| 6.1.6.4. Physical Abuse..... | 112 |
| 6.2. Abuse on Caretaker..... | 113 |

6.3.Coping Mechanisms.....115

CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION123

BIBLIOGRAPHY136

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A Sayings and Poems with Negative Connotations..... 136

APPENDIX B Summary of Data from Questionnaires 137

APPENDIX C Photographs 146

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY
A THESIS IN SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Old Age And Social Change: An Anthropological Study of the Lives of the Elderly among the Amhara of Ensaro.

By
Kifle Mengesha

Abstract

Old people are important members of a given society. Nevertheless, the extent of attention given to this group varies considerably. In Ethiopia, demographic reports unanimously indicate that the conventional productive and reproductive age group ranges between 15-49 years. This implicitly shows that those aged over 50 are not considered important.

This study was designed to explore the livelihoods of old people in rural area, an important and yet poorly studied group. The study was carried out among the Amhara of Ensaro. The major objectives of the study were to describe the life of the elderly in the context of local social, cultural and economic frameworks. The study specifically addresses such questions as emic definitions of old age, dynamics of old people's life styles, gender related activities of old people and intra and inter generational ties between the old people and the younger generation.

Data relevant to the stated objectives have been collected using a combination of techniques. These include participatory observation, focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, sample survey, taking pictures, and recording daily routines and events. These methods are designed to compliment each other. Forty informants were chosen

purposefully from the total number of three hundred sixty three people aged fifty-five and above.

The major findings of the study show that definitions of old age are based on biological, functional, psychological, and social attributes. However, functional attributes were found to be common markers of old age. As long as a person carries out his normal activities he is not considered to be old. Based on a chronological definition, it was gathered that local people established the onset of old age and three categories of elders. Age 55 is regarded as the threshold of old age and age brackets 55-65, 65-75, and 76 and above are considered young-old, middle-old and old-old respectively. The study explores the roles and statuses of old people under three Government administrations (Haile Selassie, Derg, and EPRDF). In the Haile Selassie (Monarchic) regime elders had a high status and role and commanded good respect. It can be argued that this is mainly because children were directly allocated land by their parents when they established households of their own which in turn strengthens filial piety and respect toward their parents. Elders were responsible to handle such social problems as blood feuds and other conflicts in their community. During the Derg regime, however, land was nationalized and redistributed among members of the society. Most of the children who reached the marriageable age could be allocated land through leaders of peasant association. This trend had a negative impact with regard to respect and filial piety towards the aged. Furthermore, the emergence of various mass organizations eroded the role and status of the aged, most of the young became orators in public in the presence of elders, unlike previously.

Under the present government (EPRDF) land was redistributed and those who were labeled as 'feudal' during the Derg regime suffered again during this regime and were labeled as kirit fudal (remnant-feudal) and those who were involved in the Derg bureaucracy within the peasant association were labeled as 'bureaucrats' and allotted only four gemed (one hectare) irrespective of the size of their household. Most of these people ('bureaucrats') have already reached old age and were the subject of this study.

Like other Amhara societies, Ensaro is a male dominated community. Despite this fact, gender roles and activities are relaxed to some extent and sometimes reversed in old age. Housekeeping and looking after children by old people are some of the cases in point.

Intra and inter generation ties are important strategies to adjust to different problems of old age. Good relationships with spouses, children, and other kin group members are taken as vital mechanism to cope with problems. The support system between male children and elderly parents is reciprocal where children are nurtured early in their life and latter benefit from their elderly parents property while elderly parents obtain immediate care and attention from their male children.

Most often social problems of the elderly are argued to be an urban phenomenon. However, this study clearly found that the problems are widespread in at least this area. It was found that the poor elders are denied proper care and support from potential caretakers mainly because this group do not have sufficient property to share. The middle-old and the old-old categories are vulnerable to socio-economic problems, mainly the later for they are not able to augment their income by participating in various activities. Abuse in old age such as neglect, exploitation, abandonment, and physical attack are also prevalent among the old age group with relatively more effects on the poor elders. Elders follow various mechanisms to sustain their livelihoods. The poor young-old participate in other activities such as daily labour, selling sugarcane and wild fruits, and some of them send out their male children to adjust the size of their households and also to obtain income in the form of grain from the labour of their children. The middle-old and the old-old, mainly the later depend on caretakers, mainly children. They also attend church services and receive food alms around churchyards.

Chapter One

Background to the Study Problem

Introduction

Old age or senescence is the last stage of the normal life span in human beings. The term old age has a dual definition. The first is the last stage in the life processes of an individual and the second is an age group or generation comprising a segment of the oldest members of a population. However, there is no universally accepted age that is considered old among or within societies; because of inconsistencies as to what age a society may consider old and what members in that society may consider old.

For statistical and public administration purposes, however, age of eligibility for retirement (chronological age), which is 60 or 65 for western or developed countries (UN, 1991:9) and 55 for some developing countries of Africa including Ethiopia (Teshome, 1996: 46), is a mark of old age.

Nowadays, the world's population is aging due to improved public health services in both rich and poor countries, which results in significant growth of life expectancy at birth. According to same estimates there were about 200 million people over 60 in the world in the 1950s. In the year 2000 this number has already reached 550 million, and by 2025 it will be about 1.2 billion (Randel et al., 1999: xii).

In Ethiopia, according to the 1994 population and Housing Census, the number of people aged 60 years and above was 2,632,171. Of this total 2,307,425 (87.66%) and 324,746 (12.3%) live in rural and urban areas, respectively.

In most developed countries, the problem of old people is addressed through institutional care. This support system is functional to a lesser extent in the urban areas of developing countries. However, the support mechanism of older people in most developing countries is embedded in the kinship institution.

In Ethiopia, especially in rural areas, the family structure is characterized by an extended network of relations. This has been and still is an important source of support in terms of provision of food, shelter, financing health expenditure, and etc, to elder members. Though this is believed to be the case in general, there have been limited studies conducted on the elderly.

This study hence, aims to explore the dynamics in the life of the elderly in a rural setting. By doing so, the study intends to contribute to the scarce literature on the elderly. It also hopes to come up with sound data that would be useful for policy formulation concerning the elderly.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Anthropology has a long history of interest in age, and aged informants, but not in aging or the aged (Fry, 1980: 1). Older people have provided many of the fascinating accounts of the cultures they remembered in their life experiences. Anthropological studies of aging, however, with few exceptions, are comparatively a recent phenomenon (Keith, 1988 (a): 339). Hence, this research investigates the role and status of elderly people in their society as well as their problems and needs.

The definition of old age is controversial and varies greatly from one culture to another as it lies in biological, psychological and social frameworks (Keith, 1980: 175; Beaubier, 1980: 21; Homes, 1980: 277-278; Orwoll and Perlmutter, 1990: 145; Fray, 1991 (b): 82). The most commonly accepted definition of elderly people in both developed and developing countries is found in social policy documents that define retirement ages (Leslie, 1989: 563; Atchley, 1991: 6 Abera, 1996: 20).

However, in many preliterate or traditional societies, chronological time has little or no importance on the meaning of old age. Other socially constructed meanings of age are more significant such as roles assigned to older people, the loss of roles accompanying physical decline where active contribution is no longer possible (Vatuk, 1980: 143; Holmes, 1980: 277; Rendel et al., 1999:5).

The recent increase in the number of senior citizens is a worldwide phenomenon. It is reported in both industrialized and non-industrialized countries (UN, 1991:11; UN, 1994:2). The majority of older people in most developed countries have little role, power, and

veneration. In some countries like Japan and China, however, the aged maintain their power and privilege (Piouesana, 1979: 13; Ikels, 1980: 94 – 95; Macionis, 1987:332). Despite the reduced trends of role and power of the aged in developed countries, they all enjoy automatic support in the form of pension system or social security program (Tinker, 1992:7).

In most traditional or preliterate societies old people are respected, and have high status and role. The norms of old people are actualized in terms of obedience, veneration, filial piety, and social support network (Cantor, 1980; Ikles, 1980:82; Macionis, 1987:330; Posiner, 1995:212). However, according to Simmon (cited in Atchley 1991: 9), with rapid socioeconomic rate of change, older People lose their advantageous status because of the declining significance of kinship ties. This trend may be true in some part of rural Ethiopia including Ensaro in the Amhara National Regional State, the site of this research.

Evidences have shown that in parts of rural Ethiopia, land fragmentation, poverty, rural-urban migration, and the expansion of market forces severely affect old people. Old people face economic hardships, food shortages, chronic diseases, loss of filial piety and veneration (Abera, 1996: 33; Meseret, 1996: 59; Mengesha, 1996: 5). Though the developmental social policy of Ethiopia has clearly pinpointed the need to solve the problems of needy elderly persons (MOLSA, 1996), one may critically question its practical application after five years of policy implementation. This is evidenced by the fact that many migrant elderly do not get basic support and they resort to begging (Menbere, 1993: 13; Roberto, 1993: 14). The problem is relatively acute particularly for elderly women who stay at the margins of their society. Even if support mechanisms are planned by governmental and non-governmental institutions, they are centered on urban settings and areas that are not far from roadsides (Dejene, 1995; Goitom, 1998; Getenet, 1999; Heran, 2000). Consequently, rural and remote

areas remain neglected (Chambers, 1983: 7). Indeed, no information is available today about the life status of elderly people in rural areas.

In the face of the substantial change that has occurred in Ethiopia over the past several decades, little is known about the lives of the elderly. The social ties between the elderly and with the younger generation and the policy option that should be pursued to help them have not been properly documented. The present study, though limited to a specific rural community, aims at analyzing the following themes: socio-cultural and economic life of the aged, the status and role of old people: past and present, intra and inter generation ties, gender related activities in old age, problems and needs of old people, and coping strategies of elders in the face of the vagaries of rapid socioeconomic change.

Furthermore, this research tries to forward policy recommendations that may be of some help for policy makers in their efforts to address the problems of the elderly

1.1.1. Review of Related Literature

1.1. 1.1. Roles, Status, and Treatment of the Aged

Roles, status, and treatment of old people were the earliest focus of cross-cultural comparative research on old age. Simmons' study in 71 traditional societies indicates that a higher status

for old people was derived from traditional skills and knowledge, security from property rights, civil and political power, food from communal sharing and exemptions from taboos,

and general welfare from routine services performed by old people (Simmons, 1945). Furthermore, Murdock's study in more than 100 societies shows that the status of elderly is markedly higher and treated better in societies with extended family systems and unilineal kin groups than in societies with nuclear families and bilateral descent (cited in White and Lee, 1982). Various researches have shown those societies with cognatic descent have loose kinship ties (Weissleder, 1963; Hoben, 1973; Reminick, 1973; Bauer, 1977) and yet elders play important roles in their societies: count genealogical ties, serve as go-betweens in the arrangement of marriage, mediate in feuds, etc.

However, norms that prescribe the aged to have high status and access to sources of status may be differently available to individuals or to categories of individuals e.g. men and women, active and non-active. Thus all old people in traditional societies are not always esteemed and well treated (Moore, 1978).

In some traditional societies elderly people were susceptible to gerontological norms, even to the point of going to death gaily (Posner, 1995:205). This is probably due to the scarcity of resources for the treatment of elderly people. Besides, as change occurs in traditional societies, they tend to face a great deal of problems: demographic factors, sporadic changes of regimes, inflation, poverty and rural-urban migration threatened the extended family ties which are the only support systems for the majority of elderly people (Demers, 1996: 5-6). Help Age International explains the phenomenon in one of its workshops on older people as: " In Ethiopia, the majority of older people are cared for by the extended family... the rising cost of living and existing poverty is putting immense pressure on the family. This is making it extremely difficult for people to care for their older people as well as their young children " (1996: 1).

1.1.1.2. Problems and Needs of Old People

Aging reduces both the body's capacities to coordinate its system and the level of functioning of those systems. Furthermore, aging reduces the supply of physical energy that the body can mobilize (Atchley, 1991: 73). Thus, elderly people should be cared for and need to get ways and opportunities to cope with their problems. As opposed to hunter-gatherers and pastoralists agricultural societies are stationary which reduces mobility of the old. This imposes a lesser cost on the young, as they do not have to be carried from camp to camp (Turnbull cited in Hess and Markson, 1980:64).

However, research has shown that coupled with change in the societies, older people in rural areas are severely disadvantaged by economic hardships, unresolved chronic health problems, functional impairment and illness, dependency, loss of respect and social status, poor access to health services, and lack of basic necessities (Atchley, 1991:48; Perlmutter and Hall, 1992:472; HAI, 1999: 132; Soneja, 1999: 128). Most of these problems resulted from poverty, natural and man-made calamities, and the direct and indirect effects of modernization (HAI, 1999; Zwi, 1999: 110; Gorman, 1999: 4).

1.1.1.3. Theories of Old Age

Theories on aging are presented by scholars subscribing to different paradigms. Among the theories, disengagement, activity, age stratification, minority group, symbolic interactionism and modernization are the ones that are applied to old age.

The 'theory of disengagement' was first developed by Comming and Henery and was later modified by other scholars. The theory states that retirement or a gradual withdrawal from social roles and a decreased involvement with others is typical of old people. Consequently, the theory argues that at the time of their demise, society will not suffer from any breakdown as the young would fill the social roles (Comminmg and Henery, 1961: 14, Richard et al., 1962; Madox, 1966; Havigurst and Tobin, 1968; Streib and Schnider, 1971: 87; Vatuk, 1980: 137; Atchley, 1991:294). However, research has shown that people in traditional societies do not withdraw (Perlmutter and Hall, 1992:40). The existence and inevitability of disengagement from the main streams of society called into question by different scholars. Because of this, activity theory has been developed as an alternative to disengagement.

Proponents of 'activity theory' view that normal aging involves maintaining the activities and attitudes of middle ages as long as possible. The general hypothesis is therefore that the more activities that elderly people engage in; the more they find life satisfying (Evers, 1980: 150-53). The theory also states that substitutes should be found for those activities and roles that had been given up (Atchley, 1985: 200-201; Cox, 1988:30-31). The main problem of this theory is that it doesn't consider what happens to the person who cannot maintain the standard of Middle Ages in later life. Age stratification perspectives also increasingly tended to be utilized by researchers to explain variation in life satisfaction and aging.

This theoretical paradigm assumes that persons of different age categories are differently viewed and treated in all societies. Age is almost universally a basis for acquiring different roles, status, and difference from others (Cox, 1988:36). Conflict may arise due to competition for scarce resources between youth and elderly people thereby breeding a generation gap (Macionis, 1991:384). Besides, others viewed that elders were cut off from

the mainstream of their society and they should be considered as special groups and referred to as minority.

According to Leonard Breen, (Cited in Macionis 1991:386) older people have a clear social identity based on the ascribed status of being old, and are typically subject to discrimination and prejudice. Therefore, this leads them to have low income, low status and unequal opportunity and generally being viewed as inferior (Cox, 1988 Macionis, 1991). However, scholars like Gordon Streib (Cited in Macionis, 1991:386) do not agree with this view insofar as the term minority stands for both permanent and exclusive, whereas being elderly is an open status. The other social theory of old age is life 'social labeling theory', which was derived from symbolic interaction perspective.

According to this perspective, the most important interactional elements in determining the ways in which a person grows old and experiences growing old are cultural values and meanings (Rose in Fontana, 1977). Moreover, the concept of social labeling theory derived from symbolic interactionism theory. This theory states that the behavior of older people may depend largely on the reaction of significant others in their immediate social milieu (Cox, 1998:41-42). As changes occur in society due to the impact of modernization, the interaction between the aged and non-aged population has been drastically changed in various countries in the world. This trend has led researchers to follow 'modernization theory'.

Proponents of this theory advocate that modernization and its associated features are inversely related to the status and treatment of the elderly. As industrialization progresses, the family ceases to function as a basic economic unit, and the skill of the elderly becomes obsolete (Atchley, 1991:47). Besides, when the young leave home for the city, the kinship

ties would break up ending any control of the young by the old people and cutting off their source of support (Fry, 1980:219-220; Perlmutter and Hall, 1992:472-474; Henslin, 1995:614).

The applicability of almost all the above mentioned theories have been tested by researchers in the urban rather than rural settings. However, due to the trend of changes in many rural areas today, some of these theories might also have practical applicability. Nevertheless, it should also be noted that these theories are based mainly on the western culture that their practical application in developing countries in general and in the rural settings in particular needs to be established.

Consequently, the following four theories: activity, symbolic interactionism, conflict, and modernization are tested to the findings of the study.

1.2. Objectives

1.2.1. Major Objectives

The major objective of this study is to describe and analyze the socio-cultural and economic life of the elderly in a rural community.

1.2.2. The Specific Objectives of the Study Includes:

- To identify the emic definition of old age,
- To investigate changes in the life style of the elderly over time,

- To investigate the status and role of distinct categories of older people within the family, the community and, the society at large,
- To describe gender-related activities of varies categories of elders,
- To investigate intra and inter generational ties in old age,
- To explore the socio-economic problems and survival strategies of different categories of old people.

1.3. Significance of the Study

It is hoped that this research will add to the limited knowledge available in Ethiopia on the social, cultural, and economic situation of rural elderly people. Moreover, this research will provide information on the socio-economic constraints facing such people. The outcome of the study may also be used for policy consideration on the elderly.

1.4. Choice of the Research Site

The research area chosen, as witnessed by the researcher, is a relatively harsh environment for old people to live in. The area is a lowland enclave¹ with a very poor infrastructure and high prevalence of various contagious diseases. The researcher has been impressed by and wondered as to how old people manage to lead their lives in such area.

One out of the six administrative units in the lowland area has been purposely selected for the research. The reason for focusing on this one administrative unit, Goshwuha, is to fit into the

¹ Low land Ensaro is surrounded by cliffs. If one looks from the middle land around the hillsides of Lemi, the small town of Ensaro, it looks as if it were an island.

methodology-- participant observation, because it is easier to observe and document the day-to-day activities of the population. It is believed that the findings of the study can possibly be applied to the other lowland Ensaro and other areas with a similar culture and social organization. The main rationales selecting Goshwuha are as follows:

- The village of Goshwuha is relatively densely populated enabling the study to be completed in due time,
- Residents in the parish are characterized by similar culture and religion (Orthodox Christians). The results of this study could also be fairly true for other communities with similar culture,
- No Anthropological study has ever been conducted in the area,

Finally, the investigator's familiarity with the area is considered as an additional advantage to conduct fieldwork in the area. His background information about the area, the culture, and tradition of the people made it easier to work in the community.

1.5. Scope and Limitation of the Research

As the title of this thesis indicates, the core intent of the study is to explore the life situation of elderly people among the Amhara of Ensaro. In describing the life situation of these group, one has to (1) understand their role, status and dynamics under the three forms of government administration (Hile Selassie, Derg and EPRDF); (2) explain gender roles, the main focus being what types of activities women and men perform in old age, as well as the importance of property in old age and patterns of inheritance; (3) identify intra and inter generational ties, i.e. between elders and members of family and other kin groups, and (4)

analyze problems and coping mechanisms i.e. the socio economic problems of elders and how these have been managed .

This study has two limitations. First, since Ensaro area is a vast territory with varied climatic zones, it was necessary to choose a manageable site. This makes it rather difficult to assert that what is discussed here could neither be concluded for the Ensaro land nor addresses every aspect of the study community's socio-cultural and socio-economic life. Another limitation is that the attitude of non-aged population towards old age is marginally covered.

1.6. Methodology

1.6.1. Data collection Method

Data has been collected by using a combination of techniques. These include reviewing literature, participatory observation, focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, sample survey, taking pictures, and recording daily routines and events. These methods are designed to complement each other. Forty informants were chosen purposefully from the total number of three hundred sixty six people aged fifty-five and above.

Review of related literature: Relevant materials on the elderly, aging, and gerontology were identified and reviewed with an objective to establish statement of the problems, designing a questionnaire and conceptualizing the study. Furthermore, the literature has been

used to compare the findings of the study with related work whether there are similar or different outcomes.

Participatory Observation: In the course of the study, the investigator lived in the community for a total of one hundred twenty days. During this time the terrain characteristics, vegetation, river, drainage, cliffs, hills, settlement pattern, agricultural activities, soil types, type of crops grown were observed. Besides, social events including wedding, burial ceremonies, elderly arbitration, indigenous institutions (*iddir,debo and wenefel*) were attended and recorded both in writing and photography. These enabled the investigator to identify study subjects and develop rapport. Furthermore, daily routines of the elderly were recorded.

In depth interview: A total of twenty elderly people (an equal number of men and women) were selected on the basis of their acceptance in the community as opinion leaders and their deep knowledge about the community. Information regarding type and structure of the family, decent system, pattern of residence, religious beliefs and ritual practices were discussed and recorded. In addition, definitions of old ages, intra and inter generational ties, social support, state of widowhood, state of inheritance, current needs and problems and survival strategies were discussed in detail.

Focus group discussions: A total of twelve sessions of focused discussions were held with a total of hundred and six members of the community. The chosen participants include varies age groups such as old men including priests (three sessions), old women (three sessions), young boys including deacons (three sessions) and young girls (three sessions). The focus of

discussion were on the emic definition of old age, roles and status of old people, issues concerning social change and old age, government and institutional support and protection, emerging problems of old age, gender related issues in old age and inheritance of property.

Survey: The main emphasis of the survey using a pre-tested questionnaire was to include the socio demographic background, socio-economic information, social status and role, intra and inter generational ties, and problems and needs. A total of forty elderly members of the study community were purposely selected out of a total of three hundred sixty six people over fifty-five years of age.

1.6.2. Data Analysis

Both survey and qualitative information were analyzed manually. In analyzing the data attempts were made to carefully review and examine field notes from focus group discussions, participatory observation and in-depth interview, daily routines and pictures. Simple frequencies were used to draw percentages to present survey findings while information from the qualitative methods were categorized together on the basis of their similarity. Finally, triangulation was used to obtain a better, more substantive picture of reality (good information) from different methods to meaningfully respond to the objectives set forward.

1.6.3. Problems Encountered

Finding relevant literature was a major hurdle at the beginning. There are not many anthropological studies on the elderly in the continent of Africa. Especially such materials are not available for Ethiopia. In order to face such challenges, I went through various books written on other subjects but containing some issues of aging and gerontology from the western perspective. Even some policy materials on old age in Ethiopia were difficult to trace.

Before conducting the present research I had some information about the people and the area. On my field trip to the community I was welcomed initially. However, in the course of time, people suspected me as a spy (coming to the area for political reasons), and tended to be brief and selective in discussing on issues. Others thought that I had the power to solve their practical problems, and some informants expected/ asked for different forms of favors and gifts. This has affected the data collection process at the very beginning to some extent. My data collectors and initial informants have assisted me to regain my researcher position and establish rapport.

The other problem was people had no experience to sit with a stranger answering questions. Study subjects of different categories, felt uncomfortable and lost patience (especially women) in answering all the questions in ten minutes. Two informants left me in the course of interview. An elderly woman told me her grievances that throughout her life she had never seen an outsider asking questions about the life status of her community. So, she attributed such events as the coming of last days (*sementegnaw shi*).

1.6.4. Entrance to the field

The aim of the first round fieldtrip was to obtain a permit to carry out my research in the study area, to develop rapport, to get more familiar with the community and to carry out ethnographic records. Therefore, the process began with taking a letter of introduction from the Department of Sociology and Social Administration that was addressed to the North Shoa Zone Council (in Debreberhan town).

The North Shoa Zonal Council gave me a letter of cooperation addressed to the *Ensarona* Wayou Wereda Council, some 40 kilometers west of Debreberhan. I left for Deneba after I had my lunch at Debreberhan.

The Deneba Woreda Council was kind enough to give me a letter of cooperation for the Goshwuha Kebele Administration. At 3:30 PM. I secured the letter and prepared to go back to Debreberhan. Though it was late, I was confident that I would find a car. After two hours, a Nissan patrol arrived. I begged the driver to give me a ride. However, he drove his car forward speedily paying no heed to the way I asked him. I was left with no choice but spend the night at Deneba. I was showed a hotel I rented a bedroom for seven *birr* and went to bed as early as 9:00 PM after having my dinner, why so early? Because I was told not to stay late otherwise I would be shut out and the light went off. This is how the owner managed to cut the fuel expense of the electric generator that is functional before 10:00 PM.

In the following day I caught the morning bus, which came from Lemi. I arrived at Debrebrehan at 9:00, in the morning. Having my breakfast in one of the hotels there, I caught the bus to Addis Ababa and arrived after a four-hour drive.

A week later, I started making the necessary preparation for the first round field trip to Ensaro. I bought important materials like stationeries, medicine, candles, insecticides, a lantern, and dry foodstuff that I would make use of it in my stay at Ensaro.

Early in the morning on the 13th of September 2001, I made my trip to the study area along with a relative of mine who was born there. Her parents live in Goshwuha, my research site. The bus left for Ensaro at 6:00 in the morning and followed the Addis-Gojjam main road. On our way there are small towns such as Sululta, Chanco, Duber, and Muketuri. After 80 kilometers drive we arrived at Muketuri. When we reached Muketuri the driver turned right and followed the Addis- Merhabete gravel road. There are two small villages on the road from Muketuri to Lemi, Woberi and Kecha as well as three bridges, Aleltu, Duber and Robe. The bridge at Robe serves also as a demarcation between Region Three (the Amhara Regional State) and Region Four (the Oromya Regional State).

We arrived at Lemi after a five-hour drive. Lemi is a small town of Ensaro that is found 130 kilometers from Addis Ababa. After eating our lunch we walked to the lowland Ensaro. There were two alternatives to get there, one was along Yewesha Gedel a three-hour walk, and the other is along Mazoria a five-hour walk. We opted for the second route, which is less slippery and easy to walk during the rainy season.

A young man traveled with us to Goshwuha. He migrated to Lemi six years ago to involve in petty trades. He helped us in carrying our luggage and showed us at a distance most of the administrative units of the low land areas such as, Salyeshena Dereku, Yedenona Beresa, Gezawashana Dalota, Goshwuhana Keke, and Karanbana Moltanba. After a three-hour walk we turned right and traveled on a semi-gravel road that was constructed by the local community in collaboration with the zonal government. The running water made our journey more tedious. On our way there were landslides and we saw people in their *tef* and sorghum plots.

We reached the study area at 6:30 PM. The community gave us a warm welcome and then I explained the purpose of my being there. The first thing I did was to go to the church to stay the night there because it is where I could establish a good rapport and easily win the support of the religious leaders. But *Aba* Estifanos, head of a church (Goshwuha Kidanmeheret), told me that students who attend religious education had already occupied the place. So I was obliged to spend the night in the hut owned by my relatives (parents of the girl who went with me to Goshuwa). As of the next day until I finished my study I stayed in a hut owned by a young man who is bachelor.

Before embarking on my research I gave the letter of cooperation I brought from the Deneba Council to the chairman of the community. He showed me a great respect and assisted me much in my work.

Chapter 2

The Social Setting

Introduction

It was 20 years ago when I first visited the Ensaro enclaves. I was in my teens when I first came to Goshwuha community to attend a marriage ceremony of my next of kin. Because I was born and bred in Ambo, a place found in western Shawa Oromya Zone, I found the cultural differences quite inspiring even at an early age. The most important

When I visited Ensaro in 1978, the population was small in size. There were small huts with hatched roofs scattered here and there in each parish. Every household had many large granaries in the compound. Visitors were given a warm welcome by the parishioners. A welcome banquet (local food and drinks) was one way of conveying love and respect for guests. There used to be indigenous trees in every corner of the rocky hillsides, which gave the scenery a pleasing look. On the trees monkeys used to move here and there.

After 21 years the researcher entered the area for the second time in August 2001. Everything has changed; the above-mentioned features of Ensaro land are hardly observable. I felt as if I came to the area for the first time. The rocky hills stand like a man in the nude, affected by the deforestation. The area is overpopulated.

There are few granaries found in the compounds as compared to early times. *Tella* with which guests were served is brewed only for important events like holidays or social ceremonies. Guests are not served with food as it was before, as a result of the decrease in yields of grains. People are physically weak and morally desperate. Most of the aged people thought reminisce about their “ good old days”’.

Having read the above account one may pose the questions; who are the Amhara of Ensaro? Where do they live? What is unique about them that gave rise to this study? The description of these features is presented under the sub-suctions of setting, and population. In the next section of this chapter social organization of the Amhara of Ensaro will be discussed. The main emphasis of this section is family and lineage, marriage and patterns of residence, indigenous social institutions (*maheber*, *debo*, *wenfel*, *edir*, and *equb*), belief system, and inter-ethnic relations.

2.1. The Geographical Context

Ensaro, part of the Ensaro ena Wayou Woreda in North Shoa Zone of the Amhara Regional state, comprises 10 administrative units. It is bounded by Wayu in the east, Gerare Jaresso in the west, Lay Betna Tach Bet in the north, Moretena Jiru in the northeast, Wechalena Jida in the south, Abeshuna Nwea in the southeast, and Debre Tsege in the southwest.

Ensaro includes three climatic Zones. *Qola* (the lowland area ranging up to 1800 meters above sea level), *weyna dega* (the middle land that ranges from 1800 to 2400 meters

above sea level) and *dega* (high land area that has an altitude around 2,400 meters and above). Most of the administrative units of Ensaro are found in the lowland area.

The *Qolla* climatic zone comprises areas having a high temperature hence it is often disease ridden. Some parts of the *qolla* area are humid during the long rainy season from June to September. In this ecological zone white *tef*, sorghums, finger millet, and cotton are grown. *Weyna Dega*, the temperate climate zone, on the other hand is relatively more conducive for living. Crops grown in the area are red *tef*, wheat, barley, peas, maize, chickpeas, and nigger seed. In both ecological zones, agricultural activities begin in March and are finalized within in the first ten days of January (see table 1). Ensaro has small areas that are found within the *dega* climatic zone. Major crops grown in the area are wheat and barely.

Ensaro is one of the underdeveloped parts of the woreda. For the most part the lowland Ensaro is without basic social infrastructures. Actually the midland is relatively better in terms of the accessibility of social infrastructures.

According to the statistics from the *kebele* agricultural office, the research site Goshwuha (One of the administrative unit of the lowland Ensaro) covers 2,436.3 hectares, out of these 1,506, 145 and 59 hectares have been used for farming, grazing-land and house construction, respectively; 67.3 hectares are covered by *kuteqwato* (bush), 53 hectares by forest (*den*) and 606 hectares are mountainous and hilly.

The two rivers found in Goshwuha are Debere and Jema. The former is found in the midland. However, it is not accessible for the wider sector of the population though some people use the river for horticulture. The later, which is about a five-hour-walk

from the settlement area, is found in the lowland agricultural area. Sometimes people water their cattle from Jema.

TABLE 01

CALENDAR OF THE YEAR AND AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES

| Months | TYPES OF AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES |
|--------------------------|--|
| <i>Meskerem</i> (Spt.) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weeding |
| <i>Tikimt</i> (Oct.) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harvesting <i>tef</i>, wheat, sesame and niger seed |
| <i>Hidar</i> (Nov.) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • harvesting sorghum • Threshing of <i>tef</i> |
| <i>Tahasas</i> (Dec.) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Threshing of sorghum |
| <i>Tir</i> (Jan.) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Threshing of sorghum (finalized from 1, - 22, Jan. |
| <i>Yekatit</i> (Feb.) | |
| <i>Megabit</i> (Mar.) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sorghum is sown (midland) |
| <i>Mizia</i> (Apr.) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sorghum is sown (lowland) |
| <i>Ginbot</i> (May) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sorghum is sown (lowland) if there is no rain in March & April. |
| <i>Sene</i> (June) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sorghum is sown (lowland) if there is no rain in March & April. • Peas and broad beans are sown |
| <i>Hamle</i> (July) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>tef</i> is sown • sunflower seed and sesame are sown |
| <i>Nehassie</i> (August) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weeding • Sowing chickpeas and niger-seed |

Source: Compiled from field data

There are many springs in Goshwuha. Nevertheless, their water supply is very little except springs such as Susa, Seamesk, Jer, Meseno, Weyra and Dens. Furthermore, a few of them are not accessible.

2.2. Population

The people of Ensaro belong to the Amhara Ethnic group and speak the Semitic language Amharic. They have a similar culture to other Amhara people of Gojjam, Gondar, Wello, Merhabete and Menz.

There are no written evidences as to when the people of Ensaro settled the present area and why the area is called Ensaro. But as maintained by many old and religious people of the community, in ancient times settlers of the area found out most of the area as lowland, inundated with grass. Besides, all settlers were Orthodox Christians. Therefore, according to informants, the term, Ensaro, was coined to denote such features of the area (lowland, grassland, and orthodox Christianity). There is also myth concerning the name of the research site, Goshwuha. This name is said to have been given by St. Teklehaymanot. When he arrived at the area he found streams so he was delighted and called the area Goshwuha, which means ‘thanks water’.

According to statistics from the *Ensaro woreda* council, the total number of the population in the area is 53,614 out of which 27,406 (51.12%) are male and 26,208 (48.88%) are female. Almost all residents of the area make their living from agriculture, which is characterized by the employment of a traditional farming system.

According to statistics obtained from Goshwuha kebele agricultural office, the research area, *Goshwuha* has a total population of 4,102, out of which 2,207 (53.8%) are male and 1,895 (46.2) are female. The fieldwork research survey also shows that the number of people above 55 years old is 366 of which 222 (60.7) are male and 144 (39.3%) are female.

2.2.1 Social Organization

2.2.1.1. Family and Lineage

Betezemed (the family), as in most parts of Ethiopia, is a crucial form of social organization for the survival of individuals in Goshwuha. Principally those immediate family members such as parents, children, grand children, grandparents, siblings, nephews, and nieces are of essential in life, especially for the elderly people.

Members of the *betezemed* carry out activities through various indigenous institutions they form such as *debo*, *wenfel* and *mehaber* etc. When a person encounters a difficult situation, it is by way of these institutions that his immediate kin groups provide him with assistance.

From time immemorial up to the recent past the Ensaro people had tragic experience of vendettas. Along with difficult situations, vendettas have been matters that required the involvement of kin groups. The participation of kin's men in the retaliation is cherished by both the person in need and the kin group.

According to some informants, today, there is no conflict of such kind due to confiscation of guns and the prohibition against the use of gunfire even at social occasions such as weddings, funerals, and holidays.

In Goshwuha descent is bilateral, meaning, children born to a couple are related equally to their mother's and their father's family of orientation.

2.2.1. 2. Marriage and Pattern of Residence

Various studies show that in the traditional Amhara society marriage is of various types and is an extremely flexible institutions being easily dissolved (Reminick, 1973; Hoben, 1973; McCann, 1987; Pankhurst, 1990; Teferi; 1998; Yared, 1999). Most of these studies show that marriage types are *serg*, *qotasir*, *fet*, *gerdena* or *demoze*.

Serg is a wedding ceremony for a traditionally elaborate alliance (wedding) arranged between two families. It has elaborate rituals and ceremonies. *Qoatsir* is a marriage arrangement where the boy works for the girl's family for a limited period of time prior to their weeding as laid down in a witnessed contract. *Qotasir* overlaps with *serg* marriage because *qotasir* entails elaborate rituals and ceremonies and also is an arrangement between families. It differs from *serg* in that a boy works for the girl's family before he marries her and in most cases the newly married couple live around the girl's parent.

Fet marriage (*ye fet gabecha*) is a form of marriage in which a divorced-man marries a divorced-woman, each bringing a certain amount of wealth into the union, and drawing

up their own contract that may or not be witnessed. The other form of marriage is *gerdena* or *demoz* marriage. In this form of marriage a man hires a maidservant who shares his bed and receives a salary but does not share his wealth and cannot sue for compensation when she is dismissed from service that constitutes divorce.

As in the other Amhara societies marriage in *Ensaro* is monogamous and exogamous. The first refers having only one wife or husband at a time and the second denotes that a person cannot marry his blood relative up to the seventh generation. All the above-mentioned marriage types are practiced is Goshwuha. However, in the arrangement of *gerdena* payment is not in cash but in kind (grain). In Goshwuha I saw elderly widowers living with women by establishing *girdena* arrangement. One of my informants Desendilegn, 75, lives with a woman having established a *girdena* arrangement. According to him, she is his *kelabi* (house servant) and he never shares a bed with her. Though he denies sleeping with her his friends Berke, Berhane and Meketaw object his claim witnessing that he shared a bed with her. According to informants, no one admits he has intercourse with a woman under a *gerdena* arrangement. It is a secret business. Otherwise it brings him a disgrace from the community.

According to focus group discussions in *Ensaro* the marriageable age for women is 13 and for men 25. Elders of the bride and the groom shoulder the responsibility of setting up the marriage, which culminates with elaborate rituals and ceremonies. I will endeavor to portray the rituals and ceremonies of *serg* marriage partly because it has not been thoroughly dealt with in the above-mentioned studies and partly because it illustrates us the role and involvement of elders to institute the *serg* marriage.

The description of the process of *serg* marriage is based on the interview conducted with informants² and also from my own observation that was made two decades earlier (when I first visited the area) and in the present study. In the first case (two decades ago), I attended the marriage ceremony of Beshwamel whose age was 11 and in the present study I attended the marriage ceremonies of Banchaimolu, female, age 13; Zenebech, female, age 12; Tofa, male, age 22; Endalamaw, male, age 25; Chalkut, female, age 11. There is no difference concerning rituals and ceremonies among these marriages. However, today's marriage is different from the marriage I saw in early times in terms of the amount of feasts.

When I visited Goshwuha two decades ago people brewed up to 40 *gan* (a jar made up of clay which is used for brewing local beer and has a capacity to hold 60-100 liters of *tella*) and slaughtered up to three oxen. However, according to informants, today no one brewed more than 20 *gan* of *tella* and no one slaughtered more than one ox, because of economic reasons (mainly the shortage of agricultural land). In the present study, I closely observed and interviewed Asamenew's *serg* marriage.

The process of Asamenew's *serg* marriage began after his parents chose him his girl (Chalkut). Two female elders were sent to ask the girl's hand in marriage on behalf of the groom. Then the family of Chalkut told the messengers to come some other time to give time for the family to discuss the matter. When they decided, two male elders were sent to

² Brke, male, age 86; Getachew, male age 56; Shewandan, male, age, 56; Amha, male age 36; Emey, male age 28; Zewdenesh, female, age 65; Askale, female, age, 71; Cerenetu, female, age, 70; Mulunesh, female, age 60; Mewded, female, age 45.

enquire about the decision the girl's family reached. The decision was positive and the parents of the girl prepared themselves to organize a big *deges* (feast). The feast is known *negermekurecha* (Engagement).

For the third time seven elders were sent to participate in the engagement ceremony. When they reached the house of the girl's parent, they refused to sit until they were told that they were given the girl's hand in marriage. One of the elders from the girl's side asked them why they refused to sit and they responded that they came in search of a father and in turn to become a son to the girl's family.

The elders from Chalkut's side then inquired about what their *Maderia* (type and size of property owned by the groom's family) was. Promising that all would be stated at the time of the wedding, they placed 30 *birr* on the leather mat that was spread over the floor. Chalkut's family kept on asking to make sure that their daughter would be safe with her future husband. So they requested who was the father of the money. One of the elders gave an explanation and swore by the government *mengest yemut*.³ Again one of the elders from Chalkut's side bore witness to the event by swearing "She is given, *mengest yemut!*" and similarly one of Asamenew's elders says, " We have given our son to you, *mengest yemut!* ".

Subsequent to this, elders of both sides eat and drink. The feast continued till 9:00 in the evening. From this time onwards the boy and the girl are said to be engaged. The marriage ceremony did not take place immediately after the engagement. Rather

¹During Menilik's and Haile Selasse's regimes people in marriage ceremonies swore *Menilik yemut* and *Haile Selasse yemut* respectively. They began to swear *Mengest yemut* from the *Derg* regime. I asked informants why they did so, and they replied after the downfall of the Monarchic rule the governments are unknown and have no names.

Asamenew and Chalkut stayed with their own parents for about one to three years in anticipation of the wedding day.

The final marriage ceremony, took place on Feb. 23, 2002 and the elders who were sent to Chalkut's family previously informed her kin about the *Maderia* as they promised. At 2:00 PM in the afternoon, the groom came with at least 50-60 people. Outside the hut there was a leather mat for the groom to put the garment he brought for the bride. Chalkut's family accepted the garment. According to my informants, if the garment was found unpleasing in the eyes of the bride's family, he was made to take back the cloth he brought and pay 50 to 60 *birr* as a guarantee.

After that the bride's father, Feke, announced that he has given his daughter and the boy's father, Zeke, took on the offer. Finally, the groom, Asamenew, gave his confirmation swearing, "*Mengest yemut*, she is my wife!" Then the priest, *aba* Estifanos, gave his benediction and the best men approved the blessings saying, "Let it be for the bride and the groom as your words."

Following the benediction, attendants of the wedding ceremony chose two individuals from both sides to coordinate the ceremony. By shaking hands the coordinators were introduced to each other. Then invited guests entered the *dass* (a temporarily tent made up of sticks and the leaves of trees) singing traditional wedding songs.

Inside the *dass* the groom and the best men sat separately from the invited guests behind a veil made up of a traditional sheet called *gabi*. Elders sat on beds. The coordinators gave *shekena* (traditional cups made up of gourds) to the best men and brought *tella* (home

brewed beer) to guests. The role of the coordinators is to resolve conflicts that arise in that marriage ceremony.

After drinking two or three *shekenas* of *tella*, the groom and his best men entered the main house where the bride was found. Women who were found in the house gave them a warm welcome by singing and served them with more *tella*. The singing went on for a while.

The best men then returned to the *dass* to sing and dance. When the best men were through the dance they went to the *segabet* (a *dass* where meat is kept) and took *shent* (one of the biggest parts of the cow/ox where the ribs are found), cut it into smaller parts and served it with *berbere* (powder of red pepper) to the invited guests. After everyone had eaten raw meat, lunch was served. Separate from the other guests, elders and the groom along with the best men were given *doro wot* (chicken made with red pepper).

Singing and dancing started afresh after lunch. They sang '*asomsumena ejuan yezh na*' (hurry! go and bring her holding her hand). Outside the main house a leather-mat was put on the floor and two best men entered the house to bring the bride. One of the best men carried Chalkut (the bride) on his back and made her sit on the leather. All the best men and the groom sat with her.

Balamin, (a woman who is living still with the man she married for the first time) Ayemeku, came with scissors and acting as if she was cutting the nails of the bride, groom, and best men, singing '*tefero kobelele bedem tenekere*' (your nail has migrated and been dyed in blood- this is to indicate that the bride is going to loose her virginity) and *kulun man kualeshe batekuaim tamerialesh* (You do not have to put on a make up. You

look beautiful even without it). She also sang for the groom *tasere bemukecha kengedihe yelem yenat tucha* (As you are starting a new life with your wife you are free from any punishment from your mother), *tasere bejengjare kengedihe yelem jerejere* (you are married so you do not have to look for a relationship with another girl).

When it was time for the groom to take the bride to his house, all sang *woseba wesebseba* (a song that signals to move into the groom's residence and also indicates that the groom and the bride are one). One of the best men carried the bride on his back. Ten people¹ from the bride's side who are usually called *zehekemate* went along with her. The *zehekemate* carry with them food in a traditional food container called *agelgel*, cups made up of gourds and *addes* (traditional face cream), mirror and scissors.

When they arrived to the groom's house, the older brother of the bride, slaughtered a goat and the best men standing at the gate asked those who were inside to give the bride *yemerat sem* (name for a daughter-in-law). The groom's mother gave the name, *Yaynework* (gold for my eyes). The best men repeatedly asked the groom's mother to give a name for her daughter-in-law pretending not to listen to the new name. He makes the groom's mother call the name out three times.

Songs that were sung in the bride's house were also sung here. Then the *Zehekemate* entered into the main house while the others enter the *dass*. In the main house the *Zehekemate* asked the groom, *Asamenew*, to bring honey and milk with which they could wash the bride's legs. He did everything requested by *Zehekemate*. According to my Informants, if food is not served immediately the *zehkmate* insist on taking the bride to where she came from. So they are given great respect. The Representative of the

¹ The informants said that it could be more than ten people.

zehkmate was given one big traditional pot filled with *tella*. He opened the pot and poured *tella* into the *shekenas* of the other *zehkmates*. No one other than them was allowed to drink from it.

Before mid-night, two best men, the bride and the groom went into a secluded hut where the groom made love to the bride. One best man held her legs and the other her waist, then the groom deflowered Chalkut. When she screamed, people who waited eagerly shouted a big applause. It has been stated that people used to fire a gun to manifest their joy and appreciation to the groom some time before five years.

The *zehkmate* stayed the whole night enjoying themselves. Around 8:00 PM the next afternoon they went back to the bride's family residence. The same day the bride and the groom went to the bride's parents' home accompanied by the relatives of the groom. They carry at least 7 *dabbos* (bread). The newly married couples spent two weeks of their honeymoon there. Before departure, the best men washed the clothes of the bride's relatives. They took a one-day rest and moves to their place the next day.

In the present research because of time shortage I could not observe the second "honeymoon" of the newly married couple (Chalkut -the bride and Asamenew- the groom) that took place at the groom's parents residence. Based on my early knowledge and according to information gathered from informants, the newly married couple and their best men are provided with *tella*, *areke*, and *enjera* with *wet* (stew) brought by close friends and relatives. As they did before, best men wash clothes before leaving the house. They take a daylong rest and go away after eating their lunch in the following day.

In *Goshwuha* the pattern of residence is patrilocal. Newly married couples live with or near the husband's parents. According to the informants of the study, this is a disadvantage for the wife; she is unavoidably placed in a subordinate position in her new family for she is the only 'new' member of the family. Furthermore, she is removed from the support and contact of her family, while her husband stays close with his relatives and individuals he has known all his lifetime.

2.2.1.3. Indigenous Social Institutions

2.2.1. 3.1. *Maheber*

Maheber is a voluntary, indigenous social organization, which is established around the church. It has been observed that there are a number of *mahebars* in *Goshwuha*. Members of each *mahebar* are not more than 20 and take the names of saints and holy men. Membership tends to be gender-based in *mahebers*, that is, men and women do not form *maheber* together. In most cases the youth do not show an interest in forming *mahebers*. *Mahebers* are of interest to the early-old category of old people.

Celebration of feasts in *mahebers* takes place on the saints' days in the church compound. Members prepare feasts in turn. Each member in his/her turn is required to bring *enjera wet*, *tella*, *kollo* (roasted barley /wheat and chick peas) and *dabbo* (traditional bread). The *musse* (a chairman of *maheber* elected from the members who serves for two years) inspects whether all these are supplied or not. When the ceremony comes to an end the man who prepares the feast demands a suggestion about the feast, the quality and quantity of the food items. If there is a shortage in the supply of food or

drink or if the quality is found to be poor, he is fined with money the amount of which is decided by the members. He pays the fine in the subsequent month.

Absent members are also made to pay some amount of money as agreed up on by members. The payment is effected next month like-wise. Decisions regarding fines are made collectively. The *musse* never makes decisions alone though it is within his mandate. Before the ceremony is completed, the next three persons who should prepare feasts are informed and they accept the offer made by falling on their knees in front of the members. Lastly priests give benedictions. Then the one who will prepare the ceremonial feast for the next month is given *tebel* (a small pot filled with *tella*) and *tsadik* (a loaf of bread put in a traditional container called *mesob*). According to priests in Goshwuha, these *tsadik* and *tebel* stand as a symbol of *maheber* and signify *sega wedemu* (a holy communion).

The use of *mahebers* in Goshwuha is not limited to fulfilling the religious obligation. They are to a great extent sources of assistance when members cannot carry out agricultural activities for some reasons like sickness. If members fail to participate due to old age, they should send their caregiver.

2.2.1.3.2. *Debbo*

A number of studies revealed that the *debbo* institution is practiced in many ethnic groups such as Oromo, Gurage and Amhara (Temesgen, 1965; Bartels, 1975; Teferi, 1998, Yared, 1999). According to these studies, *debbo* is a traditional social organization through which

people come together as a task force to perform different activities based on the request of a needy member.

It has been observed that *debbo* is believed to be one of the social institution in which people of Ensaro can solve their problems pertaining to labor. Informants disclosed that *debbo* is a paramount importance in the harsh ecology and inconvenient geographical nature of Ensaro, which needs the coordination of efforts to carry out a certain task.

In Ensaro a person usually calls for a *debbo* to perform agricultural and non-agricultural activities. Weeding, harvesting, and threshing are the topmost agricultural activities carried out by *debo*. House construction is another activity, which calls for *debbo*. No one builds or mends a house alone in Ensaro. In the third phase of my field trip I have seen that Berke's (one of the elderly informants) hut was mended by a *debbo* work group.

Even if the members cannot be less than three in number, it depends upon the kind of task to be carried out. In November 12, 2001, I participated in one *debbo* that was called by Getachew (an elderly informant, age 56). The work group was participating in threshing of *tef* that was harvested from one-hectare and members were not less than 20.

A person, who summoned people for *debbo*, is responsible to provide them with lunch and dinner. At lunchtime Getachew brought *anebabero* (a kind of bread which is thick and large in diameter) anointed with sesame sauce. At dinnertime there was a big feast in Getachew's house. *Enjera* with *wot*, *tella*, and *areke* were served, and members of the *debbo* group enjoyed themselves till 10:00 pm. in the evening. Members of the *debbo* sing songs when the work is completed and at work too.

2.2.1.3.3. *Wonfel*

Wonfel is another form of social institution in Goshwuha in which a person gets support at times of need. It is an agreement whereby two or more individuals work together on each other's plots for an equal amount of time usually a day. *Wonfel* institution is reciprocal. According to my informants members of *wonfel* are not more than four. It has been observed that in Zewdenesh's plot (one of my informant's) three persons were tilling the land to sow chickpeas. Zewdenesh's son, Semugn, told me that he would reciprocate the same labor for those who participated in tilling his mother's land. It has been also observed that there is no feast in *wonfel*. Members of *wonfel* are served only lunch.

In *wonfel* a person also borrows certain goods and is expected to do the same when he is requested. The person who wants to get material in *wonfel* does not mention that he is making the request on the basis of *wonfel*. This kind of *wonfel* is tacit.

During my field trip in Goshwuha I have seen a number of people get and reciprocate various things such as donkey, *tefere* (rope made up of leather or plastic), agricultural tools such as pounding stick, sickle, *menshe* (large fork like stick used for threshing) and *margegebia* (large skin fan used at threshing).

2.2.1.3.4. *Edir*

Edir is another form of social organization that is found in Goshwuha. According to the elderly informants, in Goshwuha the first edir was established in 1988. I interviewed a 65-year-old, Shwandagn (a secretary of Goshwuha edir) and he explained to me that the main objectives of edir in his community is to provide material and labor assistance for the family of the deceased and comforting them for seven consecutive days after the funeral. It has been stated that, due to the decrease in yields of grain, each members of the community could not bear the expense of the funeral alone. This resulted in the formation of edir.

Payment for the family of the deceased, which is made in kind, is in effect before the burial takes place. Each member should pay about a kilo of cereals or pulses, two *enjeras*, a bundle of firewood, one *sini* (coffee cup) of *shiro* (bean powder used for making *wot* /stew/) and *berbere* (powder of red pepper).

According to the elderly informants, the number of *edir* members varies from place to place and depends on the span of the *got* (compact residential units which is not less than 30 huts). Some *gots* merge with other *gots* if they have small units. Two *edirs* have been observed while the study was carried out and the number of members is around 200 each.

2.2.1.3.5. *Equb*

Equb is another form of social organization in Goshwuha that is not so common as compared to the other institutions. It is an organization established to mitigate financial problems. According to informants, in Goshwuha it was women-petty-traders who sell *areqe* and *tela* (local beverages) in the community that established the first *equb*.

I was reported that the range of money collected from each member of *equb* is from two to five *birr*. Most often needy women entice others to form *equb* and the first money collected goes to the woman who organized that *equb*. The turn of other members is determined by casting lots every 15 days. There are also men who are engaged in handicrafts that set up *equb* together with women.

Equb among individuals who entirely depend on agriculture as a means of survival is hardly noticeable. But informants stated that as of last year a lot of people who were not involved in other income-generating activities formed their own *equb*. The contribution that is gathered on a monthly basis amounted to 50 *birr* per individual. An individual who win *equb* enables him to buy corrugated iron-sheet and oxen, which is not possible otherwise.

2.2.1.4. Belief System

From observations and informal discussions employed in the study, it was found out that all people in *Goshwuha* are followers of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. However, they also practice other forms of belief like spirit possessions (*zar*) and magic. Orthodox Christianity and spirit possession, *zar*, are openly practiced whereas magic is a secret business in *Goshwuha*.

Most of the time belief in orthodox Christianity is a transcendental one, which means people follow the orthodox Christianity for the value they attach with life after death. The fact that many older people are dedicated to religious services supports the above allegation. Nevertheless, they are also devoted seeking for solutions to some of the pragmatic matters in their day-to-day activities. For example, it has been observed that in August 22, 2001 as the people celebrate *feseleta* (the ascend of Blessed Virgin Mary) a young man whose name is Ayele Chebude approached to the ark of covenant and declaimed to the public that an unidentified man had cut his donkey's leg with *meterebia* (axe) and asked them to curse the individual. All of them suddenly took soil with their hands and spread it over the air saying that "Let God reciprocate the same to the person who did it!" Another person called Demisse Tensau, declaimed that some body threw his hive from an oak tree; demanding the public to curse the individual and the public cursed him similarly.

Though Orthodox Christianity is the dominant faith among the traditional Amhara, *zar*, *adibar*, magic *buda*, and *aganint* are beliefs of significant proportion (Missing, 1958;Reminick, 1973;Young, 1975; Pankhurst, 1990; Aspen, 1994). Among these mentioned beliefs I will try to expound *zar*, magic and *buda*, which I encounter most in *Goshwuha*.

People visit *bale zar* (master of the *zar*) and a magician exclusively in search of solutions to their pragmatic problems. According to the informants of the study, people tend to go to *bale zars* when they encounter difficult circumstances and are told that they have problems with the spirit under whose possession they have fallen. Then they perform certain rituals as ordered by the *bale zar* to be reconciled with the spirit that possessed them. One of my informant's wife, Askale Mengeste, who has taken Holy Communion sometime before turned to worshipping of the spirit. The reason was that her youngest and eldest sons were shot dead. Soon after this incident, her other son was crippled and was thus unable to move. So, she went to a *bale zar* and was told that all the tragic events happened to her was because her *zar* was not content with her. So she started drinking coffee and *areqe* (a home made distilled liquor) wearing colorful clothes and slaughtering hen / cook having different colors and in so doing she thought she fought against any misfortune that might have affected her.

According to my informants in Goshwuha the majority of *zar* possessors are married females. I argue with similar finding of Missing (1958) and Pankhurst (1990) that *zar* cult functions as a form of group therapy; most patients (spirit possessors) are married women who feel neglected by their husband (male dominated society). According to Birke, early time he used to beat Askale (his wife); after she became possessor of the *zar* spirit he feared to beat her because the spirit warned him to stop any wrong action he takes against her.

There are people in *Goshwuha* who visited *tenkuy* (magician) for both *seleras lemawkena meftehe lemefeleg* (white magic - good) and *muart* (black magic - evil). To counteract the effect of *muart* (black magic) and *buda* (witchcraft or evil eye) various

forms of white magic are practiced. For example, during my stay in Goshwaha I saw most cows, oxen, heifers, and bulls that the trailing edges of their ears were notched.

In August 2001⁴, I saw people hanging cattle skulls on a stick and placing the stick in the field. According to informants they did so for protection of crops from evil eyes. Besides, It has been observed that children were made to wear amulets as protection against malevolent spirits and black magic.

According to informants, in Goshwaha *Muartengoch* (Sorcerers or black magicians) use materials and make on them charms or spells to cause destruction. If a person wishes a misfortune to befall on his enemy, he purchases a certain object from a *muartegna* such as eggs, part of the body of wild animals as well as feaces of black dog and buries it around his enemy's premises at night based on Sorcerer's instruction. One of my informants, Breke, explained that sorcerers are the cause of his poverty. He said that before two decades he had a diesel-mill. Seeing his good income, Berke thought, his enemies projected misfortune to lose his economic positions. According to him, this is evidenced by the fact that his diesel-mill was exploded by itself while working and he could not regain his previous status. Today he is one of the disadvantaged elders in Goshwaha. He strongly argues that his failure is attributed to *muartegns*.

Observation has shown that in Goshwaha certain occupational groups are suspected as *buda* (evil eye or witches). According to informants, the *buda* is a person who causes misfortune on another person by looking with a covetous eye at a person or his or her property. Some of my informants argue that the *budas* might not realize whether they have the power of the evil eye or not. In any case, a person suspected of witchcraft leads a

⁴ In my first round field trip.

precarious life. He even runs the risk of losing his life (projection of retaliation by the deceased family) if a death of a person is alleged to be caused by evil eye. The case of one of the informants reveals hereunder how witches lead a dreadful and precarious life.

Engedashet Cherkos

Engedashet is 72 years old. He lives with his wife, the youngest son, and grandchildren. His livelihood is irons melting and weaving. About 340 people benefit from his service. He charges 15 kilos of *tef* and 15 kilos of sorghum each for his yearly service (maintenance of agricultural tools). People pay him at the threshing period, that is, November, and December. Those who do not want to pay him in terms of grain pay him in cash right away and these are people coming from neighboring communities.

Though Engedashet gets respect from his community, it is not a genuine one because he is labeled as *buda*. Two years ago somebody lit fire on his roof and all his properties went up in flames. After this awful event he decided to move to another area but elders, religious leaders and other people made him change his mind. Within three months, members of the community built his hut by contributing money and wood. However, another dreadful incident happened to him last year. Someone threw two hand bombs into his compound. Fortunately, no damage has occurred to him. A representative from the *woreda* council came to Goshwuha, condemned the act, and gave an automatic gun to his son. Though no one openly provokes harm on Engdashet for being *buda*, he suffers from backbiting. He cannot gaze on anybody, for if a person gets ill, people attribute it to his gazing.

All of his married children took their marriage partners from families who are engaged in similar activities in the neighboring communities. No one in Goshwuha is willing to establish a marriage relationship with him. There are people who do not want to eat food in his home because they said that it is clearly indicated in the Bible that God says no one should talk with *budas*. If some one encounters a *buda* on his way, he should give him a nice smack and

push him down to the cliff. However, informants said that even priests eat food and drink *tella* in his home when invited, contrary to what has been said.

2.2.1.5. Inter-Ethnic Relations

Some parts of the Ensaro enclave are bounded by other ethnic groups, the *Oromo*. The relationship between these ethnic groups is very limited. The *Oromo* usually come to the lowland Ensaro to sell their labour in agricultural activities especially at times of weeding. A few of them look after cattle at night to someone who renovates the quality of the land using organic fertilizer (this process is called *machechet*). The daily wage for those who participate in agricultural activities is 6.00 *birr* per day. The laborers are provided with lunch as well. For those who look after cattle the wage is 2.00 *birr* per day in addition to covering daily meal.

Within the villages in Goshwuha, the *Oromos* barter some sorts of cereals and pulses for *tef* (The *Oromos* barter with the people of Goshuwa). The same quantity of cereals or pulses is exchanged with the same quantity of *tef*. They also barter butter for *tef*. One coffee cup of butter is exchanged for 25 same cup of *tef*. The two ethnic groups also transact at a small town of Ensaro called Lemi. The bartering that takes place in Lemi is different from the one in the villages in that there is exchange of sorghum for broad beans and *tef* with beans. The transaction in Lemi also incorporates the use of money occasionally. The Goshwuha people also cross over the boarder to buy donkeys and oxen from the *Oromos*. Intermarriage between these two ethnic groups is culturally proscribed.

Conclusion

The first part of this chapter comprised two sections population and demographic features. In the second part of this chapter I tried to explain the social organization including family and lineage, marriage and patterns of residence, indigenous social institution (which is boiled down into *maheber*, *debo*, *wonfel*, *edir* and *equb*) and the belief system and inter-ethnic relations.

Goshwuha has undergone continuous change. The size of Goshwuha community is very large today. No one finds a large amount of stored grain (granaries) as before (two decades ago). This is due to poverty resulting from scarcity of land; people sense of insecurity about their future destiny.

Betezemed (family) is important for the survival of individual in Goshwuha. Family members (close relatives) work together to solve various problems of their relatives. *Debo* and *wonfel* are organized to solve labour and material shortages. Material (agricultural tools) borrowing is mainly the domain of *wonfel* and similar material is reciprocated when the other party demands. The *debo* institution is very important especially for old and sick people who cannot participate in agricultural activities. Among the four forms of marriage *serg* and *qotasir* involve elaborate rituals and ceremonies and elders involve to a great extent to institute them. *Qotasir* differs from *serg* because the would-be husband becomes member of the household of the girl's parent for about two or three years to assist them in agricultural tasks. A boy who marries through *qotasir* is poor and may not have parents. In terms of rituals and ceremonies it is similar to *serg* marriage. Elders who are widower mostly carry out *girdena* arrangement to keep the pace of life right.

There is instability of *serg* marriage in Goshwuha. I am reluctant to follow Weissleder's justification about marriage unsteadiness based on 'a strictly materialist reduction i.e. economic consideration' - among other things poverty plays the catalytic role for the rate of divorce (Weissleder cited in Pankhurst, 1990:175). According to focus group discussions and informal interviews, the instability of marriage is therefore explained in a more complex term of incompatibility, which is both emotional and economic as argued by Pankhurst (1990:175) in a the study, which was carried out among the Amhara of Menze. In Ensaro ceremonies of *serg* marriage has undergone continuous change. Today preparation for *serg* feast involves small amounts. The advent of the two institutions, *edir* and *equb*, is a recent phenomenon and they were established in Goshwuha in the late 80s. I argue that the emergence of these institutions resulted from the rapid growth of poverty in Goshwuha.

Religion, Orthodox Christianity, is the main faith in Goshwuha. Most of the time people in Goshwuha dedicated to Orthodox Christianity for transcendental aspect. Moreover they are devoted seeking for solutions to some of the pragmatic matters in their day-to-day activities. Other beliefs and practices like *zar* and *tinkola* also play a big role in curing, healing, and mediating spirits (individual

spirit like *wukabi* is mediated by *bale zar*, master of the *zar*). It may be argued that in the male dominated society of Ensaro those women who possess the *zar* spirit use this as a means to fight against mistreatment imposed upon them by their male counterpart.

Chapter 3

Statutes and Roles of Old People in Goshwuha: Past and Present

Introduction

Many gerontological studies show that as changes take place in society the status and role of old people is also be altered (Phillips, 1969: 19; Rogers and Rabel, 1972: 169-170, Hess and Markson, 1980; Fray in Perlmutter and Hall, 1992: 473). Changes in social norms and values, which impinge on the status and role of old people in society, are obviously of various kinds. The purpose of this section is, however, to consider how the status and role of old people has been affected by the changing conditions under three governments in Ethiopia. Accordingly, attempts will be made understand the status and roles of the elderly under the monarchic rule of Haile Sellasie, the military Derg government, and the EPDRF -led government. To begin with, it is important to consider the emic definition of old age.

3.1. Emic Definition of Old Age

Findings of focus group discussions and survey questionnaires reveal that it is not hard to tell whether a person is considered old or not. According to the findings, the marks of old age are based on four important variables: *ye sera makenawen akem huneta* (physical capacity to perform certain activities - functional), *ye sewenet gesetta* (body looks - biological), *ye shemgelena tegbaraten yemakenawen huneta* (expected roles in old age - social), or

yeaemero medkem (mental decline - psychological). Most of the respondents agree however that one cannot talk of old age by considering one single criterion. They believe old age can be established by consideration of several factors or indicators. A questionnaire was distributed to 40 elderly informants in which they were requested to give their views about marks of old age. Results showed that 16 out of 40 (40%) said marks of old age are a combination of biological and functional; 7 (17.5%) of them view it is only functional; 6 (15%) persons believed marks of old age are a combination of functional, biological, social and psychological factors; 5 (12.5%) said they are a combination of functional, biological and social factors; 3 (7.5%) of them perceive it as a combination of functional and social elements; and 3 (7.5%) persons said they are a combination of biological and social.

As far as the functional definition of old age is concerned, diminishing power and energy to perform various activities especially inability to go to the lowland agricultural areas to perform different activities is mainly regarded as the principal mark of old age. When a person becomes less functional in core activities he is viewed as an old person in addition to other marks. For example, inability to walk up or down hillsides to reach agricultural fields, failure to urinate properly, lack of energy while moving, eating and speaking are all marks of old age. Informal interviews and focus group discussions show that the vast majority of respondents agree on the functional definition of old age. Moreover, informants in the case study also widely accept the functional definition of old age.

Berke (age: 86; sex: male)

I know that I am a *shemagele* (an old person) because I can not do what I used to do. While I was a young I used to go to *qola* for farming and I had big reputation, as there was no one as sharp shooter as I used to be. But, all these are things of the past. Due to my old age I cannot chase the

donkeys out from my field even I find myself hard to dress, undress, and eat my meals properly.

Berhan (age: 77; sex: male)

What do you mean! I am a *shemagele*, by all counts. You see me seated and immobile all day long like a helpless child. I am restricted to my home compound unable to do out for agricultural or marketing activity. I cannot even attend a church service in my immediate neighborhoods, let alone do work.

Yemechishal (age: 71;sex: female)

I am an *arogit* (old woman), because I can't perform agricultural activities because I can't walk to the fields in *qola*. How can I walk for 4 hours to get there? These days, I find it difficult even to attend church service in my immediate neighborhoods.

Debitu (age: 45; sex: female)

I am an *arogit* because I cannot go to *qola* to perform agricultural activities. Even it is difficult for me to fetch water going some distance. I cannot even control my five-year-old child who often disappears from my sight. He is fond of going to that cliff beyond.

Belehu (age: 58; sex: male)

I am not a *shimagele* yet. I possess sufficient strength to undertake agricultural work equally with young people, sometimes even better. It is only when I lose the strength to work that I consider myself as an old person. But now, I am full of energy. Certainly, I am not an old man. Oh no!

Respondents also identified old people on the basis of certain biological indicators -- *shibet* (graying of hair), *bera* (bald-head) *ye tirse mewlek / mesheref* (loss, or decay of teeth), *ye sewenet kebedet mekenes* (loss of weight), *ye koda meshebesheb* (wrinkling of body skins) and *yemayetena yemesmat chiger* (impairment of sight and hearing senses). Besides, *ye tenfash mater* (short breath), *sewenet ende leb yalemetazez* (low reflexes), *mizan yalemetebek* (lack of balance), *megubet* (stooping posture), *yehod menteltel* (midriff bulge), *marethyewer abeba mekom* (menopause), and *beshetengnet* (chronic illness is regarded as indicators of old age). Two old women Mamsha (age 77) and Chernetua (age70) showed me their gray hair and how their teeth have already been in the state of *memenezazer* (not found in the right array) as evidence of their old age. They strongly argue that wrinkled skin, teeth lose, midriff bulge, and menopause are the marks of old age. They showed me as evidence an older woman, Abayehu (age 89), waking to the church in stooping posture.

The other cursor of old age that augments the above benchmarks is social factors or indicators. Concerning the social indicators of old age, informants of the case study disclosed the same markers as the respondents of the survey questionnaire. An old person, according to them, is someone who partakes of Holy Communion (*sega wedemu mekebel*), and who therefore refrains from taking vengeful action against his offenders. Two of the above informants, Berke and Mamsha, told me they are partakers of the holy sacrament. They believed that one of their legs is in the grave, meaning they will soon die. They believe that is why they had to partake of the Lord's Table before they die. Accordingly, they entered into a holy commitment not to avenge anybody else, but to instead consign vengeance to God.

In this way, old people assume the position of peacemakers or conflict mediators in society. Old people are usually grandparents or great grandparents and therefore hold their rightful position as

custodians of wisdom and counsel to the young generation. This is also regarded as an additional indicator of old age. Moreover, *tegegnenet* (loss of independence) and *yelej lej mayet* (becoming grandparent) are social markers of old age.

According to informants, it is also possible to identify an old person based on *yaemero huneta* (psychological condition). Major psychological indicators according to the people of Goshwuha, are *mersat* (forgetfulness) or *yeamero medkem* (senility). Berke said he has grown very forgetful. At times, he finds it hard to know where he has placed his *merkuz* (walking stick). Askale also (age 76) told me that sometime she failed to remember what she did at a time. Both Berke and Askale thought that their being forgetful or senile is due to old age.

Moreover, informants consider chronological age as an indicator of old age. It has been commonly argued by them that all the above-mentioned benchmarks of old age are closely linked to advancing age. Informants in the focus group discussions argue that the combination of many factors is one of the best markers, otherwise, it leads to confusion. They raised such issues like *mare*t (menopause) and *shebet* (gray hair); menopause draws closer to women when they are about 50, but it may perhaps come to some women due to various biological problems in the early 30s; gray hair also may possibly come even in the early 20s or may not come for some people in their 60s. The same is true for other elements stated in the discussion. With regard to the onset of chronological age informants in the survey questionnaire have different views.

According to survey findings, out of forty informants, five (12.5%) say it is 40; one (2.5%) says it is 45; nine (22.5%) say it is 50; 7 (17.5%) of them say it is 55; seventeen (42.5%) consider the onset of old age is 60; and one (2.5%) agrees it is 90. Keefelew, 57, regards himself not as an old man, while Debitu in her mid forties regards herself as an old woman, whereas Asefefu Tariku

(age 80) considers herself not as an old person. She views that old age begins at 90 when a person stops doing any work and unable to eat food (*meblatena mesrat seyakom*). Nevertheless, informants in the focus group discussion agree that old age begins at 55. But they go further and classify old age into three categories. These are *yewetat shimagele / arogit* (early-old), *mekaklegna shimagele / mekaklegna arogit* (middle-old), and *yareje /yebekaw or yarejech / yebekat* (late-old). The age limits of these are 55-65, 66-75, and 76 and above respectively.

3.2. Role and Status of Old People under the Monarchy

According to the informants, in Goshwuha, old people were held with respect regardless of their social background or status of wealth during the monarchic rule. Whether they are rich, moderately rich, poor, or very poor they obtain respect from the society. In Ensaro, for example, no old people were in possession of vast land properties, but they had high social status and respect from the younger generation. All 40 elderly respondents who were asked to give their views said elders had a considerable social role and status during the monarchic rule of Haile Sellasie.

The social system during the king's regime, according to the study subjects, encouraged citizens to hold old people in respect. Besides, the informants said old people during the monarchy played influential roles in the society and often served as advisers, arbitrators, and community leaders.

As has been stated, various public activities were not launched without consulting old people. When farming activities begin, members of the household consult older members of the household or the neighborhood about which field to plough first, which crop to grow on a

particular plot, or which plot to leave fallow. Some recall the position of old people during the king's regime (Haile Selasie) as the superior social status.

Tesema (age: 80; sex: male)

As far as I know, during the Haile Selasie regime old people had high status and role. All old people, regardless of their economic status, had been given respect and veneration. Members of the young generation consulted old people about various aspects of personal and communal life. Moreover, virtually all conflicts in households or in the community were arbitrated by old people.

During the Haile Sellasie regime, said the informants, one of the most serious problems of the community was physical assault on people, which in many cases resulted in deaths. This in turn provokes vengeful actions. In such situations, old people act as peacemakers. This has helped to enhance their status in the society. Old people try to settle conflicts to avoid taking them to the courts of law. If the case is too difficult to handle, they go to the extent of requiring church intervention as a final option in the process of arbitration. According to Breke (who used to serve as an arbitrator), conflict arbitrators seek the permission of church clergy to have access to the Holy Cross and the portrait of the Virgin Mary with which to conduct some rituals with the consent of the parties.

The belligerent groups are then taken to a quiet place, say in the church yard, asked to lay down their hand weapons before the arbitrators and priests, and made to swear in the name of God, before the Holy Cross and Virgin Mary's picture, not to harbor any revenge and to make peace. Old people also played influential roles in marriage affairs. According to the informants,

old people generally wielded much social influence until the nationalization of rural land. As viewed by informants the feudal social structure in the land of Ensaro was one of patron-client relationship (*ye alekana menzer genugnunet*), which helped to further strengthen the status of old, people. They strongly affirmed that even the feudal landlord never had negative attitude towards poor elderly people. The system had given due respect to both the rich and the poor old persons as mentioned above. Two informants have made the following statements in the course of interview:

Abayehu (age: 89;sex: female)

I was in the middle economic category During the Haile Sellasie regime. I was given great respect from the young generation. Old people were highly esteemed regardless of their economic position in the community. I used to serve my community by circumcising baby children and served as a mediator in the arrangement of marriages. During the Haile Sellasie regime there existed a patron-client relationship and this had to strengthen filial piety. Moreover, all people possessed considerable land properties and this also contributed to the enhancement of their social status. Even less wealthy or in fact poor old people were held in high respect by the society.

Berke (age: 86; sex: male)

I am a patriot who fought against the Italian aggression during the Haile Sellasie regime. Later I became a member of the armed force from 1946 to 1956 and withdrew after 10 years of service of my own will. Until the fall of the Derg regime, I had led a decent life. I was a landed gentry. Moreover I was the only person in the lowland Ensaro who owned a diesel-mill. From 1957 until the fall of the Derg regime, I had not participated in civil services as an employee, but served as an arbitrator, a go between in marriage arrangements, a renewed hunter, and hero. Due to this, I was held in great respect in the society.

During the monarchy, old people also served as informal community leaders. Elders decided on matters concerning the life of their community. For example old people exercised control over people who work on holy saint days by bypassing religious norms. One of my informants, Yeshenegusse, stated that in the 1970, he worked as an informal community leader. He recalled how he used to impose fines on any body discovered working on saint days. He said such breakers of religious norms were ordered to bring to church some quantities of grain or were subjected to undergo some religious practices like *tsome* (fasting) or repeated prostrations as an act of worship (*segdet*).

3.3. Role and Status of Old People during the Derg Regime

The result of this study reveals that the status and roles of old people began to diminish during the regime of the military dictatorship (Derg). Yet other informants believe that loss of respect for old people began during the EPRDF-led government.

Out of 40 respondents, 31 (77.5 %) said that the roles and status of old people began to go down during the Derg regime, while 8 (20%) said the trend began in the present government administration, 1 (2.5%) informant did not respond.

Those who attribute the diminishing roles and status of old people to the Derg regime give various explanations. Nine (29%) of them say the reason is the nationalization of rural land, while 7 (22.6%) attribute the reason to the distribution of land to peasants; 6 (19.4%) believe it is the sign of the advent of the biblical last days which is commonly known as *simintegnaw shi*; 2 (6.5%) argue that this is the direct effect of the establishment of various mass

organizations like women's, youth and peasant associations; 2 (6.5%) say it is the result of the emergence of mass organizations and the distribution of land for the peasants; 2 (6.5%) attribute the reason to land confiscation, population growth and distribution of land; 1 (3.2%) of them said it is the result of population growth and distribution of land; 1 (3.2%) of them said it is only due to population growth and 1 (3.2%) informant says nothing .

During the Derg, said the informants, things had taken a different course. Land was confiscated and became public property. Coupled with the change of government, the emergences of various mass organizations such as peasant association, youth association and women association have impinged on the status and role of old people. This happened because younger people were then given more and more public responsibilities. Consequently, old people began to lose their social status. They had little say in public matters. They were considered *yebekaw* or *adehari* (old fashioned or reactionaries). Berke angrily states the phenomenon as follows:

During the Derg regime, my lands were confiscated and I was made to hold only four hectares. I was accused of promoting antirevolutionary views and was arrested and threatened to be killed in public in a small town called 'Lemi'. However, members of the community led by priests, moved in mass, and pleaded with the then government officials and I was released. From this time till now I am leading a precarious life. Yet, I used to participate as an arbitrator and community leader in the Derg regime to some extent.

Most of the informants argue that the distribution of land to all community members on the basis of their family size deprived old people of their social empowerment. Informants also argue that this has impinged on the role and status of old people and downgraded the then existing patron-

client relationship. However, to some extent elders had various roles to play. They still had different activities in their family and community at large, especially in the arena of conflict resolution, marriage arrangement, arbitration, and religious services in the church etc, yet, some elders have got empowerment and given land and title in the bureaucracy of the peasant association. However, according to the informants, most of them were not satisfied with the system of administration because everything was coercive. Two informants explain their hatred as follows:

Yemechishal (age: 71; sex: female)

I hate the Derg regime. Its system of administration was poor; I have served as treasurer in the ‘women’s association’. We used to coerce women to contribute money and to attend our assembly. I had frequent quarrels with my kin groups in the process of discharging my duty.

Basazenew (age: 65;sex: male)

It was the Derg regime that made me possess land. However, its system of administration was poor. People were coerced for various things. I was provided with a gun to serve the community as a militia against my will. Our long-standing value began to breakdown in the Derg regime because elders had lost their place in the community; it was our elders who had administered us with peace for centuries. After the downfall of the Haile Selassie regime everything went wrong. Children were forced to go for military service instead of looking after their parents. The youth became public officials and started giving public speeches in the presence of elders. Moreover, people began to engage in feuds over scarcity of fertile and grazing land.

Discussion with informants also reveals that in addition to socio-cultural factors environmental degradation, and demographic factors had deepened poverty among members of the society in general and elderly people in particular. Different indigenous trees were cut down for various purposes like fencing both residential and farming plots etc. This resulted in the decreasing quality of the soil because it has been washed down by the overflow of streams in the winter. It is quite evident that this process had had a negative impact on agricultural activities, decreased crop production.

Decreased productivity or agricultural yield in turn caused food shortage and this severely affected elders and children. The youth and the early-old persons, used to augment their income by working as daily laborers on farms of somebody in their community. Payments may be either on cash or in kind. But, the middle-aged and the late-aged entirely depended on their immediate kin groups because they have no physical power to cultivate their plots, mainly the later one.

Family members depended on each other to meet contingencies. Since the Derg regime, one of the big problems, which affected the life of families in Goshwuha, is said to have been the shortage of agricultural land caused by increasing population.

3.4. Role and Status of Old People during the EPRDF Administration

During the EPRDF administration, according to informants of the study, the status and role of old people have been reduced. Elders have faced quite a great deal of problems. The major

ones are the redistribution of land, which deprived old people of their land. Almost all informants argue that the status of old people has been lowered in the EPRDF regime.

Participants of the focus group discussions argue that the declining trend in the role and status of old people which began in the Derg regime, has reached its peak in the EPRDF government. People who had served in different capacities in the Derg regime were stripped of their power, basic human rights and also made to undergo economic hardships.

A number of elderly informants complained that the redistribution of land that took place five years ago was not fair, i.e. its main objective was to meet some political purposes. This is evidenced by the fact that those who have had different status in the bureaucratic structure of Peasant Association (PA) were given only one hectare. It is said that the maximum limit of the redistribution in the area was three hectares. Those who possessed more than this size were restricted to only the stated limit. However, this was possible if they had not been involved in any type of government bureaucracies of the Derg regime. Consequently, the problem became severe for those who were involved in the then bureaucracy and had already reached old age when land was redistributed.

In agricultural societies, control over resources like land is positively correlated with the status and role of old people. The same is true for the elderly people of Ensaro. Thus, whenever their control over land is lessening so is their status and role.

Observation has shown that in Goshwuha there is a lot of people who have become poor as the consequence of land redistribution. Those who were labeled as *kirit feudal* “remnant feudals” are in their late old age at this time, and most of those who were in their early 50s and late 50s

that had been involved in the bureaucracy of *Derg* régime are now in their early and middle old age. Those elderly people who have also been labeled as *kirit fudal* were given the same land size (one hectare) as those who were labeled as bureaucrats in the Derg regime. Besides, it was gathered that land distributors were easily bribed by those who could afford what they (land distributors) demand (cash or in kind) for allotting fertile or large size of land.

According to the result of focus group discussions the middle-old and the late-old categories are the most vulnerable groups in the society compared to the early-old category. The young generation including the early-old can at least augment their income through sharecropping (cultivating somebody's land and sharing the produce on equal basis with the one who possess the land) or participating in income generating activities.

To justify the above discussion that how the reallocation of land severely hit some older people in Ensaro in general and in Goshwuha in particular, the cases of three informants will be presented below.

Berke (age: 86; sex: male)

While land was distributed among the community members, I was left with $\frac{1}{4}$ th of my previous possession (four hectares) for I was considered to be *kirit* feudal. My married son was not given any plot of land, so he ploughs mine. My two-divorced daughters, too, are my dependents. I now crippled by the consequence of old age. At this age I cannot participate in other activities to supplement my household income that has dramatically fallen.

Desendegne (age: 76; sex: male)

I used to hold three hectares of land during the Derge regime. But now I own only one for I was labeled as a bureaucrat. I lost my land during the process of land redistribution effected six years ago. I

served as treasurer in the peasant association during the Derg regime. At this age I cannot augment the household income by participating in other activities. Let alone to do this even I gave my land on the basis of crop sharing to one of my kins. The produce does not cover my household food requirement and other expenses. Had it been large size I would have not suffered from food shortage.

Shewandage (age: 56; sex: male)

I had more than two hectares of land during the Derg regime. When the land was redistributed six years ago I lost one hectare for being labeled as bureaucrat. I served as a secretary in the peasant association during the Derg administration. From 2001 until today (November, 2002) I have been cultivating additional one hectare taking from some body on the basis of crop sharing. Still the produce I get from my plot and from sharecropping does not cover my household's food requirement.

From the Above cases it is possible to say that the most vulnerable part of elders among the stated categories are the middle-old and the late-old who had small amounts of plots. Especially, the late-old are more prone to socioeconomic problems because they are completely unable to involve in income generating activities, like sharecropping.

On the other hand there are old people who hold small size of land but were not labeled as 'remnants of fudals' or bureaucrat. For example, Denknes, Abebech, Tsegaw and Wogdereseg, have less than 0.75 hectare. The first two are in their early-old age, the third, and the fourth are in their middle-old and late-old, respectively. All have socio economic problems. Wogdereseg

is the most vulnerable one as her age does not allow her to augment her income and she seeks for the generosity of family support. The rest are participating in income generating activities like begging, serving as daily laborer in agricultural activities, working in the church as supplier of firewood. All claimed that they have low social status for being poor.

However, there are cases where elders have in good economic position no matter what they have small amount of plots. This group of people is those who are involved in handicraft. In Goshwuha a 72-year-old Engedashet is participating in iron melting activities. He has 0.75 hectare of agricultural plots. Engedashet has 340 customers who pay him 30 kilos of cereals (15 kilos of *tef*, and 15 kilos of sorghum) on yearly basis. He gives them service throughout the year. Moreover, those people who come from neighbouring communities pay him cash immediately after getting his service. This shows that how he is in a better economic position. Unfortunately, Engedashet suffers from social problem. He is labeled being *buda* (an evil-eye) as mentioned in chapter two. Therefore, those old people who have involved in handcrafting are better off in terms of their economic status but not in terms of their social status for the participants of this activities are mostly labeled as an evil-eyes.

Findings of the study shows that though old people have a role to play in their family and community, their social status has been diminishing. Berke, for example, still has a role in the family and society. In August 2001 when I began my first phase of field trip in Goshwuha, the committee was formed to investigate into the alleged church fund misappropriation. Berke was an active participant in the committee and served being a chairman. In the following week while he walked to the church he saw a young lady who was severely beating her donkey. So, he told her to stop what she was doing. She did not accept what he told her and insulted him *yejaje semagele* (a frail old man). Berke was one of the respected persons in the community. He was

so much feared that even his wife avoided eating with him, when he arrived home, his children used to leave the room as a sign of respect.

Conclusion

The emic definition of old age greatly centers on the functional definition of old age, although there are various other indicators. Close observation and repeated inquiries revealed that as long as people actively participate in farming activities they do not consider themselves to be old.

The role and status of old people in Goshwuha community have shown a dramatic change over the three forms of government administration. As far as the informants' description is concerned, old people had a high status and role during the Haile Selassie government that they commanded good respect and veneration. However, the role and status of old people had shown a dramatic fall during the Derg regime and impinged on their role and status in general and their life situation in particular. Many informants argue that this is increasingly manifested during the EPRDF administration.

I am of the opinion that old people commanded high respect during the Haile Selassie regime; because children were given land by their parents when they got married. So, they were obedient, loyal, and respectful to their old parents. This helped elders to be esteemed as important members of the community. During the Derg regime, on the other hand, land became the property of the public and all members of the community were allotted agricultural plots. This has no doubt affected the status of old people. Besides, the formation of different mass organizations such as peasant associations, youth associations, and women associations had

diminished the importance of old people. For example, when people quarrel they went directly to *ferd shengo* (the court in the peasant association) where the cadres of the mass organizations preach the slogan *hulum equi new* (all people are equal). This also reduced the status and role of elderly citizens in the community.

Under the present government (the EPDRF led government) land has been redistributed. Those who have been labeled as *kerit feudal* (remnant of feudal) and those who have served in the bureaucracy of the peasant association have been provided only one hectare regardless of the size of their household. This is another blow to the “*kirit* feudalists” who were also mistreated during the Derg regime. As a result, they lost their social status again. It is possible to argue that the ‘social labeling theory’ can be substantiated in this regard. Besides, population growth, the opening up of schools in the community, and confiscation of guns also contributed to the diminishing status and role of elders. It is interesting to note that old people lost their enhanced social prestige as a result of disarming of people. People no longer own weapons with which to kill each other. This somehow caused old people to lose their influence in society because there are no longer conflicts about blood feuds to arbitrate.

Finally, it is safe to conclude that among the three categories of elders the middle-old and the late-old who have small size of land are the most vulnerable group in old age, especially the late-old category. The early- old and some of the middle-old categories participate in income generating activities.

Chapter 4

Gender and Old Age in Goshwuha

Introduction

Researchers such as Poluha (1987), Hirut and Lakew, (1989), Dessalegn, (1989), and Pankhurst (1990) focus on women's socioeconomic life not particularly on old age. Moreover, the elaborate studies of Reminick (1973), and Pankhurst (1990) deal with male dominance in Menz of Amhara state. Yet the focus of interest is not on old age. Therefore, the absence of literature on old age in general and, old age and gender in particular, has made it difficult to undertake studies which help us compare or contrast the life style of older male and female population of Goshwuha with others.

In this section, therefore, I will attempt to explain the social functions of old women and men. Since gender involves both sexes, female and male, it is necessary to explain the functions of both. The explanation is based on the three categories of old people - the early-old, the

middle-old, and the late-old (*as* defined in the foregoing). Besides, the state of widowhood, and property and inheritance will also be examined.

4.1. Women in Old Age

Observation has shown that, most prestige generating roles and statuses seem to be occupied by men although women share them to some extent. During my stay in Goshwuha I had noted that men mostly engaged themselves in advisory, arbitration and other social activities. In August 2001, when a committee was formed for probing into an alleged misappropriation of a church fund, no old women was named to serve on it.

The committee met on October 18, 2001 after a Church Service. On that day, older members of the community got together and discussed concerning labor wage and other issues. The committee decided the daily wage of a laborer to be 4 *birr*. It was also decided that those who keep watch over cattle during the night be paid one *birr* a day. Furthermore, the committee decided to impose fines on those parents who shelter their divorced children, but the amount of the fines was not fixed. There was not a single women represented in this committee.

In Goshwuha, girls are forced to marry somebody before the age of fifteen. They may not know the person to whom they are married. Marriage at this age has a negative impact on the health of the girl. Such a condition also leads to various social problems. This is because sexual intercourse before the age of 15 is hazardous and can bring chronic health complications. In Goshwuha, therefore, a number of married girls had faced fistula or related

womb complications within a few months of their marriage. The case of Mewded would give us a good illustration.

I was married at the age of eleven. After six months I ran away from my husband's hut and began to live with my parents. I did not return to my husband because I hated him. I still remember with indignation how, on that unfortunate day, the two best men clasped my thighs cruelly and forcefully in order for my husband to deflower me. He did that *endenses* (in a manner like an animal). After I stayed a year in my parent's house I married Belachew for the second time and lived with him for four years. Unfortunately I suffered three miscarriages because of womb problems. In the last miscarriage, I developed a fistula case. After treatment in Addis Ababa for three months, I returned home to Goshwuha and began to live with my parents. I married another person, Akalu, for the third time. But my health got worse and I could not participate in farming activities. So I had to return to my parents again and I am still living with them.

Besides, young women bear many children before 18 years of age. This exposes them to further health risks and they normally grow old and weak in their early 40s.

If a married girl has womb problems her chance of bearing children in her productive age is minimal. In Goshwuha children are considered to be assets for parents partly because of their labor value especially in performing agricultural activities and partly because of the useful role they play as caretakers of the family when parents become old.

As the farm fields are usually far away from the residences, some three to four hours' of walking distance, Goshwuha Community is in critical need of manpower. Besides, livestock is often kept in the lowland farming areas both during day and night. Children serve their

parents by looking after the cattle in daytime. When parents suffer health problems, their children do the job in their place. Marriages often end up in divorce when women do not bear children because of infertility. In such cases, women do not have somebody to look after them in old age.

Although, elderly women have no recognized social status in Goshwuha they play significant roles for the household. They participate both in and outside home activities. They frequently perform domestic chores. The story of 65-year old Zewdenesh may make this point clearer.

Zewdenesh wakes up before dawn breaks. She bakes *injera*, and fetches water, three or four times a day. Then she prepares *wat* for breakfast and dinner. Completing this, she takes out *ibet* (cow and ox dung) and makes it into dung-cake. Dung-cakes are left to dry around the tip of the cliff. Subsequently, she leads her cattle to the pastureland. There she gathers firewood. Immediately after returning home, she fetches water to prepare supper for her and her son. She does not go to bed until late midnight.

According to my observation and focus group discussions, those women of the early-old category actively take part in various activities. They travel to the farming area on foot walking three or four hours to assist their husbands. Besides, different household chores such as preparing daily meals, fetching water, washing clothes, cleaning the house are done by women of this old age category; they also do marketing activities. Moreover, women of the early-old category participate in other social activities like, *mehaber*. Consequently, they are held in greater respect than the middle-old and the late-old, as explained by the following story.

Fifty-five year old Ermegachew like Zewdenesh has a lot of things to do; she prepares daily meal and fetches water. But the stream is not so far away compared to Zewdenesh. She takes cereals to the diesel-mill and goes every Saturday to the market. Zewdenesh is member of two *mehaber*. She also goes to the agricultural area to assist her husband from June to September. In her view, she is given greater social respect than the late-old women.

Old women of the middle-old category do not travel far away to gather firewood and cow dung when they no longer go to the farm fields. However, the record of their daily routine, which I recorded during my second field trip in November 2001, shows that they engage in household chores such as taking care of grand children, preparing meals, guarding the house, advising household members, cleaning the house and looking after cattle at home. In their spare time they engage in spinning cotton. And yet, there are women who engage in agricultural deeds in the backyards. Above all the middle-old category mostly attend church services.

Close observation has revealed that women of the late-old category who are in good health usually participate in domestic activities like preparing meals and guarding grandchildren. Outside home they take part in attending church services. Women of this age category are given less respect and veneration.

From this I tend to conclude that the fate of the aged in Goshwuha society is ultimately determined by the balance between their contribution to the society and their dependence upon it.

4.2. Men in Old Age

Men are rather privileged compared to women in the culture of Ensaro. Parents are cheerful when they give birth to a male child. In August 2001, I attended two baptisms in Goshwuha, and the infants' fathers invited me to come home to participate in those feasts. I also attended another feast in November 2001. I asked the parents how they felt about it all.

Gurmess (age: 35; sex: male)

I would have been far happier if I had a son.
What would I gain from a female child? Who
would make me to have a rest (*yemiyasarefegn*)?
Men have a big role in our community. It is
men who feed the mouth of the household
(*areso ye myabela*). Anyway, what can I do?
it is God's will, and I have to accept it.

Sereke (age: 56; Sex: male)

Thanks to God, I have got a son. This is what I always
wished. In this harsh place (*ye sekay bota*) how do you survive
without a son ? A male child is like a shield (*Gasha*) against
the adversary. He avenges the enemy (*ye bekelal*).

Beleye (Age: 28; Sex: male)

God has looked in to my heart and gave me a male baby
(*egziabeher ye leben ayto kochemelegn*). What good will a
female do ? She will leave her parent's residence and serve
strangers (her father and mother in-laws).

I also approached Yegozeguzu, a 25-year-old girl, for her comment. Gurmess' wife Yegozeguzu had a desire to have male child. I asked why she preferred boys to girls and told me that it was men who bring you honor. Male is tantamount to throat (*guroro mallet new*).
What is the use of female (*set*)?

While women usually do important household duties, agricultural tasks like tilling the land, sowing, and threshing are normally the exclusive domain of men. As the society is patriarchal, newly wedded youths are often assisted in the household of their families during the first couple of years. Parents are fond of keeping their male children who are married because they need them for defense against adversaries. It is believed that male children who are married should be kept close to their parents in order that they assist their parents while they get old and also may avenge for their parents during assault. This, therefore, explains the prevalence of the male dominance in the Goshwaha society.

Even though the status of elderly men in Goshwaha is minimal today, they still play important roles in the household and the community at large. Some able-bodied and physically strong elders often undertake agricultural activities out in the farm fields in the lowlands.

The data, as gathered through observation and focus group discussion, show that those who are within the early-old category actively participate in hard labor in the fields after walking long distances. Moreover, they also engage more in social functions like conflict mediation and marriage arrangement than the other age categories. Accordingly, they commend greater social respect and veneration than the middle-old and the late-old categories.

Getachew (Age: 57; Sex: male)

Residents respect me, because I always play a leadership role. People listen to me attentively as I speak in public. They elect me in the various informal committees set up to settle issues.

People respect and accept all the decisions I make. I am always asked to involve in marriages arrangement and in the mediation of conflicts.

Most of those old people, who are within the middle-old category, are usually limited capacity to move about. Their physical limitations would not allow them to do hard work in the fields. However, there are a few old people who offer to do some work even in their advanced age. They engage in guarding the house, taking care of grand children, and advise household members on various matters. Outside the home, they attend church services.

Tadesse (age: 75; sex: male)

I have certain contributions to make at the home level. I used to be an energetic farmer. But now I can't go to the fields to farm. I am getting weaker. My services are limited to the house. I look after the house and the grandchildren. I take the cattle to the pastures. And I participate in some social functions like arranging weddings, settling social conflicts and attend church services.

In Goshwaha community, the roles of old people who are within the late-old category are not simple though they do not engage in many of the activities of the early-old category. Most often they look after the house in the daytime, review and discuss the work of members of the household or take part in conflict settlement in their community. Let me illustrate this from my diary by what Berke, an 86-year old man, is doing at the home and community level.

Breke gives advice to his young children and grandchildren around the hearth. Presiding at hearth gatherings every night, Berke recounts the experiences of his occupational and personal life. As a custodian of wisdom and history, he passes down to his young relatives the valuable experiences of life.

Moreover, he sometimes takes part in solving social disputes and attending social functions like funerals, weddings, and church services.

Unfortunately, even though the late-old category of elders attends church services (those elders whose movement are not restricted), they have no sound religious authority compared to the other categories of old people.

All evidences therefore suggest that although old people may retire from certain walks of life, they rarely withdraw from the family as I explained their roles in the above discussions. It appears, also, that older family members frequently serve as central communication axes of the family, contributing to the maintenance of emotional closeness among siblings and extended family members.

It is quite interesting to note that when people enters into the middle-old and the late-old categories, the gender role that has been forming and defining before old age becomes more relaxed and in some cases, even tends to be reversed. For example guarding and looking after children is the task of women but most of older persons of these age categories involve in these activities. The following poems gathered in the study area reveals how the dominance of males is in the state of decline in old age, mainly in the middle-old and late-old categories.

**ሽማግሌ : አገባሁ፡
ጥርስ : የወለቀ፡
ለሱ : ስፈተፍት፡
አሸቦዬ : አለቀ፡።**

I married an old man,
who has lost his teeth;
For him making soft diet,
I am running out of salt.

**አሮጌ በሬና
ሽማግሌ ባል፣
አላወቅሽውም ወይ
ችጋር መግደሉን፡።**

An old ox and,
An old husband;
Didn't you (female) know that,
Hunger kills.

4. 3.The State of Widowhood

My experience of fieldwork during which I shared the life of the community has helped me to gain insights into how widowhood affects the emotional and material life of old people. In the first place, widowhood keeps old people socially isolated. Most of the informants said that in the early-old category females lose the capacity of managing their household upon the death of their husbands. Furthermore, they cannot re-marry as opposed to their male counterparts.

As we have seen earlier, the early-old vigorously participate in agricultural and social activities more than the other group of old people. In Goshwaha Society an androcentric view is both the cultural ideal and the real one. So, widows become economically and socially disadvantaged. Most of the widows reported that they had been labeled as *Gefi* (one who causes misfortune to happen to others). Such people are held in hatred and suspicion in the family.

Zewdenesh (age: 65; sex: female)

I became victim of slander by the relatives of my deceased husband. I lived among them and they viewed me with suspicion hatred.

I often quarreled with them over petty issues.

Observation has shown that the middle-old and the late-old categories of widows are relatively better off compared to their widowers' counterpart. Focus group discussions, which were conducted for different age groups, showed that these categories of widows normally enjoy a healthier life because women irrespective of their age can prepare their own meals, which is culturally impossible for men. Yet, there are some elderly-widows of this age category that lead a precarious life. The following extract is from my dairy.

Wogdereseqn (age: 80; sex: female)

Wogdereseqn lives alone. She sometimes prepares her daily meal and cleans her house. She regularly attends church services and gets food on religious occasions. Wogderesen feels that members of the community respect her. Today her main problem is the absence of someone to collect firewood and fetch water. She is suffering from eye disease, too. Living a solitary life, she is often depressed. She said she wants to die before facing more problems.

Old women in this age category also take care of their grandchildren and guard the house in the daytime when members of the household travel to perform agricultural tasks. According to informants, this is impossible for men. Women are therefore favored because they can participate in domestic chores even in their advanced chronological age, at 76 and above. This is best explained by the proverb which says, *ye kesena ye set engageda yelewum* which roughly means priests and women cannot be guests. They are always at work everywhere, and any time.

The situation of old widowers in the early-old category is much better. This group of old people performs agricultural tasks without difficulty and may bring another spouse after the

death of their wife. However, members of the other categories have problems. Some of them even have difficulty in securing their daily bread especially if they don't have caretakers of children or daughter in-laws. There are still some old widowers who have a problem of getting their daily meals appositely though they have caretakers. As stated above, the culture does not allow men to cook food and carry out other household chores. The case of Taddesse, a 75-year-old widower hereunder justifies this account.

I live with my eldest son and he is my caretaker. However I do not get the proper care and support. I have two granaries of *tef*, forty quintals, reserved for 20 years, and I also receive my own share when my son collects from my plot every year. But, most often his family consumes from my granaries. My daughter in-law does not supply my daily meal on time. I hope, it would not be difficult for me at least to prepare *kita*, *kolo* or *nifro* ; in our culture it is disdainful if a man prepares meals. It is impossible for a human being to be buried while alive (*sew kene hiwetu aykeber*). If it were possible, I would be the one.

4.4. Property and Inheritance

The quality of life of old people in Goshwuha is determined by the size of the property they possess and the control they exercise over it. Observation has shown that the quality of care and support bestowed to old people depends on the size of land and cattle and other property they possess. Elder's control over these properties enables them to command good respect.

Above anything else, land is an important property that serves as insurance in old age. Having ample land means getting old age benefit in Goshwuha. As stated earlier one of the big problems of old people is the scarcity of land. Those who have enough land would

relatively be treated well by their caregivers. Some old people may also have power to choose the best caregivers if they are not satisfied. This is best exemplified if we see the case of Asefetu, which was discussed earlier. She chose another nephew, as she was not satisfied with the former one.

Caretakers or children have the right to inherit the property of old persons on the basis of their will. According to informal focus group discussions with priests, women, men and young, or adult persons, as well as members of local administrations (*ye kebele mestedader*), those children who live with their mothers may claim their father's share after the property is divided between the widow and the deceased husband. In most cases they do not claim and live in peace with their mother. The case of Zewdenesh provides a good example.

Zewdenesh's husband, who died in 1999, is known to have been an industrious farmer. He died after being blind during the last 10 years of his life. He stored two granaries of *tef* for about 40 years. One is still present the other one was shared by his children according to his will. Zewdenesh's husband was given three hectares of agricultural land by the present government's policy of land redistribution. He bequeathed one hectare to his sons and the remaining two hectares went to Zewdenesh and her unmarried child. Though Zewdenesh's husband bequeathed his property to his children, they do not have the full title to possess. The land is in the name of Zewdenesh and she pays the tax for the three hectares. Her son, Semugn, who is yet a bachelor tills the land for the household and live in peace with her.

The same is true for any widows, too. However, my informants say that if both spouses die, the youngest married or unmarried son is put in control over all the land. The other married

children may also claim the property of their parents, if the youngest son who remains in the parent's household does not prepare a colorful feast for *tazkar* (a final rite of passage that is held for the deceased after a year).

Nowadays, though inheritance of land is impossible in theory, it is the youngest son who exercises control over land if both parents pass away, and the other children may claim household materials like different utensils, cattle, and grain in silos. Under the land redistribution of the present government, which took place five years ago, most of the youngest married sons who live with their elderly parents were denied land because they were supposed to inherit when their parents would pass away.

Conclusion

In the first parts of this chapter I have tried to describe the activities of both elderly males and females in Goshwula community. Women in their life cycle are burdened with various tasks, which are normally carried out in the society. It seems plausible to conclude that old women throughout their whole life are not considered equally with men. They are held under suppression because of the prevailing male dominance, which was well expounded in Pankhurst (1990) when dealing with the case of the society of Menz in Amhara state.

However, gender biased attitudes and gender division of work are somehow relaxed and some of them are reversed in old age. Consider for example, keeping the hut and looking after grandchildren by those elders who are in the middle-old and late-old categories in the daytime while others participate in agricultural activities.

In Goshwaha those elders whose health and physical condition is sound play a prominent role for their society. Through active participation, they also command social respect. Consequently, the early-old category of old people takes a more active participation in public life and they therefore enjoy more respect than the middle-old and the late-old categories. This does not mean that the middle-old and the late-old categories have no role in the society; they play prominent roles in the household.

It is difficult for me to accept the applicability of the universal theoretical paradigm of disengagement theory (Coming and Henery in Talmon, 1968:193-194) to the elderly people of Goshwaha, which states that as a person ages, a mutual withdrawal occurs between the aging individual and society i.e. elders should voluntarily disassociate themselves from direct involvement in the activities they fully engaged in, and should let those who have assumed responsibility work. But, elders in Goshwaha do not voluntarily disengage; unless constrained by poor health or disability, old people have the same psychological and social needs that young adult people have in farming. Though they are disengaged because of poor physical energy, they participate in other spheres of life such as domestic chores and social activities like attending church services, arbitration, and marriage arrangements. Therefore, the activity theory fits with the findings that elders do not totally disengage from the mainstream of society but become involved in other activities. This argument is similar to the findings of Vatuk (1980) in India, and Kern (1980) in Belize, Central America.

Widowhood in old age impairs the life of elders. Widows in the early-old category have problems of managing the household activities especially if there is no son or other male member. The middle-old and the late-old categories of both the widows and widowers in

Goshwaha get support form caregivers. They are not supposed to participate in farming activities like the early-old category.

Access to property, such as land, stored grain, and farm oxen is security for the elderly people of Goshwaha. The quality of getting care and support depends on access to resources. This is the major factor explaining the differential attitude towards the elderly.

Chapter 5

Social Relations

Introduction

The condition of life of old people is mostly determined by the kind of relationships they have with various social groups. This section, therefore, focuses on the nature of social ties old people have with their own and other generations.

As the quality of life of old people and their social status depends on such relationships, it is important to look into ties between spouses, siblings, peers, children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, and in-laws. I also try to show the relations within neighborhoods and the community at large.

5.1. Intra-Generation Ties

5.1.1. *Husband and Wife Relationship*

In old age, good relationships between elderly couples are important. Out of the married respondents⁵ in the sample, 20 (90.9%) said that they have strong relationship with their partners but only 2 (9.1%) said they have weak relationship. According to informants, the presence of their spouse is valuable in many ways. If the wife is able to perform the domestic tasks, the husband is said to be properly treated by his wife and she fulfils some of his needs, like provision of better food, washing his body and cloths. Besides, both enjoy by talking about their early experiences. Researches have established that marital satisfaction is a major contributor to the overall well being of old people (Connidis, 1989). Berke has amicable relations with his wife today. Previously, he did not allow her to eat food with him or to discuss any matter together; their relationship used to be a patron-client type. When he reached old age, she said, he gave up looking her with contempt and began communicating properly with all members of the household in general and with her in particular. This fit with earlier statement that in old age gender based attitudes are relaxed or reversed.

However, the nature of such ties is determined by the availability of resources that the elderly household possesses.⁶ Berhan for example, is one of the poor elderly people in Goshwaha community. He lived in poverty starting from his 40s. When he reached old age his relations with his wife tended to be altered. He was denied basic provisions of food and left home. For the time being he established his living in the

⁵ Out of 40 informants only 22 are married.

⁶ According to Simon (1945) the ownership or control of property is important for the support treatment of old People.

church compound. Today he lives with his eldest son. However, the majority of elderly informants responded that they had their psychological desires met more from their wives than from anybody else.

5.1.2. Ties Between Siblings

According to the results of survey questionnaire, out of the total number of informants 32 (80%) have siblings of which 26 (81.2%) respond that they have strong social ties; 6 (18.8%) informants say they have no strong social ties.

As has been observed, in Goshwaha the sibling relationship is an egalitarian one. This is because the ties between them are of horizontal rather than vertical.⁷ Research has also shown that ties between siblings are ascribed rather than achieved type and thus, the ties are more enduring for siblings “shared memories of childhood, having memories of the same home, and share the same genetic pool” (Cecirelli cited in Connidis, 1989:71).

In Goshwaha elderly brothers have contact everyday since the norm of residential patterns is patrilocal. If they do not live in the same compound, they usually live in the same community. For example, Berke and Berhane do not live in the same compound but they live in the same community. However, according to information gathered from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, elderly brothers live in different community or region throughout their life for various reasons. For instance, the groom may establish his residence after his marriage in the place of the bride’s family⁸; or due

⁷ Relations are not a patron-client type.

⁸ In the case of *kotasir* marriage.

to the consequence of feud he may leave his community and establish his living in the other area of Ensaro or move to other region, town (city); or he may migrate to the town in seeking for better life.

According to informal discussions and focused observations, elderly siblings are more likely to share social activities than to assist one another. However, there are cases where support may take place in times of crises. In this case the better off families provide support for their needy elderly siblings. It has been reported that in 1985 when the drought severely hit the population of Ensaro the kinship network was intact and sibling support was one of the coping mechanisms in Goshwaha society. Berke explained that during the period of the crisis one of his brothers Chebude assisted all his siblings; he distributed ten granaries of *tef* to his needy brothers and sisters.

Observation has shown that in Goshwaha sibling relationships differ in terms of gender and thus brother-to-brother relationships is more observable than sister-to-brother relationships. As stated above brothers have daily interaction though support exchange is limited today. If support exchange is present, it is very equitable, involving giving and receiving similar amounts of assistance to and from one another.

Close observations and focus group discussions have revealed that sibling ties are relatively strong between sisters but this is highly circumscribed by geographical distance. In Ensaro most of the brides establish their settlement out of their parent's community. Therefore, they do not have contact as brothers do. This has been evidenced by the fact that low frequency of contact is not due to absence of emotions but geographical proximity.

Observation also revealed that those elderly sisters who live in Goshwuha community have strong ties. Though they do not have contact daily their emotional ties are well built. This seems to be the result of the consequence of their greater role similarity after marriage, i.e. responsibility of home affairs, rearing children, and experiencing interim conflicts, which occurs with husbands. Sometimes they support each other by providing food and drinks on social occasions.

According to information gathered from some informants, both sexes have ties and obtain support from their migrated kin, but these ties and support depend on the economic status of their migrated siblings. Berhane and Berke stated that they have ties and get assistance from their sisters who live in Addis Ababa and Ambo. These sisters come to Goshwuha at least twice a year. It has been reported that, last year one of their youngest sisters who lives in Ambo provided Berhane with 500 birr in order for him to buy an ox. According to him, since the price of an ox is expensive he was forced to buy a bull. The bull, which he bought, was expected to become an ox for the next year.

Therefore, care and support among elderly siblings is determined by the economic status or willingness of individual persons to assist those elderly siblings who are in need. In the absence of any children, however, siblings have strong ties and get support from each other.

5.1.3. Relationship Between Peers

The most important determinant of social adaptation in old age in Goshwaha community seems to be relationship among peer groups. According to results of survey questionnaire, 19 (47.5%) informants said their relation is very strong with people of their own age group; 15 (37.5%) respondents said the relation is about the same as the relation they had before reaching old age; 6 (15%) informants said that their relation is cooler.

It has been observed that most old people usually gathered around *belelo* (the community's church yard) at least once a day. The middle-old and the late-old categories are the ones that have shown strong ties than the early-old category. They long for one another and become restless when any single member is missing. They meet daily at *belelo* for social reasons and recreation. Many of the informants said that relationship between elders is the only means of recreation for old people. But this is not true for women who do not enjoy any outdoor fellowships as the men do. Women in the above age bracket perform various activities at home since they feel too weak to move far away. They normally stay at home and are visited at their places.

It has been observed that the middle-old and the late-old categories of elderly people are unable to go outside to participate in agricultural activities. Berke's wife, Askale, 71, told me the following account about her husband:

“ Berke does not want to stay at home, after having his breakfast he soon goes out to find his peers at *belelo*. He comes home at 11: 30 or 12:00 a.m for lunch and again goes out to find them.”

Berke himself explained that unless he is forced by compelling circumstances, he avoids participating in domestic chores, simply sitting, or sleeping. He said he enjoys chatting with his peers.

On more occasions than one, I personally overheard elderly peers discussing at *belelo* various matters of their early experiences. They usually recount their past deeds and performances. They usually share views about their problems and seek solutions together. They are especially fond of discussing conditions of life under the imperial administration. They recall how they enjoyed life under the monarchy.

Sometimes they sit on the edge of the cliffs and survey the lowland farming areas with feelings of regret that they are unable to participate in the activities due to old age. They usually express concern over the fate of the future generation in light of the scarcity of land. One of my informants, Desendilegn, made the following statement while I was with him:

Do you see that agricultural field? It used to be one of my farming plots before the land redistribution. Thanks to the EPRDF government, we are deprived of our wealth (*mutet adergo zerefen*). The area you see was full of indigenous trees during the Haile Selassie period. These days all the areas that you see around have lost their scenic beauty. We find no trees. Soon it will become *bereha* (lowest and hottest of the *qolla*). We are sorry about the future generation. For us we do not mind. We are on the verge of dying. Almighty God made us to stay and see this period (*egziabeher ideme seteton yehenen zemen ayen*).

They also discuss the problems they face at home. Elderly Peers often engage in name calling and backbiting. Some old people are active in finding solutions about the problems elders encountered in their day-to-day activities. I have heard many old people seeking advice of Berke at *belelo*.

5.2. Inter-Generation Ties

5.2.1. Ties between Elderly Parents and Their Children

Children are believed to represent security in old age in traditional society. This is because there is no pension scheme designed by the government for rural agricultural populations. The population of Ensaro is no exception. It is worth noting here that the nature of parent-child relationships depends on the child's gender.

As stated earlier, children, both male and female, provide considerable care and support for their parents. However, male children are more reliable supporters since the female children leave their parents after marriage. Accordingly, married daughters develop stronger contacts with in-laws, though they occasionally visit their own parents.

According to information gathered from survey questionnaire, thirty-five (94.59%) of the respondents say they have strong relationship with their daughters, and two (5.41%) have no relationship. But, observation and repeated inquiries have shown that daughters who are married and live in the same community always visit their aging parents more often than those who live outside the community. This is evidenced by the fact that geographical distance has an impact on frequency of visit.

According to close observation during my stay in Goshwaha, ties between elderly mothers and unmarried daughters are relatively stronger than ties between married daughters and mothers. However, ties between elderly mothers and married daughters are closer than ties between elderly fathers and married daughters. Married daughters prefer to consult and discuss various issues with their mothers rather than their fathers.

Moreover, in Ensaro marriage often end up in divorce for various reasons and divorced women return to live with their family of procreation. If they do not marry again they serve as supporters of their aging parents. The case of Berke elaborates this point. Two of his daughters, one of whom was mentioned in the previous chapter, Mewded, and the other one, Meseret, still live with their elderly parents and support them in various ways both in-door and out-door activities. On the other hand, married sons usually live with their parents throughout their live. According to the result of the survey questionnaire, out of 34 respondents who have sons 31 (88.2%) said that they have strong ties with their sons while four (11.8%) of them assumed not to have strong relationship.

As discussed earlier, after marriage sons will stay up to two years or more depending upon the parent's economic capacity, which enables their married sons to establish households around their fathers' abode. There are social expectations in the society that such married sons should provide care for their parents. It has been observed that in Goshwaha community elderly persons are cared for and supported by their sons. If the sons have not yet married they are the sole providers of support for their elderly parents. They cultivate agricultural plots, maintain huts and fences, and take their elderly parents to the health center in case they are seriously ill. After the sons get married they do not cease supporting them. Similarly, old people also provide care and support for their children.

Those elders with single young sons provide them with agricultural plots and other important asset like farm oxen in order to help them set up their own household upon marriage (it is mainly the early-old category who do this).

Some married sons also cultivate their parents' agricultural plots on the basis of crop sharing or taking a portion of land for their wage. According to informants, however, if the parents are not satisfied with the performance of their married sons, they may cancel the agreement of crop sharing or land provision. So this same land can be given to the other married sons or even to nephews. The story of Zenebu elucidates this:

Zenebu (age: 66; sex: female)

Zenebu is widowed and lives alone. Her eldest son migrated to urban area a few years ago. She lets one of her eldest sons live in her compound. She gave land to him on the basis of sharecropping. Later on she found out that he failed to give her due share honestly. Moreover, her daughter in-law also failed to gather firewood or to fetch water. So, she gave her plots to another one of her sons on the basis of crop sharing.

Observation has shown that elderly widows or widowers are cared for in their own households if they have young unmarried sons or divorced daughters. But this depends on their economic well-being and physical condition. If they are poor and frail, they may be moved to the house of their married sons. However, in some cases the widows can also live with their married daughters.

5.2.2. Ties between Grandparents and Grandchildren

Grandchildren are important for their elderly grandparents. According to results of the survey questionnaire, out of those who have grandchildren 36 (94.7%) have good relations with their grand parents, but 2 (5.3%) of them responded that they do not. Grandchildren help their elderly grandparents in different ways. They pull out *muyelle* (jigger fleas), from the limbs of their grandparents. They also fetch water from springs,

collect firewood, and guide frail or blind elderly grandparents to the bush toilet. The following three stories illustrate this point further.

Wegdereseegn age (age: 80; sex: female)

Wegdereseegn is a widow. Currently she lives alone in her hut. She has no sons except five daughters. She has already given her land to her daughter who lives around her abode, on the basis of crop sharing. Wogdereseegn's granddaughters fetch water and make the hearth ready for her, and sometimes they prepare *enjera* and *wat*. Her grandsons often collect firewood too.

Taye (age, 65; sex: male)

Taye is also assisted by his grand children. Taye is very happy to have grandchildren. Since he is immobile due to health problems his grand children assist him in various activities. While his married son tills the land for him, his grand children help him in collecting firewood and looking after cattle and goats.

Berhane (Age: 77; sex: male)

Berhan has a sight problem. His grandson helps him in showing directions whenever he likes to go elsewhere. He also serves Berhan by pulling out (*muyele*) jigger fleas from his limb.

According to my observation, grandparents in most cases, become caretakers for their grandchildren, particularly, when adult daughters leave home for work in the lowland or highland farming plots. Elderly grandmothers in their advanced age look after their grand children within the limits of their health and physical strength. It has also been observed that there are cases where grandparents sometimes become surrogate parents, mainly when their major day-to-day responsibility is parenting of their grandchildren. This will happen when either of the parents is unable to fulfill his/her responsibility. In-

depth interview also revealed that in times of family crises grandparents often serve as crisis managers. These crises are divorce, widowhood, or economic problems experienced by their children or grandchildren. For example, Berhan's grand children today live with his separated wife, and yet Berehan provides cereals from his share though he moved to the hut of his eldest son living behind his wife, disabled children, and grandchildren. Like Berhan, Taye who is mentioned in many sections of this chapter, also takes care of his grandchildren, because their mother has died.

It seems plausible that elderly grandparents are symbols of family longevity and continuity by just being there. For the grandchildren in Goshwuha, having grandparents increases their feelings of security.

Therefore, the grandparent-to-grandchild relationship is reciprocal in the sense that grand children look on their grandparents, as family historians, support and advice, and companionship, while grandparents can bring their grandchildren a sense of support, love, and companionship too.

5.2.3. Ties between Elders and their Nieces and Nephews

Observation has revealed that nieces and nephews have also contact with their elderly aunts or uncles. Out of forty respondents 31 (77.5%) of them said that they have strong ties with their nephews, but 9 (22.5%) of them have no strong ties. And, 30 (75%) of the respondents have strong social attachment with their nieces but 10 (25%) of them reply they do not.

The degree of ties between elders and their nieces and nephews is determined by the type of relationship elderly siblings may have. If siblings have close ties between one another the degree of contact between their nieces and nephews tends to be strong and vice versa. Likewise nieces and nephews who live in the community will visit their aunts and uncles at weekends or on saint days when there is no work. But those who live out of the community sometimes come to visit them, mainly when they are ill.

However, some nieces and nephews who live in town and who are in good economic status support and assist aunts and uncles when they call them. Berke's nephew used to assist his uncle before he left Addis Ababa for the USA. He sometimes sends them clothes and cash. Whenever, Berke came to Addis Ababa his nephew used to cover his transportation and lodging costs. This is because his mother has strong contacts with her siblings though she migrated from the community in her teens for fear of marriage, and gave birth to five children in Ambo. Surprisingly, Berke has no relationship with his nephew until his nephew became a civil servant.

5.2.4. Ties between Elders and Their In-laws

According to informants, in Goshwua daughters-in-law and sons-in law are providers of care and support for the parents of their husband and wife, respectively. As stated earlier since the norm of residence is patrilocal, daughters-in-law live around their husbands' family after they get married. Before they establish their own household daughters-in-law actively participate both in domestic chores and agricultural activities for the household of their husbands' parents. The newly married couples live together with parents of the husbands for about two or three years, depending upon their economic status, who sponsor the married couples to establish their own household. Giving care and support will also continue after the couples establish their own household. If the youngest sons are married, they are expected to replace the household of their elderly parents and their wives are the principal caretakers. The following accounts are extracted from my diary.

Berke's son, Beleye, has been living with his father; he is the youngest son who is expected to replace Berke's household. Beleye's wife has been participating actively in both domestic chores and agricultural activities. A 71-year-old Askale, Birke's wife, loves her daughter-in-law because she gives her good assistance and respect.

A 75-year-old widow, Beshash, lives with her youngest son who is expected to replace her household. Her daughter-in-law, Sisay, serves her as caretaker. According to Beshash, her survival is in the hands of Sisay. It is she who feeds Beshash.

However, the relationship between elders and their daughters'-in-law is not always good. Abuse may take place in the process of nursing. Beshash whom I mentioned above reported to me that she is not well fed and sometimes mistreated.

According to information gathered from focus group discussions, sons-in-law also assist the parents of their wives in case they are in need but provision of care and support is relatively minimal compared to daughters-in-law. As has been stated by informants this is due to the norm of residence, since it is the wives who live near to the residence of their-in-law not the husbands. It is also stated that before marriage, after engagement, the would-be-husbands are assumed to bring manpower in the form of *debbo* for agricultural activities or house construction. Sometimes they bring a number of donkeys to transport the produce from the threshing areas. It has been observed that in November 26, 2001, Desendeleg's granddaughter's would-be-husband, Shebeshi, brought a number of donkeys for Desendilegn to transport the produce from the threshing area, which takes three hours walk.

5.3. Relationship with Neighbors

Mostly neighbors of male elders are their own consanguine kin. These are brothers, nephews, unmarried nieces, and married and unmarried grand children. Though the norm of residence in Ensaro is patrilocal, one can also find neolocal residence.⁹ Here a person may have many neighbors around his abode that may be elders, young couples, widows, and, or widowers. According to my observation and informal discussions with informants, elders have strong ties with their neighbors though there is interim conflict among them. Almost all of the respondents say that their neighbors give them respect.

Respect as defined by elders is calling them in social occasions like religious ceremonial days, visiting them when they become ill, participating in work group like *debo* or *wonfel*

¹ Residence in which, couples establish their own residence subsequently after marriage.

when requested, leaving one's own seat when they get into the house, lying *koda* (ox, cow, and, or sheep skin) over *medeb* (a shelf which is built up from rock and mud and is usually used for sitting) for a person who enters a room, providing water for hand-wash and serving foods or drinks first among others, providing better food, pulling out *muye* (jigger flees), calling names with respect like *abiye* (my bigger), *gashe* (my shield), *imeyte* (my lady), *itiye*(my big sister), etc.,

Association among elderly neighbors to elderly neighbors is strong and they gather around *belelo* as mentioned in the above discussions, in the section of peers' relationships.

5.4. Relationship with the Community

Though elders thought that their role and status is minimal today, they still participate in various functions. As stated previously during my stay in Goshwuha, I observed that elders tried to solve some problems of the community like settling the high frequency of divorce, the misappropriation of church fund, solving interim conflict that arise between spouses, and serving as go between in marriage arrangements. Conversely, elders also obtain community support like food aid around churchyards on religious ceremonial days.

As stated in chapter three elders actively participate in settling feuds during the two governments, Haile Sellassie and Derg. However, even today they actively participate in various activities. I observed during my stay in Goshwuha Berke and Getachew, whose cases presented in the forgoing used to involve in settling disputes that occurred between couples.

Elders also serve as healers of ailments in their community. On 18 December 2001, I saw Chebude, 65, while medicating (using traditional medicine) Ameha, 38, who was bitten by snake. After he had been treated he normally carried out his duty. Ameha thought that it was Chebud who saved his life. Chebud also stated that he knew herbal medicines for the protection and treatment of ailments caused by evil eyes. According to informants, in Goshwuha there are elders who have traditional skills in curing bone-fractures.

Observation has shown that there are also elders who have skills in handicraft. Engedashet whose case was presented in chapter two renders vital services to his community. Engedashet's career, iron melting, is very crucial for Goshwuha society; they have access to maintenances of their agricultural tools. Today, Engedashet has around 340 customers who obtain effective services from him and he is paid cereals at the time of collecting the produce as stated earlier.

There are elders in Goshwuha who are engaged in weaving during their spare times. In the second phase of my fieldtrip I saw Shewandagn, 56, and Sidelel, 77, while they were participating in weaving activities. They said that weaving was not their full time job. However, both their families and other persons in the community firmly ask them making traditional cloths. Consequently, sometimes they engage in this activity. The pay they receive is not commensurate to what they work on it.

It is possible to argue that elders are not the only recipients of care and support. Rather they also provide support to the family and the community at large. As a result they are

held in respect, although this is declining. According to the survey questionnaire¹⁰ 20 (51.3%) of respondents said that they are respected in the community while 19 (48.7%) have said they are not.

The reason they gave for not being respected is attributed to the following variables: 7 (36.8%) of them said this is because of *sementegnaw she* ('last days'—the coming of Jesus Christ), 4 (21.1%) of them believed it is the result of obsolete knowledge, 5 (26.3%) of them responded it is due to poverty, 1 (5.3%) said it is due to poor physical strength, 1(5.3%) responded it is due to both last days and poor physical strength, and 1 (5.3%) said that he did not know.

Conclusion

Intra and inter generational ties are fundamental aspects for the adjustment of old age. Moreover, ties between neighbors and the community at large are equally important to intra and inter generational ties.

Ties between elderly couples are crucial for leading their last stage of life in peace and security. Elderly couples have strong relationships in old age. If a wife engages in domestic activities a husband is well treated by fulfilling his needs. A husband also helps his wife in keeping the house and looking after grand children when she is out for some purposes. It is possible to argue that gender based activities are relaxed and sometimes reversed in old age. Relationships with couples are also determined by the economic status of the household. If the elderly

¹ The percentage is calculated out of 39 respondents; one informant did not answer.

household is in a poor economic status, the relationships may not be so strong and interim conflict may occur between the couple, mainly in the case of early-old category.

Siblings' relationships are also crucial and continuous since the ties between them are ascribed rather than achieved. Mostly, relationships are based on sharing social activities rather than helping each other. However, in times of crises they help in providing material assistance. Brother to brother relationships are strong as they mostly live in the same community. If sisters live in the same communities where their parents reside, relationships between them and sister-brother relationships are good. However, there are cases where conflicts may arise if a person does not comply with norms. The ideal custom of the society is that the junior siblings should visit the senior ones in their spare time and if this is not realized the senior siblings may consider this as an act of contempt and minor conflict may take place between them.

Relations between elderly peer groups are important for the adjustment of old age in the sense that this offers psychological satisfaction as well as a forum for discussing their early life experiences, their current problems and needs.

Children are the core supporters in old age; sons are life long supporters of their aged parents compared to daughters. This is because daughters after marriage live with in-laws while sons as a rule live around their parents' homesteads. Before marriage, daughters actively participate in domestic chores and have strong relationships with their mothers rather than with their fathers. Sons carry out agricultural activities of their parents, especially the youngest son who is supposed to replace the future dying parents. The relationship between children and their parents is also reciprocal. Parents also assist their children. They give them agricultural plots and other important assets such as oxen, bulls, heifers, goats, or cereals for newly married sons.

They also give their plots on the basis of sharecropping when they are unable to perform agricultural activities. Old parents also assist their divorced daughters in sharing the household resources. However, there are elders who do not have good relationships with their children. This may emanate from poverty. In daily experience we observe that whenever there is poverty in the family, relationship among members may be weak and so is filial piety. Besides, relationships between adult children and elderly parents depend on children's early acculturation and parent's supportive patterns towards their children. If these are warm, grown children are very close emotionally to parents and grandparents, and the elderly command good respect. However, if children are raised under severe acculturative circumstances, where there is little adoration and care (emotional and material support) bestowed towards them, the elderly will be treated poorly as well.

Relationships with grand children are also strong. Grandparents socialize their grandchildren when their parents are out of their homesteads for agricultural activities. Some grandfathers also nurture their grandchildren if their parents died. Grandchildren also help their grandparents both in home and outside home environment.

Relationships between nephews and nieces are important in old age. The nature of ties is determined by the degree of interaction between siblings. If siblings have strong ties, their children will also tend to have strong ties with their uncles and aunts. Those who have no children, nephews, and nieces are their immediate supporters. Those nephews and nieces who are in good economic position in towns sometimes assist their elderly uncles and aunts.

Ties between neighbors and community members are also sound. Frequent visiting, consultation, exchange of labor, solving interim conflicts, and marriage arrangement are some

of the tasks of neighboring homesteads. Solving community problems like deciding the payments of daily laborers and the selling prices of local drinks, and arbitrating divorce cases are elders' tasks in the community. Moreover, participating in weaving and traditional healing are some of the activities of elders that strengthen the relationship between them and other community members. Elders also obtain access to food and local drinks from members of their community on religious ceremonial days.

Therefore, networks of ties among kin groups are important for survival and adjustment in old age. The relationships between non-kin peer groups, neighbors, and the community at large also play a vital role in the adjustment to old age.

Chapter 6

Problems of Old People and their Coping Mechanisms

Introduction

Old people face more problems than other age groups in Goshwuha. Among the age categories stated in the foregoing, the middle-old and the late-old face a number of pressing problems. The problems are more serious for the late-old because they are more likely to be frail or disabled.

In this section, attempts will be made to describe the socio-economic problems of old people, the abuses they usually face, and the coping strategies they follow to mitigate their problems.

6.1. Socio Economic Problems

6.1.1. Food Shortage

In all age categories those elders who are labeled as poor and very poor suffer from food shortage. As informants disclosed, in Goshwuha community almost all members above the age of 17 had a chance to possess agricultural plots, as a result of the 1997 land redistribution policy in the Amhara region. According to many informants, the land redistribution was not effected fairly on an equal basis. It had some political objectives to serve.

According to informants those poor and very poor elders, who possessed less than 0.75 hectare of land, have thus faced some problems of food shortages. These categories of elders often have no oxen to plough their land. Even, elders who have one hectare or more and no

oxen are regarded as poor because they faced food shortages. As has been stated by informants the problem becomes very grave from July to October, as the yearly produce is depleted at this time.

The gravity of the problems is not the same for all old age categories. The middle-old and the late-old categories of elders who are poor are more prone to food problems. Evidences indicate that the likelihood of augmenting their income by participating in different activities is rare compared with the early-aged category. Coupled with food shortage they have also the problems of quality of shelter.

6.1.2 Shelter

Housing is one of the problems of old people in Goshwua. Observation has shown that most of the huts of old people need maintenance. The poor and very poor categories are victims for this problem. The walls of some huts have not been daubed and thus could not protect the blowing of wind that in effect affects the health of old people. The roofs are not well covered to protect them against rains. I noticed this during my trip in August. Many old people told me that this is because of the scarcity of grass with which to cover the roofs.¹¹

Informants explain that it is difficult to get grass to cover roofs. Most of the land in Ensaro in general and in Goshwuha in particular, which used to be covered by forest and bush, has been cleared for cultivation. People have also begun to till mountainsides using bare hoes.

¹¹ To slow down the problem many young people established *equb* institution as stated in chapter four.

According to informants, previously when the population was smaller, members of the community used to leave their land fallow for about six or more years. These days, they say, no land remains fallow. However, a few people have small pasture plots that are not conducive to crop cultivation. So they sell some of it for cash when they need money. Observation has shown that the price of a *kemer sar* (a heap of hay) that may cover only a medium hut costs 500 birr. But poor people cannot afford this.

It is widely known that aging necessitates special services for disability is most common in later life. Accordingly, elders are more likely than the young to need a special bed. As has been observed, the height of traditional bed is so tall that it is difficult for them to mount and lie on it. Moreover, some elders do not have *koda* (traditional ox or cow skin that serve as mattress) and *gabi* (a toga-like piece of cotton cloth mainly used for dressing but also as bed-clothes). Besides, shelter and other related problems, the problem of toilet is the one to be mentioned.

6.1.3. Toilet

Since, the homesteads in Goshwuha are surrounded by cliffs, elders face the difficulty of answering the call of nature. This is a major problem for the middle-old and the late-old categories of old people.

Observation has shown that those frail and disabled old people are the ones vulnerable to toilet problems. According to information gathered from the field, in August 1999, Yadegdegu, a 71year old woman, while coming home after church service at 9:00 AM stopped to defecate at the edge of a cliff, but she slipped and fell forty feet deep and died

instantly. The researcher has seen scars of many old people on their bodies resulting from such kind of toilet problems.

Many old people have stressed the importance of latrine, but they cannot dig them due to declining of physical power. Berke, among others, said he used to have his own latrine but this was later filled. Consequently, he started using the edge of hills as a toilet. Surprisingly, I observed that no one sees heaps of human feces because donkeys and goats feed on the dried ones. The other and most pressing problems of old people in Goshwuha is lack of health services.

6.1.4. Health

Health is one of the big problems of old people in Goshwuha. Most often children and elders are prone to health troubles. The most notable diseases prevalent in the area are loss of sight. Other health problems elders face include bronchitis, heart disease, abdominal discomfort, inflammation of foot caused by jigger fleas, and malaria.

As has been observed, there is no health center in Goshwuha. However, all members of the community can produce certificates from the *kebele* to be treated in hospitals (in Debre Berehan or Addis Ababa). According to information supplied by local people, even young people, let alone the elderly, have problems of easy access to hospitals because of transportation cost and lodging. So, patients prefer to live with their pains.

Among the categories of old people, both sexes of the late-old are the ones who do not get any sort of medical treatment. This is because they are unable to cross the hills of Ensaro.

Berke, for example, suffers from a serious cough. His sister, who lives in Ambo, 120 kilometers from Lemi, tried to take him to one of the hospitals in Addis Ababa, but he was not willing to accept her offer. He says it is better to die than travel along the hills. It is my belief that many old people who would have been cured by medical treatment stayed at home with their diseases and become disabled.

6.1.5. Burden of Caring Dependents

In Goshwuha we find elders who are burdened with caring for their grandchildren and sometimes their offspring. According to the questionnaire distributed to 40 elderly informants, thirteen (32.5%) give support and care for their dependants. Of this eight (61.5%) are caring for their grandchildren; four (30.8%) of them care for their offspring and grandchildren; and one (7.7%) is supporting only offspring.

Grandchildren and offspring depend on elders due to various reasons; about seventy percent of the respondents said this is due to the death, and migration of parents to urban areas while the rest stated it is due to family breakdown as a result of divorce. According to informants, the death of some parents was caused by HIV/AIDS. This is difficult to verify because respondents are not willing to discuss the issue openly. However, the fact is well known by members of the community. Many old and young people told me that the children of two elders¹² died of the disease. I also tried to dig into the matter and the symptoms of the disease and the history of their dead children. The diseases were tuberculosis and the children were bar ladies in Addis Ababa.

¹² For reasons of confidentiality, I can't disclose the names of respondents.

Consequently, the two elders, x and y, raise their grand children. X's daughter died leaving two children male and female while Y's daughter left one female child. X and Y have limited resources to care for these children. Berhan, who was repeatedly mentioned in this paper, shares his property with his two disabled daughters, one blind, and the other deaf-mute. Berhan himself is frail and blind as stated before. So, he is overburdened by all these problems.

6.1.6. Abuses in Old Age

Findings of field research have shown that a number of old people in Goshwaha are victims of abuse. Neglect, exploitation, abandonment, and physical attack have been the major abuses which most elderly people face. Surprisingly, the majority of those who are abused live with the abusers, and the abusers are relatives.

6.1.6.1. Neglect

My close observation and day-to-day interaction with elders have shown that frail elders have been the ones being abused by members of their families. They are mainly neglected in different aspects. When they start talking nobody gives them attention. Old people want to talk about their early experiences, but some of them don't have any audience, except perhaps their own peers.

Most of the middle-old and the late-old categories of whatever economic background, are the ones who have been most neglected. They are referred as *yebekachew*-plural / *yebekaw-*

singular (out-dated). They do not involve in many of the social activities. The following sayings which I collected during my field work reveals the existence of such kind of abuse in the community.

ሽማግሌና፡ አሮጌ ፡ ቁና ፡ An old man and an old *kuna*,¹³
አንድ ፡ ናቸው። are the same.

ካረጁ፡ አይበጁ። Getting old is being useless.

Some elders (widows and widowers) are not given a proper diet. For example, Meketaw who is suffering from gastritis needs a special diet. But his caregiver, Etenesh (his married daughter), does not provide him with what is needed for his health. The same is true for Abayehu. She is very depressed because Mulusesh, her daughter, does not treat her properly. Most of the time, Abayehu says, “Mulunesh gives me leftovers and I am served last after all members of the family. The *wat* which is given for diner or supper is not properly cooked”. According to informants there are elders who lost their life due to neglect. The above-mentioned proverbs of old people that I gathered in the community reveals such kind of abuse.

A man called Jemaneh Masresha died in 1991 at the age of 80. According to informants, he was suffering from problems such as lack of food, clothes, and shelter. The local *kebele* officials once called his son Debabu to their office and rebuked him for neglecting his father. They ordered him to take good care of his father. Unfortunately Jemaneh died soon. The same thing happened to Dabash Debalke in 2000. Dabash was in her late 70s. The chairman of the community ordered Girma Mamuye, Debash’s son, to provide his mother 15 kilos of grain. However, he did not provide her with the grain and she died in the same year.

¹³Traditional grain measure made from dried grass.

Based on these information I tried to cross check whether this is true or not. I went to the extent of interviewing the chairman and other officials who had passed decisions on those children who neglected their parents. They affirmed that it is true.

As discussed above, the middle-aged and the late-aged are mainly the ones vulnerable to neglect for most in these categories of elders are frail due to the consequence of old age or disease. Therefore, they cannot participate in agricultural activities. Moreover, some of the middle-old and the majority of the late-old categories would not participate in various social activities such as in marriage arrangements, conflict resolutions, ritual practices, etc, as the young people consider them too old and forgetful. However, those who have relatively good health and good physical power have public audience and respect.

Most elderly widows and widowers of the middle-old and the old-old categories are vulnerable to lack of proper diet. Since their properties like land and cattle are under the control of caretakers the majority of them are afraid of changing caretakers and prefer to live with the abuser. On the other hand if they have small plots (less than one hectare) of land, the degree of neglect is high.

6.1.6.2. Exploitation

The middle-old and the late-old categories of old people are victims of exploitation. Mostly women of these groups are prone to such abuse. Since these age categories are often vulnerable to poor health and poor physical conditions, they are unable to engage in some activities and depend on their relatives.

The case of one of my informants' elucidates the phenomenon. Abayehu, at the age of 89, was made to collect *ibet* (cattle dung) for the purpose of making *kubet*, fire dung. Due to the diminishing state of her physical power, she could not perform it on time. It takes her five or more hours to accomplish it. Similarly Basazenew, was also forced to participate in cattle keeping activities that is believed to be child's duty in the tradition of Ensaro society. Still other evidence also justifies such accounts. While visiting a sub-village of Goshwuha, I saw a man whose name is Tesema Abaire. Tesema is in his 80s as I presented his case in the previous chapter. He was harvesting *tef* with five people. He wanted to take a rest, but his young son shouted at him like a child saying *tenes!* (Stand up!). *Endet egna eyeseran defreh tikemetaleh* (How dare you sit down while we are working!).

Other forms of exploitations some elders face is in the sharing of the produce (from their own plots they gave for someone on the basis of sharecropping) that they do not get what they deserve. Since the threshing area is too far they have no physical strength to walk four or five hours along the hill. So they simply receive whatever they are given. Mamsha has voiced such a kind of grievance. She says that the man who tills her land does not give her due share. She said *bezebezegn* (He exploited me).

There are cases where old people are exploited by being denied access to their properties. One of my informants, Meketaw, told me that his son who migrated to Addis Ababa came and sold eucalyptus trees grown by him (his father). He tried to bring the case to the local court but he was afraid the community might disapprove of this. Another informant, Berke, explained to me that his son sold an ox without his consent. When he asked why he did this, his son explained that he intended to buy a stronger ox. Berke considered his ox as a best

friend. Whenever he called his ox by name, from a distance, the ox usually approached him and licked his head. But his son has not yet bought another one having misappropriated some of the money.

According to my informants, there are still old people who are denied access to their land. Mostly their children intimidate old people into submission. If old people dare to raise any question of rights, the children threaten them saying they would abandon them and go to urban areas. Old parents are therefore afraid of taking any action and submit.

And others, sons or daughters, or other distant relatives, give false promises to old people who are already staying with caretakers. They promise them greater care and support. So the old people are deceived and give them land expecting to receive better care and support. But the promises often fail. This is evidenced by the three cases of Meketaw, Brehane and Asefetu.

Meketaw, after being left behind by, Endale, his youngest son, came to live with his married daughter. She controlled all his agricultural lands, and the produce from his plots would not usually be reported to him. Today, he is in a terrible circumstance because he has chronic gastritis, which needs special food and medical treatment. But she denied him all care. The same is true for Berhane.

Formerly Teamer, his youngest son, had assisted Berhane. These days, Getaw, his eldest son is caring for him. Berhane is not satisfied with the care and support he has been given. Consequently, he has longed to go back home. However, Getaw is trying to hold some of his plots and an ox.

Asefetu is also deprived of her plot by her nephew. Being blind, single, and frail, she has given her land to Azene, her nephew, since he is her immediate relative. Thus, Azene used to till her plots and look after her cattle. Through time he began to disrespect and neglect her in various ways. So, she gave her land to Zewdeneh, her other nephew. However, Azene to whom she gave land on the basis of crop sharing refused to release one *gemed* (0.25 hectare). The case is still pending although she appealed to the *wereda* and zonal offices several times.

The form of abuse discussed above have various forms, forcing elders to participate in some activities beyond their physical ability emanates from less respect. The majority of those elders who are vulnerable to such a form of exploitation have either small or no property. If they have enough land they may get good care and support. The other form of exploitation like denial of their access to property right or sharecropping is due to the consequence of advancing age. They are regarded to die soon so caretakers are anxious to withhold their property. Moreover, they are regarded as frail and do not report any transgression that has made against them.

6.1.6.3. Abandonment

In Goshwuha there are elders who were abandoned by their supporters, mainly children. Children usually migrate to urban areas. Elders face a lot of problems when their male caretakers migrated to towns. The cases of Yemechishal and Meketaw prove this fact. Today Yemechishal faces a lot of problems concerning her agricultural activities. Mamo, her

son, who had tilled her agricultural plots, migrated to Addis Ababa in 2000. But, to cope with the existing problems she gave her land to other non-relatives on the basis of crop sharing and she has been given fewer yields than is due. Similarly, Meketaw has no male child with him today. His son who had given care and support migrated to Addis Ababa five years ago.

Evidence has shown that migration to the city or towns is instigated by the example of those who migrated earlier. When those who migrated earlier come to visit their relatives, they tell their friends about the glamorous city life. So, their friends follow their footsteps. However, the main cause of migration of children in Goshwuha seems to be poverty. Children thought that onwards they suffer from shortage of land or what they inherit from parents would not enough to establish their won household therefore the only option they have is to migrate to the urban areas.

6.1.6.4. Physical Abuse

It has been stated that some elders in Goshwuha are victims of physical abuse. Though old parents tend to keep it secret, there are cases where their children, mostly their sons beat or attempt to bit them. According to information gathered from some neighbors of one household, two sons beat their old parents. The researcher tried to confirm this incident and a lot of people in the community said it is true. Informants also explain that there are sons who threaten their elderly parents using an axe in the quest for marriage. Emeye, my host family during my stay in Goshwuha, told me that there are sons who threaten to beat their parents by

raising axes and saying *endalteretreh, mne yakoyehelegn meseleh* (I would break your head into pieces. What do you think you have kept for me?).

It is possible to argue that the cause of physical abuse is poverty. This is because, today elders in Goshwuha do not have ample land for sponsoring their male children's marriage so those who reach the marriageable age may threaten or even beat their elderly parents. The most vulnerable categories of elders are the early-old and some of the able-bodied middle-old categories. The late-old categories of elders have already been under their caretakers who have already controlled their property.

6.2. Abuse of Caretakers

Older people in Goshwuha are also perpetrators who abuse their caretakers. These are verbal abuse or physical force, pouting, manipulate, and invading privacy. It has been observed that some old people often yell at their caretakers. This seems an attempt to gain or maintain control. Berke, for example, often insults his family members. He fills with anger at his wife and children over simple matters and he tends to be in a bad mood sometimes. He occasionally uses physical abuse like throwing sticks, slapping, and pinching. The same is true of Abayehu. She is a very verbal and noisy person. She often talks about her daughter's wrong deeds to anybody, and even reported them to me. She insults her in the presence of many people especially in the church compound after Saturday and Sunday's morning services. Similarly, Berhan insults his wife and blind daughter while they prepare coffee. One day, according to members of his household, Berhane tried to break the coffee pot by throwing his walking stick. He considers that coffee belongs to Satan.

As I have observed, pouting is a frequent reaction of most elderly people in Goshwuha. Being stubborn, turning a deaf ear, and / or wanting to be left alone are expressions of displeasure towards caregivers. Some of the aged also use manipulative mechanisms by showing or feeling guilt. This is to gain sympathy as a result of their pains or frailties. Berke, always says, “my children would not have suffered from the scarcity of land, if I were easily mobile. I should have appealed to the higher government office in Addis Ababa”. He sometimes demands the support of his children when he wants to get out from his bed though he can do it by himself. I saw his son, Amha, displeased about this saying *jegnaw endih hono yekere* (would a hero remained in such a state?). Manipulative behaviors are manifested when elders instigate one family member against the other. Abayehu reported to me that last year she had written a letter to her son who lives in Addis Ababa complaining that her daughter has not cared for her. Consequently, Yaschelewal, her 49-year-old son came to Goshwuha and condemned her abuser. He began to help her in cash and kind afterwards.

Moreover, elders invade the privacy of their caregivers. In most cases they tend to involve in their children’s business. Rather than giving opinions or expressing their own point of view, they tend to manipulate the views of their caregivers. Berke, for instance, interferes in the secret discussion of his children. He also wants to be involved in secret discussions between Beleye and Alem (his married son and daughter-in-law). It is possible to argue that the aged use this form of abuse to show off the power to attend in their children’s business as they did in their early socialization process believing that caregivers understand old age does not deter being plying the role of parenthood.

Those elders who perpetrate abuse against their caretakers are the middle-old and the old-old categories that have poor physical strength. They often practice this as mechanisms for receiving sustainable care and support.

6.3. Coping Mechanisms

According to focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, nowadays, old people face a lot of problems. The survey questionnaire also reveals that out of forty informants, twenty-eight (70%) responded the assistance they get from kin groups have been changing over time. They now live a precarious life even worse than half a decade ago. Ten (35.71%) of them attributed the problem to the scarcity of land; five (17.86%) of the respondents associated it with the death of their supporters, the same percentage attributed it to absence of supporters due to their leaving the household through marriage, attending school, and 'irresponsibility'; four (14.29%) of them said that it is due to migration of supporters; three (10.71%) of the respondents attributed it to the declining state of the life of caregivers and, and one (3.57%) of them associated it to both the death and migration of supporter.

Concerning the coping mechanisms regarding the above problems, fifteen (53.57%) of those twenty-eight respondents (those informants who replied their life have altered) answered they have not taken any kind of alternatives to cope with their problems while thirteen (46.43) say they have taken. Out of those who have taken alternatives to cope their problems eight (61.54%) of them use their children as coping mechanism; two (15.38%) changed their occupation (and started begging), and the same percentage use alternative mechanism using

coercive action like making children drop out from schools; and one (7.69%) say nothing about coping mechanisms.

Close observation has shown that immediate kin groups, mainly children, are survival strategy of the elderly. As discussed with informants, among the categories of old age the middle-aged and the late-aged are vulnerable to the problem of ageing, especially the later one. In times of hardship in the society these categories of elders are also susceptible to socio-economic problems. The early-aged category would peruse various mechanisms to cope with the existing problems to a greater extent than the other categories.

According to the data gathered from focus group discussions in the field, most of the early old category of poor or very poor finds employment as daily laborers in someone's plots to clear up weeds. Others send their children to the other well-to-do households to receive money or cereals for the payment of their children's services. And still others sell sugar cane and wild fruits such as *geba*, and *qulqual*. A few people keep cattle at night for the purpose of 'machachet' (making organic fertilizer). People do not like to apply chemical fertilizer to the plots they have in the lowland areas. They often use cattle's dung by keeping cattle on the plots at night for two months. The number of cattle ranges from 100 to 200. Each individual gives his cattle and receives when his turn comes. All get a turn within every six or seven year's period. So, the payment paid to the man who looks after the cattle at night is *2 birr*.

The middle-old and the late-old categories (whether they are widowhood or not) that are poor depend on church alms; they often sit around the church compound to get food. For instance, Abayehu and Fantaye always sit around churchyards for food alms. The same is true for Berhane and Tsegaw. They depend on the church's food alms. Besides, some of them relay

on the generosity of their immediate or distant kin groups. For example, Wogdereseegn live alone but her daughter who lives in separate household brings food and other important material. Wogdereseegn's grandchildren also collect fire wood and fetch water as I presented her case in the previous chapter. Therefore, besides access to church's food aid, her immediate kin groups serve as caregivers (coping mechanisms) of Wogdereseegn.

As has been observed the youngest adult sons are the immediate caregivers of elderly parents of the middle-aged and the late-aged categories in whatever economic position, gender, and, or marital status they may be. Beleye, 28, is a caregiver of his old parents. He is the youngest son of Berke. After marriage he has not yet established his own household and ideally he is supposed to replace the household of his elderly parents when they die. Beleye cultivates Berke's plot and performs some activities like *debo*, *wenfel*, and goes for meeting when local administration body call on the community, in the name of Berke. However, those who have no youngest sons around them give their plot to their distant kin or neighbors on the basis of sharecropping, for instance, as I demonstrated the cases of Yemeshishal and Asefefu in the other section of this chapter. Those who have small plots and two or more oxen may rent additional land through auction from the sub district office via their caregivers. The land is taken under auction if the possessor migrated to the urban areas leaving behind his plot, or if he died (*yemote keda*) provided that he has no dependent. Then, the local government administrative unit controls the land and rents it for a year based on an auction.

The focus group discussions also reveal that some of the middle-aged category of elderly widowers (in whatever economic position they may be) who have no male children around them give their plot on the basis of sharecropping and take a woman in the form of *girdena* to live with them. Most of the informants argued that those elders who lead their life in this

way are cared and treated well by the women who live with them through *girdena* establishment. It has been observed that Desendilegn one of my elderly informants live with a woman through *gerdena* establishment. According to Desendilegn, the woman feeds and cared for him well. Most of the widows of this age category live with their youngest married sons or, in rare case, with their married daughters. A few of them live alone and their immediate kin groups like

children and grandchildren provide them food and assist them with some domestic chores. For example, Zenebu, lives with, Kasse, one of her youngest son and he is her caregiver; Beshashe also lives with Workalemahu, her youngest son from whom she receive care and support.

According to focus group discussions with informants, in earlier times the Ensaro population underwent the terrible plight of famine. The crises occurred in different times. The most fatal drought occurred in 1910 when many people died of starvation. Other droughts occurred in 1938, 1958, and 1985. Moreover, a fire broke out in 1997 and a number of houses and granaries were burnt down (see table 2). As stated by many informants the most vulnerable part of the population were those elderly people who are under the category of middle-aged and the late-aged. To cope with the existing problems different strategies were undertaken by the society. Most of the elderly informants said that it was elders who had given instruction, for example, which types of soils or wild fruits should be eaten. However, most of the two categories of elders mentioned above were still dependant on their relatives because elders of these age categories are likely to be frail mentally and physically. According to informants, it was their relatives who brought wild fruit and red soil from particular areas and slaughter cattle. Those who had no relatives depend on their neighbors.

TABLE 2

COPING MECHANISMS BY PERIOD AND TYPE OF CRISIS

| Period of Crises | Type of Crises | Coping Mechanisms |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|--|
| 1910 | Drought | Eating red soil, tree seeds, oxen, cows, goat, and, and red soils |
| 1938 | Drought | Eating tree seeds, red soils, and cattle such as oxen, cows, and goats. |
| 1958 | Drought | Most of the people lent from the better of household's. |
| 1985 | Drought | Government provided aids. Each household member got 20 kilos of cereals. |
| 1997 | Fire breakout | Government provided aids like cereals, blanket, and other garments. |

Source : Compiled from field data

Conclusion

In this chapter attempts have been made to discuss the socio economic problems of elders such as food shortage, shelter, toilet, health, and abuse in old age. Concerning abuse, I have endeavored to document neglect, exploitation, abandonment, physical abuse, and also abuse of caretaker. In the last section I also discussed coping strategies in times of difficulties.

In Goshwaha some of the aged face the problem of food shortage. The most affected groups are the poor under the middle-old and the late-old categories, because this group of elders could not augment their income by participating in other income-generating activities. The problem emanates mainly from scarcity of land. The other problem of old people is shelter.

According to the sample questionnaire distributed to forty elders, only ten percent of them do not have their own hut. Though the majority of old people have their own houses, the quality of the hut is very poor compared to those of the young generation. Some huts are not daubed and do not protect them against winds. Besides, the roofs of many huts are not covered with grass and do not protect the elderly against the winter rain.

Toilet is another major problem of the elderly. Old age causes limited movement. Therefore, old people need proper facilities to defecate. Members of the community including elders use hillsides as latrine; this is dangerous and precarious for safety. For instance, the study revealed that a woman has died while defecating at a precarious place while others sustained injuries.

Elders are one of the most abused categories of the population. Some elders are vulnerable to neglect. Nobody gives due attention to frail old people. Most of them are regarded as 'old-fashioned'. Another form of abuse is exploitation. There are elders who are made to perform some activities, which do not suit their age or physical condition.

Abandonment is still a form of abuse. In Goshwaha there are old people who have been left behind by their caregivers and hence are leading a precarious life. Caregivers most often migrate to towns in search of better life; those who had migrated earlier instigate their friends to follow their steps. Beating is also another form of abuse towards the elderly in Goshwaha; some children beat their old parents or intimidate them using axes or other tools.

On the other hand, old people also abuse their caregivers by yelling as a way to get sympathy or control, or resort to pouting. Being stubborn, turning a deaf ear, and wishing to be left alone are expressions of pouting. Manipulative behavior can also be considered as abuse of caregivers. This usually involves showing a sense of fake guilt as a result of one's pain or fragility. Old people also invade the privacy of their children.

Old people follow various coping strategies to mitigate their problems. Depending on children is the main form of survival strategy, especially for the middle-old and the old-old categories. Most poor old people of these categories also depend on church alms. The healthy, early-old category of elders can participate in other activities like selling sugar cane and wild fruits, or they send their children to the better households.

Those who are in a good economic condition use different mechanisms to safeguard their socio economic status. If they have two or more oxen and small amounts of plots, they rent land from the local administration (peasant association) or they till others' plots on the basis of sharecropping.

The people of Ensaro have undergone drought experiences. It can be argued that elders are the most vulnerable group in this case. To cope with the problems various means were undertaken these involve using the existing resources to mitigate the problem; for example, consuming livestock, eating red soil, cattle, and different wild fruits and depend on the generosity of individuals or the government. The Goshwaha people used all these mechanisms to reduce the crises they faced in different times. The frail middle-old and the late-old categories that are said to have depended on their caregivers or neighbors; the early

old and some of the healthy middle-aged had followed the same strategies as the youngest generation.

It is possible to argue that older people face quite a lot of pressing problems in Goshwaha. Insofar as the informal support system is embedded in the network of kinship ties, the weakening of these ties, which resulted from alteration of socio-economic realities, impinges on the life status of the elderly and some of them are left without support. This is evidenced by the fact that many elders were left behind by their caretakers who migrated to urban areas in search of a better life. Moreover, the ability of some families to meet the basic needs of the aged has been weakened, mainly in the cases of poor families. Among the categories of the aged, the middle-old and the late-old who are poor lead a precarious life due to the fact that many of them have limited capacity to participate in agricultural activities or income generating-schemes. It is difficult, therefore, to argue that all old people are treated well and have a high status in traditional society. This is best evidenced by looking into abuse in old age as stated in this chapter. Simons (1945) also proves this in his cross-cultural studies of old age.

Mistreatment or abuse in old age depends on property rights. The 'haves', are treated relatively better than the 'have nots' and in most cases conflict occurs in claiming scarce resources mainly land. Therefore, "conflict theory" is applicable in this regard (See Fry 1980, Perlmutter and Hell E. 1992). Moreover the indirect effect of "modernization" (See Fry 1980, Perlmutter and Hall, 1992:473-474) has also threatened the life of old people. And hence, modernization theory can also be applied in such a case. This is best exemplified by how old people's caregivers in Goshwaha leave their old parents behind and migrate to urban areas as mentioned above.

Chapter Seven

Summary and Conclusion

This study has attempted to describe the lives of the elderly among the Amhara of Ensaro. The study has generated relevant data by using both quantitative as well as qualitative methods. The researcher lived in the study village and gained important insights through participating in local events. Though it took sometimes to become acquainted with the local ways and pass through the challenges of dealing with ‘gate keepers’, it was managed to generate pertinent information and respond to the objectives set forth at the beginning. The study outcomes from the different approaches were analyzed and triangulated in such a way that scientific objectivity is maintained.

Definition of old age was an important issue in the study community. It was gathered that there are different factors that account for the definition of old age. Accordingly, such factors as biological (body looks), functional (having to do with performance), social (expected statuses and roles based on age), psychological (mental decline), and chronological (having to do with years) were identified as common indicators of old age. However, the majority of the study community seems to rely more on functional attributes, which are often seen in terms all the other factors mentioned above. As long as a person carries out normal routines especially in agricultural activities, a person is not considered old. Findings from similar studies elsewhere have also shown that in traditional societies people define old age at the point when active contribution is no longer possible (Holmes, 1980:277; Kerns, 1980:116; Gorman, 1999:7).

The majority of the study community agree that old people should be categorized into three groups: early-old, middle-old, and late-old based on chronological counts in which the calculation was done on the basis of some special events (wars, famines, coronation of kings etc.). Accordingly, the onset of old age can be considered to be at about 55. Though one may not draw the cut of point between the different categories in concrete terms, the first group falls between 55-65, the second group falls between 66-75 and the third is above 75. It was interesting to note that such chronological benchmarks are used in the UN definition of old age (UN, 1991: 5). According to the United Nation's international conference, the threshold for old age is 60. As regards to the different categories of old age, the early-old are those aged 60-69; the middle-old are those aged 70-79 and the late-old are aged 80 years and over. It is possible to conclude that the difference between the present study's definition of old age and that of the UN is not surprising as the UN definition mainly considers the western life expectancy into account which is 70 and over (Holems, 1983: 56) as opposed to Ethiopia where it stands at 52.2 according to the 1994 Housing and Population census. Though one may assume the reasons for such variation, it would however be important to undertake further studies to objectively understand the reasons for such variation.

In this study it is important to note that the myth of old age as an urban problem was demystified. As indicated in the definition, old age is not only a problem of urban areas. It is a problem of rural areas as well as those people who are defined as old have diminished physical strength compared to the young generation and have reduced functions in the various activities. Reduced physical strength means reduced livelihood and therefore a declining quality of life. Similar studies have shown that elders in rural areas are victims of socio-economic problems (Soneje, 1999:128; Gorman, 1999:47; HAI and CMSA, 1999:132).

Findings related to gender issues in old age in the study community has shown that in old age gender related activities are relaxed and sometimes reversed despite the fact that the study community is a male dominated society. Husbands are sometimes involved in domestic chores such as looking after grandchildren and guarding houses when household members carry out agricultural activities. Yet, in no ways are men involved in food preparation. Though similar studies are lacking in Ethiopia, a study by Brubaker and Keith et al. indicated “the most typical change in household duties is an increase among men in the number of 'masculine' tasks they perform in old age. However, retired men do perform more feminine tasks than employed men” (cited in Connidis, 1989: 23). Brubaker and Keith et al. conclude, “the performance of ‘feminine’ household duties by older men does not threaten their self-esteem but tends instead to enhance well-being (p.23).

Old members of the study community use intergeneration ties as a common strategy to get support despite loose kinship tie which is a common characteristics of the Amhara-Tigre society (Weissleder, 1963; Hoben, 1973; Reminick, 1973; Bauer; 1977). Among members of kin groups, children and grand children, mainly men are the core caretakers of their elderly parents in Goshwuha. As noted from studies in traditional societies (Holmes, 1983:124; Vatuk, 1980), generational reciprocity is the cultural expectation where care is received when one is young and is paid back when one’s caretakers become old. However, the quality of care and support depends on whether a person has sufficient property especially land; meaning, if elders control and administer sufficient property, they gain good respect in the society and family members will continue to render personal care. This is similar to the findings of James Nason in a study of old age in the Caroline Islands where he argued “an old

person who has property need not fear neglect, since if kin fail, others will appear, hopeful of receiving the remaining property as their due reward (cited in Holmes, 1983: 126). Upon death or becoming frail of the property holder (old), his/her property is transferred to the youngest son.

As explained extensively in the thesis, old people have established coping strategies, which include persistent visits to religious institutions. Orthodox Christianity is the main religious institution in the community. Becoming religious to attain a high level of spirituality gives old people comfort and most of the poor older people have access to food sharing around churchyards whenever there is religious feast. Levin's research (1989:139) has shown that "religious attendance is fairly stable throughout life, and may decline only in the late-old whose physical activity has been limited by disability". This decline in religiosity is quite evident in organizational religious involvement but personal religious activity is a constant devotion of the elderly. Considering religious involvement of the elderly in Goshwaha, it is difficult to follow disengagement theory proposed by Coming and Henry. This is because old people do not totally disengage from social activities and they find other substitutes for the role they lost in old age. Among other things religious activity is more prominent and stable even among the late-old category. It is therefore activity theory (which prescribes older people's involvement in different social activities) is applicable in this regard.

Findings on the lifestyle of elders in Goshwaha have shown that there is an alteration of status and well-being due to manifestations of various abuses. Studies have shown that in traditional society old people have high status and role and are taken as source of

wisdom, opinion makers, and relics of history and are thus accorded with greater respect (Ikels, 1980:80; Holmes, 1983; 171-172). The value of old people is stated by Georges Minois as “ ... Old people must have a special value in a preliterate society such as that depicted in the Homeric epics --- and an African motto declares, 'when an old man dies, a library burns' ” (Cited in Posner, 1995: 310). However, as change occurs the importance bestowed to the elderly diminishes (Williams, 1980:109). The case of elders in Goshwaha is a good illustration to this point. Though giving care and respecting them is the cultural ideal and expectations before the Derg regime, the findings show beyond losing their status and role, many elders become victims of abuse such as battering, abandonment, and neglect. This is an emerging phenomenon threatening the life of the elderly.

In this particular study the early-old and some of the middle-old were seem to be the target of battering and abandonment due to the continued conflicting interest between the young and their predecessors in competing for scarce resources as ‘conflict theory’ in the study of old age reveals. This has been observed as related to claiming scarce resource mainly land and for marriage sponsorship. Some of the early-old category on the other hand is victims of neglect as they often are bed ridden, fairly non-functional, help less, suffering from dementia, no more authoritative over the control of their property.

Abuse in old age is often considered as a phenomenon of urban areas or developed countries (Steinmetz, 1988). However, Posner states “If a society is so poor that food is very scarce, the cost of feeding an old person may be the starvation of a young one, and in such a case the society is likely to allow the old person to starve, or even kill him outright” (p.205).

Moreover, according to Holmes, live burial existed in Samoan earlier times. “When an old man felt sick and infirm, and thought he was dying, he deliberately tell his children and friends to get ready and bury him” (Turner sited in Holmes, 1983:100). Such deed of live burial is however regarded as honor, gerontocidal norm, not as an act of cruelty or abuse. Nevertheless, in view of human beings egoistic nature, it is unlikely to consider self-burial as a norm in any society.

In the study community some elders are burdened with caring for their dependent, mainly grandchildren, whose parents are migrated to urban areas or died of HIV/AIDS. These problems are grave for those who have limited resources to care for their dependents. Though this study did not pay as much attention to issues of HIV/AIDS, it is already apparent that the effect of the pandemic has gone deep into rural areas and calls for further studies.

In addition to the above insights, the result of this study favors the following suggestions.

1. The definition of old age includes quite large span of age groups and it is unwise to regard older people as a single category. Consequently, categorization should be made to get rid of the problem and this calls for policy to classify old people into three age groups: early-old, middle-old, and late-old. It is obvious that most of the middle-old and the majority of the late-old have poor physical strength to participate in some income generating activities to cope with the existing problems as discussed in this paper. Therefore, dividing the elderly into such age brackets may help to address problems of the specific group.
2. In the absence of social security, control over significant property, mainly land, is the main source of livelihood in old age. The current government's land redistribution did not favor the elderly. Reallocation of land seems to have been made on political

motives. Those who have been regarded as feudal during the imperial regime and those who have been involved in the Derg state machinery were allotted only one hectare of land. Furthermore, it was gathered that land distributors were bribed by the “haves” to get more and fertile land whereas some of the “have nots”, especially, the destitute elders have no access to do so and consequently obtained less land size which is in line with the study by Tefri (1998). Thus, the land redistribution schemes have to be reconsidered or revised and with due consideration for the elderly members of the community.

3. A number of elders in Goshwuha have various problems and needs, which cannot be addressed by them or their caretakers due to existing poor socio-economic state in the community. Therefore government or non-government organization should create options to address their problems. There needs to be a clear policy that prescribes intergenerational links so that elders may not be marginalized and their socio-economic well-being could be maintained.

GLOSSARY

| | |
|------------------|---|
| <i>Areke</i> | Liquor made out of sorghum in Ensaro. |
| <i>Arogit</i> | An old woman whose age is more than 55. |
| <i>Awaki</i> | A magician whose activities are toward healing and curing illness, or other evil things. |
| <i>Baleamin</i> | A woman who did not divorce after her first marriage and who performs rituals in serg marriage. |
| <i>Betezemed</i> | Relatives |
| <i>Cubbet</i> | Dried cow or ox dung. |
| <i>Das</i> | A temporary shelter, made from thin trunks and bushes, erected in the compound on important occasions (such as <i>serg</i> , and funerals) to accommodate all the gusts. |
| <i>Debo</i> | A system of mutual assistance whereby a household which happens to be short of labor, oxen or both, during a given agricultural season calls upon friends and relatives for help. |
| Ekub | <i>A common rotating savings group in which the sum of members' regular contributions is given to each member in turn, in a sequence to be determined by lot.</i> |
| <i>Gemed</i> | A 25m long rope applied for measuring land. |
| <i>Ibet</i> | Wet ox or cow dung. |
| <i>Iddir</i> | Burial association. |
| <i>Injera</i> | The staple thin flat bread that is made from a mixture of ground Sorghum or <i>tef</i> . It is fermented for about one or two days and baked on a large, round and flat |

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| | clay pan (this is in the Ensaro context). |
| <i>Kemer sar</i> | A heap of hay used for covering roofs or serving as fodder. |
| <i>Kebele</i> | Grass-roots level administrative unit equivalent to a parish or local community. |
| <i>Kola</i> | Lowland. |
| <i>Kollo</i> | Roasted cereals, sometimes mixed with roasted pulses. |
| <i>Maderya</i> | Type and size of property owned by a person in Goshwuha. |
| <i>Medeb</i> | A shelf built up from rock and mud about eight inches to one foot in height off the floor running along one or more walls. It is usually covered with hides of oxen or cows and is used as bench. |
| <i>Mehaber</i> | Religious social gathering usually held monthly. |
| <i>Moseb</i> | Round footed basket of straw, with a top cover in same material, which is used both to store <i>enjera</i> and to serve food from as a table when the top cover is removed. |
| <i>Mekakelegna</i> | |
| <i>shemagle or arogit</i> | Elders of the middle old age category (between 66 to 75) |
| <i>Muwart</i> | Black -magic. |
| <i>Nifero</i> too. | Boiled wheat and chickpeas and sometimes other cereals too. |
| <i>Shemagele</i> | An old man whose age is more than 55. |

Tef *Eragrostis tef, a grass-like grain with tiny seeds,*

indigenous and unique for Ethiopia.

Tella *Locally brewed beer, made from sorghum*

Tenkola Magic. It can be 'white' or 'black'. If the activity is toward evil (*muart*) it is referred as black magic and or if it is and toward good things it is white-magic.

Tenkuay Magician.

A possessive non-exorcible sprit *wat*

Wenfel Immediately reciprocal labor exchange for both agricultural and non-agricultural purposes.

Wereda The third level administrative district of Ethiopian government.

Stew made of ground pulse and pepper

Weyna Dega Mid-land

Yareje / yarejeh Elders of the late-old category (76 and above).

Yebekaw / yebekat Same as *yarejel yarejeh*

yewetat shimagele(arogit) Elders of the early-old category (between 55-65).

Appendix B: SUMMARY OF DATA FROM QUESTIONNAIRES

| I. Socio-Demographic Background | | <u>No</u> | |
|--|------------------------------------|------------------|------|
| <u>%</u> | | | |
| | • Sex | | |
| | Sample 40 | | |
| | Male | 20 | 50.0 |
| | Female | 20 | 50.0 |
| | • Age | | |
| | Sample 40 | | |
| | 55-65 | | 16 |
| 40.0 | | | |
| | 66-76 | | 16 |
| 40.0 | | | |
| | >76 | | 8 |
| 20.0 | | | |
| | • Marital Status | | |
| | Sample 40 | | |
| | Single | | 2 |
| | 5.0 | | |
| | Married | | 22 |
| | 55.0 | | |
| | Widowed | | 14 |
| | 35.0 | | |
| | Separated | | 2 |
| | 5.0 | | |
| | • Educational Status | | |
| | Sample 40 | | |
| | Illiterate | | 37 |
| | 92.5 | | |
| | Church Education | | 1 |
| | 2.5 | | |
| | Read and Write | | 1 |
| | 2.5 | | |
| | Missing | | 1 |
| | 2.5 | | |
| | • Ethnicity | | |
| | Sample 40 | | |
| | Amhara | | 40 |
| 100.0 | | | |
| | Oromo | 0 | 0 |
| | Gurage | 0 | 0 |
| | • Do you have a child /ren? | | |
| | Sample 39 | | |

| | | | |
|------|--|-------------------------------------|----|
| | | No | 2 |
| 5.0 | | Yes | 38 |
| 95.0 | | | |
| | | • Do you have grandchildren? | |
| | | Sample 40 | |
| | | No | 3 |
| 7.5 | | Yes | 37 |
| 92.5 | | | |
| | | • Do you have siblings? | |
| | | Sample 39 | |
| | | No | 7 |
| 17.9 | | Yes | 32 |
| 82.1 | | | |

| | | <u>No</u> | <u>%</u> |
|---|---|-----------|----------|
| • Do you have own hut? | | | |
| Sample 40 | | | |
| | No | 4 | 10.0 |
| | Yes | 36 | 90.0 |
| • What is your living arrangement? | | | |
| Sample 36 | | | |
| | With spouse and children | 13 | 36.1 |
| | With married children and grandchildren | | 10 |
| 27.8 | | | |
| | With children only | | 7 |
| 19.4 | | | |
| | With spouse only | | 3 |
| 8.3 | | | |
| | Alone | 3 | 8.3 |

II. Socio-economic information

• What is your means of livelihood?

Sample 40

| | | | |
|--|-------------|----|------|
| | Agriculture | 37 | 92.5 |
| | Handicraft | 1 | 2.5 |
| | Begging | 1 | 2.5 |
| | Dependent | 1 | 2.5 |

• Who cultivates the land for you?

Sample 37

| | | | |
|--|----------|----|------|
| | Children | 26 | 70.3 |
| | Self | 5 | 13.5 |
| | Non-kin | 5 | 13.5 |
| | Nephew | 1 | 2.7 |

• If someone cultivates the land for you on what basis?

Sample 37

| | | | |
|------|------------------------|----|------|
| 35.1 | Free | | 13 |
| | Sharecropping | 11 | 29.7 |
| | Commonly used | 6 | 16.2 |
| 18.9 | Free and sharecropping | | 7 |

• What is the size of your agricultural plot?

Sample 38

| | | | |
|------|-------------|--|----|
| 86.4 | 1-2 hectare | | 33 |
| 10.5 | >1 hectare | | 4 |

2.6 3 hectare 1

• **How did you obtain these plots?**

Sample 38

| | | | |
|-------|----------------|---|----|
| 100.0 | Redistribution | | 38 |
| | Inheritance | 0 | 0 |
| | Purchase | 0 | 0 |

• **Do you have livestock?**

Sample 40

| | <u>No</u> | <u>%</u> |
|-----|-----------|----------|
| No | 19 | 47.5 |
| Yes | 21 | 52.5 |

• **Types of livestock by number**

| Types of Livestock | Sample | Number of Cattle | Number of Elders who Have Cattle | Percent |
|--------------------|--------|------------------|----------------------------------|---------|
| Ox/ oxen | 24 | 1 | 16 | 66.7 |
| | | 2 | 7 | 29.2 |
| | | >2 | 1 | 4.2 |
| Cow/ s | 12 | 1 | 9 | 75.0 |
| | | 2 | 3 | 25.0 |
| | | >2 | 0 | 0 |
| Bull/s | 8 | 1 | 7 | 87.5 |
| | | 2 | 1 | 12.5 |
| | | >2 | - | |
| Heifer/s | 13 | 1 | 8 | 61.5 |
| | | 2 | 4 | 30.8 |
| | | >2 | 1 | 7.7 |
| Donkey/s | 14 | 1 | 14 | 100.0 |
| | | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| | | >2 | 0 | 0 |
| Goat/s | 10 | 1 | 1 | 10.0 |
| | | 2 | 2 | 20.0 |
| | | >2 | 7 | 70.0 |

• **Do you have income generating activities other than agriculture?**

Sample 40

| | <u>No</u> | <u>%</u> |
|-----|-----------|----------|
| No | 34 | 85 |
| Yes | 6 | 15 |

• **What are those income-generating activities?**

Sample 6

| | | | |
|---|---|-----------|----------|
| | Horticulture | 1 | 16.7 |
| | Weaving | 2 | 33.3 |
| | Selling local drinks | 1 | 16.7 |
| | Begging | 2 | 33.3 |
| • | Has the assistance you get from kin groups been changing overtime? | No | % |
| | Sample 40 | | |
| | No | 12 | 30.0 |
| | Yes | 28 | 70.0 |
| • | Reasons for the changing of assistance over time? | No | % |
| | Sample 28 | | |
| | Due to scarcity of land | 10 | 35.7 |
| | Death of supporters | 5 | 17.9 |
| | Interruption of support due to supporter's marriage (for leaving the household), attending school and 'irresponsibility'. | 5 | 17.9 |
| | Due to migration of supporter. | 4 | 14.3 |
| | The declining state of the life of caregiver | 3 | 10.7 |
| | Death and migration of supporter | 1 | 3.6 |
| • | What specific alternatives do you adopt to cope with the changing supporter's situation? | No | % |
| | Sample 13 | | |
| | Depend on children | 9 | 69.2 |
| | Begging | 2 | 15.4 |
| | Coercive major (coerce Children to leave the school | 2 | 15.4 |
| • | Are you caring for other dependents? | | |
| | Sample40 | | |
| | No | 27 | 67.5 |
| | Yes | 13 | 32.5 |
| • | Who are those dependents? | | |
| | Sample 13 | | |
| | Grandchildren | 8 | 61.5 |
| | Offspring and grandchildren | 4 | 30.8 |
| | Offspring | 1 | 7.7 |
| • | How are you caring for this/these dependents? | | |
| | Sample 13 | | |
| | Nurturance | 11 | 84.6 |

Consuming the agric-
Cultural produce commonly 2 15.4

III. Social Status and Role

Do you get respect for being older member of the community?

Sample 39

| | | <u>No</u> | <u>%</u> |
|-------|-----|-----------|----------|
| 48.72 | No | | 19 |
| 51.28 | Yes | | 20 |

• Reasons for not having respected?

Sample 19

| | <u>No</u> | <u>%</u> |
|---|-----------|----------|
| <i>Sementegnaw she</i> (the advent of biblical last days) | 7 | 36.7 |
| Obsolete knowledge | 4 | 21.1 |
| Poverty | 5 | 26.3 |
| Poor physical strength | 1 | 5.3 |
| Last days and poor physical strength | 1 | 5.3 |
| Dose not know | 1 | 5.3 |

• What are prestige-generating components of roles and status in your community?

| Prestige Generating And Components of Roles Statuses | Sample | Number | | Percent | |
|--|--------|--------|-----|---------|-------|
| | | No | Yes | No | Yes |
| Advisory | 40 | 0 | 40 | 0 | 100.0 |
| Participating and contributing | 40 | 0 | 40 | 0 | 100.0 |
| Control over resources to social activities | 40 | 1 | 39 | 2.5 | 97.5 |
| Retention of prestige with former statuses | 40 | 29 | 11 | 72.5 | 27.5 |
| Having renown children | 40 | 36 | 4 | 90.0 | 10.0 |

• Under which government administration did declining socio-economic status of old people begin.

Sample 39

| | <u>No</u> | <u>%</u> |
|---------------------------------|-----------|----------|
| During the Haile Selassie regim | 0 | 0 |
| During the Derg regime | 31 | 79.5 |
| During the EPDRF regime | 8 | 20.5 |

- **What are the reasons for the fall of role and status during the Derg regime?**

| | <u>No</u> | <u>%</u> |
|---|-----------|----------|
| Sample 31 | | |
| Nationalization of rural land | 9 | 29.0 |
| Distribution of land to the peasant | 7 | 22.5 |
| The advent of biblical last days | 6 | 19.4 |
| The establishment of various masses Organizations | 2 | 6.5 |
| The establishment of mass org. .and distribution of land | 2 | 6.5 |
| Nationalization of land, pop. growth and distribution of land | 2 | 6.5 |
| Population growth and distribution of land | 1 | 3.2 |
| Population growth | 1 | 3.2 |
| No answer | 1 | 3.2 |

- **What are the reasons for the fall of role and status during the EPRDF regime?**

| | <u>No</u> | <u>%</u> |
|----------------------------------|-----------|----------|
| Sample 8 | | |
| Redistribution of land | 6 | 75.0 |
| Population growth | 1 | 12.5 |
| The advent of biblical last days | 1 | 12.5 |

- **What social institutions are you involved in?**

| Indigenous Social Institutions | Sample | Not Involved | Involved | Percent | |
|--------------------------------|--------|--------------|----------|---------|------|
| | | | | No | Yes |
| <i>Mehaber</i> | 40 | 5 | 35 | 12.5 | 87.5 |
| <i>Iqub</i> | 40 | 35 | 5 | 87.5 | 12.5 |
| <i>Shemgelena</i> | 40 | 9 | 31 | 22.5 | 77.5 |
| <i>Wonfel</i> | 40 | 6 | 34 | 15.0 | 85.0 |
| <i>Idir</i> | 40 | 4 | 36 | 10.0 | 90.0 |
| <i>Debo</i> | 40 | 28 | 12 | 70.0 | 30.0 |

- **Do you feel that younger people show respect for older people?**

| | <u>No</u> | <u>%</u> |
|-----------|-----------|----------|
| Sample 40 | | |
| No | 32 | 80.0 |
| Yes | 8 | 20.0 |

- **What are marks of old age?**

Sample 40

| No Marks of old age | No | Percent |
|---|-----------|----------------|
| Biological and functional | 16 | 40.0 |
| Functional only | 7 | 17.5 |
| Functional, biological social, and Psychological | 6 | 15.0 |
| Functional, biological and social | 5 | 12.5 |
| Functional and social | 3 | 7.5 |
| Biological and social | 3 | 7.5 |

- **What is the onset of old age in terms of chronological age?**
Sample 40

| Onset of chronological age | No | Percent |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| 4 | 5 | 12.5 |
| 45 | 1 | 2.5 |
| 50 | 9 | 22.5 |
| 55 | 7 | 17.5 |
| 60 | 17 | 42.5 |
| 90 | 1 | 2.5 |

IV. Inter and Intra generational ties

- **With whom among these family members are your social ties is Strong?**

| Family Type | Sample | Number of the Aged who have Social Ties | | Percent | |
|--------------------|---------------|--|------------|----------------|------------|
| | | No | Yes | No | Yes |
| | | | | | |
| Married couple | 22 | 2 | 20 | 9.1 | 90.9 |
| Son/s | 34 | 4 | 30 | 11.8 | 88.2 |
| Daughter/s | 37 | 2 | 35 | 5.4 | 94.6 |
| Niece/s | 40 | 10 | 30 | 25 | 75.0 |
| Nephew | 40 | 9 | 31 | 22.5 | 77.5 |
| Grandchildren | 38 | 2 | 36 | 5.3 | 94.7 |
| Sibling/s | 32 | 6 | 26 | 18.8 | 81.2 |

- **Since you have grown older, do you have more in common, or less in common with people of your own age group/peers?**

| | | | |
|-----------|----------------|-----------|----------|
| Sample 40 | | <u>No</u> | <u>%</u> |
| | More in common | 19 | 47.5 |
| | About the same | 15 | 37.5 |
| | Less in common | 6 | 15.0 |

V. Problems and Needs and Policy Oriented questions

- **What is your mobility status?** No %

| | | | |
|-----------|-----------|----|------|
| Sample 40 | | | |
| | Unlimited | 31 | 77.5 |
| | Limited | 9 | 22.5 |

- **Are you able to get out for toilet by yourself without much difficulty?** No %

| | | | |
|-----------|-------------------------------|----|------|
| Sample 40 | | | |
| | Yes can get out | 38 | 95.0 |
| | With some difficulty | 1 | 2.5 |
| | No I cannot get out by myself | 1 | 2.5 |

- **How is your health?**

| | | | |
|-----------|-------|----|------|
| Sample 40 | | | |
| | Good | 3 | 7.5 |
| | Faire | 20 | 50.0 |
| | Poor | 17 | 42.5 |

- **What kind of health problems do you face now?**

| Types of health problems | Number | | Percent | |
|---------------------------------|--------|-----|---------|------|
| | No | Yes | No | Yes |
| Visual impairment | 19 | 21 | 47.5 | 52.5 |
| Asthma | 37 | 3 | 92.5 | 7.5 |
| Heart disease | 38 | 2 | 95.0 | 5.0 |
| Diabetes | 40 | 0 | 100.0 | 0 |
| Arthritis | 40 | 0 | 100.0 | 0 |
| Orthopedic impairment | 24 | 16 | 60.0 | 40.0 |
| Tuberculosis | 40 | 0 | 100.0 | 0 |
| Rheumatism | 32 | 8 | 80.0 | 20.0 |
| Inflammatory condition of limbs | 29 | 11 | 72.5 | 27.5 |
| Malaria | 32 | 8 | 80.0 | 20.0 |
| Gastritis | 30 | 10 | 75.0 | 25.0 |

- **Do you often attend medical care?** No %

Sample 40

| | | |
|-----|----|------|
| No | 24 | 60.0 |
| Yes | 16 | 40.0 |

- Under what situation do you attend medical care?**

Sample 16

| | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|------|
| With your own money | 4 | 25.0 |
| With the assistance of close relative | 3 | 18.8 |
| Free medical service | 9 | 56.2 |

- Does the government support the older members in your village?**

Sample 40

| | | |
|-----|----|-------|
| No | 40 | 100.0 |
| Yes | 0 | 0 |

- Do you pay land use tax?**

Sample 40

| | No | % |
|-----|----|------|
| No | 2 | 5.0 |
| Yes | 38 | 95.0 |

- If, yes how much do you pay?**

Sample 38

| Cash Payment (Ethiopian <i>birr</i>) | Number of Elders | Percent |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|---------|
| 20-30 | 9 | 23.7 |
| 31-41 | 22 | 57.9 |
| 42-55 | 7 | 18.4 |

- What should be done on the part of government for the elderly in your community?**

| Needs of the Aged | Sample | Number | | Percent | |
|-------------------|--------|--------|-----|---------|------|
| | | No | Yes | No | Yes |
| Land | 40 | 5 | 35 | 12.5 | 87.5 |
| Ox | 40 | 23 | 17 | 57.5 | 42.5 |
| Cloth | 40 | 19 | 21 | 47.5 | 52.5 |
| Medication | 40 | 3 | 37 | 7.5 | 92.5 |
| Money | 40 | 27 | 13 | 67.5 | 32.5 |

- What is your future ambition?**

Sample 40

| | No | % |
|-----------------------------------|----|------|
| To get cured from illness | 11 | 27.5 |
| To get formal or informal support | 7 | 17.5 |
| To be rich | 7 | 17.5 |
| To die before further sufferings | 1 | 2.5 |
| To live long | 7 | 17.5 |

To get legal protection 7 17.5

• **What do you think about the ties between old people and their children in the future?**

| | <u>No</u> | <u>%</u> |
|------------|-----------|----------|
| Sample 40 | | |
| Well-built | 0 | 0 |
| Weak | 40 | 100.0 |